INTERVIEW I

DATE: November 13, 1970

INTERVIEWEE: KATHERINE GRAHAM PEDEN

INTERVIEWER: JOE B. FRANTZ

PLACE: Miss Peden's office in Louisville, Kentucky

Tape 1 of 1

F: Miss Peden, you came out of Hopkinsville and moved up professionally through the broadcasting world, as I recall.

P: Yes, when I graduated from high school in Hopkinsville in 1944 I went to work at WHOP, the CBS affiliate there, on D-Day, June 6 of 1944.

F: That was a day to get started.

P: That sure was, and this is a date to be interviewed, Friday the 13th, too!

F: Right.

P: But, I went to work, [for] $12.50 a week back there in 1944, and twenty years later, I took leave from the active management of that station and as national sales manager for five other stations in our group, to become commissioner of commerce of Kentucky. The principal activity in my adulthood has been in the broadcasting business.

F: Well, now, since you were a broadcaster with a CBS affiliate, and the Johnsons have KTBC in Austin, which also is a CBS affiliate, you came to know at least the Johnson entourage fairly early.

P: Yes. I first met J. C. Kellam in the early fifties. J. C. was general manager. Then they were only in radio, and later of course went into television there. I remember meeting J. C. at some of the CBS

affiliates conventions and also our National Association of Broadcasters. In the early fifties I first met Mrs. Johnson, through J. C., at one of our CBS affiliates meetings, and in about 1955 or 1956, the Broadcast Music, Incorporated and the National Association of Broadcasters had a series of program clinics across the country. They asked me to represent small market stations on the team that went out, and the Texas broadcasters' meeting was in Austin, and of course J. C. was my host, and Mrs. Johnson happened to be in Austin at that time and was gracious enough to come down to the meeting. So I've known Mrs. Johnson through the broadcasting field, and [I met] the President, as I recall, at a meeting in New York. He was then U.S. senator. In the late fifties, he came with Mrs. Johnson to a CBS affiliates reception in New York one night. I don't recall whether it was the Hotel Pierre or the Waldorf, but I, of course, through a Democratic family, knew the Senator.

F: In these sort of casual contacts, did you get the feeling that she kept a pretty firm hand in on the station?

P: Oh, absolutely. I remember discussions at one of the business sessions that she had with Frank Stanton, Dr. Stanton, head of CBS. Whatever the issue was, Mrs. Johnson spoke very eloquently, and I knew, from my association with J. C., that Mrs. Johnson was always in the perimeter of management or decision-making at the station.

F: And the Senator just sort of tagged along in the background?

P: As far as broadcasting was concerned.

F: Yes, that's what I mean.

P: I think he left the business [to her,] and I think the decision to go into television was certainly Mrs. Johnson's.

F: How did you become politically involved? Is this your own initiative, or were you kind of pushed into it?

P: Well, I'm from kind of a political family. My grandfather, S.L. Gorin, was--

F: Was that G-O-R-I-N?

P: G-O-R-I-N--was a state senator back in the 1910-1918 period, somewhere in that area, here in Kentucky under Governor [J. Crepps Wickliffe] Beckham. My mother, of course, grew up in Frankfort, when her father would go there for the sessions. My mother was very active in the 1935 campaign of a young Democrat in Kentucky, A.B. Chandler. My mother worked--

F: Boy governor.

P: I remember, as a youngster--I was then about nine or ten years old--going with Mother. We lived in the country, and she worked the county precincts, and I remember going with her and helping tack up posters for Happy Chandler. Happy always wore a white linen suit. And one of the early autographs that I have, as a youngster, is one of A. B. Chandler when he was running against Alben Barkley. I guess that was 1938 or 1939 that he challenged Barkley. He was in Hopkinsville for a box lunch rally at the football stadium, and then later that afternnon, he was over at the Kitty league baseball game, and I was there with my dad.

F: Oh, the good old Kitty league, I hadn't thought about that in years.

P: Oh, we had class D baseball in Hopkinsville! So, I'd kid Governor Chandler every once in a while, tell him I've got that autograph that was worth a whole lot. He'd say, "Yes, that and a dime will buy you a cup of coffee, Katie." (Laughter)

F: Right.

P: So it was in that atmosphere. Then in high school days, I was very active in the politics of the high school. I was on the debating team and my partner happened to be a real bright young man that we always knew was going to be a politician, Ned Breathitt. Ned and I had grown up [together] and our families were close friends. So it was a logical thing, I suppose, that I would continue my interest in politics, and being a broadcaster, you're in the mainstream of news-making, and a lot of broadcasters have gone into the field of current events and world affairs.

F: Now you became very active in the Business and Professional Women's Clubs and rose to be national president.

P: Yes.

F: Other than widening your acquaintance, did that have any sort of a political impact?

P: That's the best political training. When you can get elected national president of an organization of 180,000 women, you can get elected to most anything. There's more politicking among women's groups than most anything, even worse than partisan politics.

F: I think Judge Sarah Hughes was a president at one time, wasn't she?

P: Sarah Hughes was president in 1950 to 1952--one of the great Americans,

Judge Hughes. And later, as national president, I had the opportunity of being very helpful to Sarah Hughes, when the federal court appointment came up.

F: Yes, I remember. I think it was the ABA turned her down as too old, which was a dozen years ago.

P: Sarah Hughes called me on a Friday afternoon in October of 1961. I was national president, and I was getting ready to leave on a cross-country tour. It was National Business Women's Week, the middle week of October, and I was going to be doing sixteen states in seven days, like a luncheon in New York and a speech that night in Boston, that type of thing that took me all the way across the country.

Sarah called me on Friday afternoon and said, "Katie, if the National Federation really wants to be helpful to me, I need your help over this weekend." I said, "Sarah, what could we do?" And she said, "Before you leave to go on this trip, I need to get a real barrage into the Kennedy brothers. Lyndon Johnson is supporting me and Sam Rayburn is supporting someone else." And so we made our plans, and I sent, on that Friday night in the middle of October of 1961, a telegram to each of the fifty state presidents of our Federation. We have Federations in all our states. It was a two-page telegram; it was the largest telegraph bill that the Hopkinsville Western Union office had had up to that date. I asked each state president to then wire each local club president in their state, asking that wires be sent to President Kennedy and Attorney General Robert Kennedy urging

Sarah Hughes' appointment. The appointment was going to be made the following week.

F: You were really mobilizing woman power, weren't you?

P: We did, and I was told later by the White House and the Attorney General's office that before Tuesday, before late Tuesday afternoon, they had received almost eight thousand telegraphs.

F: That's noticeable!

P: And Sarah Hughes got the appointment that week.

F: Yes, that's right.

P: So she's always given full credit to the Business and Professional Women's Clubs.

The political experience of running for national office in that organization or any other--Rotary, Kiwanis, any civic organization--it was certainly a great training ground. I was a young past-president of the Kentucky Federation in 1958. The girls here in Kentucky wanted to run me for national office. We saw . . .

F: You made that--if you don't mind me talking about age to a woman--awfully young.

P: I was the youngest national president. I was only thirty-five when I was serving as national president. And I'm still younger than anybody that's ever been elected. Well, it was one of these circumstances. There was a woman mayor of Bremerton, Washington, and a woman member of the Supreme Court of New Jersey running for the office of second vice president. The Kentuckians decided that a young person--one of those ladies was in her sixties, and one, in

her seventies. They decided that there was a focus on change and youth in the federation, and I had been very active in our national organization the previous four or five years, and so they started me way up the ladder. Rather than serving on the national board as a national chairman, or as a second vice president or secretary or something, we hopped in and ran for second vice president, and it took four run-off ballots, but I won. Then two years later I was elected national president. So it was a political experience.

F: So you've had some experience in national organization.

P: We went out there with forty-five Kentuckians in Seattle. And they often kid me; they say we had forty-five Kentuckians and sixty-eight dollars in our treasury. But the girls rode the elevators. We stayed at the Olympia Hotel. So in order to get my name out, they rode the elevators every time that there was a traffic flow of delegates in and out, and every time the elevator got full, a Kentuckian would say, "We're from Katherine Peden's state. Where are you from?" They never said Kentucky. They were trying to get my name across. So that was a lesson in politics.

F: Did you take any overt role in the campaign of 1960? I'm talking about, now, not the Business and Professional Women's--

P: I know. Well, I did not go to the convention in San Francisco. No, Los Angeles. I was very, very interested. The Kentuckians were

for Senator Johnson. There were some Kennedy votes in the delegation, but Earle Clements was still the strong hand. So, no, I did not until the nomination was made and then--

F: Speaking of Earle Clements, did you ever have any opportunity to observe his relationship with the Senator, Vice President, President Johnson?

P: Oh, there was no, no question of the close friendship of those two men, and I can tell you that it was because of Earle Clements' friendship with Lyndon Johnson that I was called to the White House to meet with President Johnson when he asked me if I would consider a couple of posts in his administration. And I'm sure our meeting on Tuesday had me fresh in his mind when the appointment on the Advisory Commission was made on Thursday night. But Bess Abell, Earle's daughter, and I had been life-long friends.

F: Did you choose the Commission on Civil Disorders as what you wanted to serve on, or did the President more or less make that decision for you?

P: The President made the decision. The President called me. When I talked to the President on Tuesday--

F: What did he say, "Are you coming to Washington?"

P: He said that there were two spots that he wanted me to consider; that he wanted me in his Administration, and that he was going to have to make an appointment for treasurer of the United States, that the lady who was occupying that position was not well physically. He said that he wanted me to consider that. John Macy had called

me the previous Wednesday or Thursday--Wednesday I suppose--and this is about July--

F: On July 28, you were named.

P: So this was about July 21, 1967, whatever the Wednesday of that previous week would have been. I had just gotten back from a trip to Peru. I had been down with the State Department on an AID program speaking to a South American seminar on Arequipa.

F: I was there at the time.

P: Were you?

F: I was in Lima for two months in the summer of 1967, July and August.

P: I was at Arequipa for this seminar on industrial development. There was a great similarity between what they were trying to do for the Indians of Peru to what we were trying to do to our Appalachia regional program. So I was just back to the office--I was still commerce commissioner--when John Macy called me on a Wednesday afternoon. John and I had been friends for years, and he said, "Katie, the President would like to talk to you. Can you come up tomorrow?" I said, "John, I've got a dedication of a new industry." I said, "I'm going to New York on Saturday." And he said, "Well, could you stop off in Washington on Friday?" So I said, "Yes, certainly." So I arrived at the White House at the appointed hour, and it was at that particular day that the President sent General Maxwell Taylor, Ambassador Harriman, and there was a task force of three or four that left to go--

F: Yes, on that around-the-world [trip].

P: --to get our allies to come in with more support for Vietnam. The President was tied up all day and into the early evening. And Marvin Watson and I had lunch together, with John.

F: You had known Marvin previously?

P: Yes. So the afternoon wore on and about four o'clock Marvin said, "Katie, can you stay over and have dinner with President and Mrs. Johnson tonight? Then you and the President can talk in the morning." Well, I had already checked my luggage through from Louisville to New York, and I told him the circumstance, and he said, "Well, if it would be more convenient . . ." And he went in and talked to the President, and the President said they'd look at his schedule. So they decided that I'd come back on Tuesday. It would be convenient all the way around.

So I went on to New York to the national convention of Business and Professional Women's Clubs. I had some other appointments there. Business Week magazine was going to run a feature article on me. I had to meet with some of their editors. So I did go back down to Washington on Tuesday morning. I had a noon appointment with the President. That souvenir picture is one that [was taken then.] We had about half an hour together. That piece of paper that he's holding in his hand there--Marvin, or some of the fellows, had done a real check of what people across the country thought of me, and that was

the list of recommendations.

The President said, "Katie, you've sure got a lot of friends across the country. Does everybody like you?" And I said, "Well, I don't know about that, Mr. President. I appreciate their friendship." So he told me some of the people that had made comments about me. We discussed what he had on his mind, the spot of treasurer, which has been traditionally a woman's position, and also, he told me that Margaret Price was interested in leaving the National Committee. We did not know at that time that Margaret's illness was terminal, but she was wanting to get out from under the pressure. He asked if I would consider that. I told him that I was totally dedicated to his re-election, that I had political ambitions myself, and that, third, I wanted to complete my term as commerce commissioner. I thought that if I left my four-year appointment as commerce commissioner--It was the first time a woman had been appointed to such a spot in the United States, and here in Kentucky, of course. We really had an enviable record that hadn't been broken yet, and it would be a long time before my record of the four years is broken, with new industry being brought in. He understood. And I said, further, that I would not be happy in a job, as treasurer, where there's no policy-making, no staff.

F: That really doesn't have any impact, does it? It's administrative.

P: He said, "Katie, I understand. You're cut out like Lady Bird, to be doing things, aren't you?" And I said, "Well, I feel so." He said, "Well, let's think about it.

There's other spots. I'll put Marvin and John on the thing, but I really would like for you to consider coming aboard here in Washington with us." And he asked me to consider the vice chairmanship of the national party. At the time--

F: Let's go back, just a second, to your Commerce Commission. What's the dates on that?

P: I was appointed in December of 1963. I went in under the administration of Ned Breathitt. I served from December of 1963 to December of 1967. I told the--

F: And it is a four-year term appointment.

P: Right, a member of the governor's cabinet. It's one of the ten or twelve departments of state government in Kentucky, legislatively created, had a staff of one hundred and fifty, one hundred and sixty. It was rather widely known that I was considering running for Congress in the First District, either against Frank Stubblefield, or, if Frank retired--

F: I don't know Kentucky districts. Is that here, or is that Hopkinsville?

P: That's my Hopkinsville, my west Kentucky [district].

F: You're still officially a Hopkinsville person.

P: Oh, yes. I go home weekends, and I maintain this office here in Louisville, just where the business action is.

F: Yes.

P: So we left it at that. He asked if I could stay over, and have lunch, and we'd have a good chat. Bess Abell was over in her office, so he had Marvin call Bess and Liz. Liz Carpenter happened to be

in her office that day. So we gals chatted, and I did not have lunch with the President that day. I did with Liz and Bess.

F: Down in the mess?

P: Where I'd had lunch with John Macy and Marvin the week before. So I went on back to New York, caught the commuter flight back. I was back in New York by, I guess, four o'clock, to the convention. Kentucky had a candidate for office, and we were all politicking around and that.

So nothing was said. We left it [at that.] No one in New York, not even my roommate, had known that I'd been in Washington. I thought it best, and John Macy had thought it best, until some announcement was made.

Our convention traditionally ends on Thursday with a big banquet. Well, I had left my room, about six o'clock or so, and had gone to the Kentucky suite where all the Kentuckians traditionally gather before the regular banquet. It's a formal banquet of about five thousand women. And so about nine o'clock or a little after nine, I'm at the head table as a past-national president, and the producer of the program came and tapped me on the shoulder and said, "Miss Peden, the President is on the phone." Well, you just don't get a message like that at a banquet. They'd had quite a communications problem there at the Hilton with our national BPW president on microphones and things, so I guess I was thinking maybe that Sally Cunningham was on some kind of thing, so I didn't move very fast

And so this Mr. Sullivan shouted loud enough for people on several spaces next to me to hear and said, "It's President Johnson at the White House!"

F: You had the wrong president!

P: I went backstage. They had finally located me there in the hotel. The orchestra, the program was supposed to start. The Governor of Nebraska was the featured speaker that night . . .

F: Tiemann? [Norbert T. Tiemann].

P: He was defeated last week. But he was the featured speaker. So they delayed his introduction, and the orchestra kept playing. I've looked back, and I've often said that the waiters there at the Hilton reminded me of that scene in "Hello, Dolly" in the second act, where Dolly comes in and all the waiters are doing that ballet with the trays. Well, they stopped everybody backstage there at the Hilton.

Marvin was on the phone and he said, "Hold just a moment, Katie, the President wants to talk to you." So the President said, "Katherine, you sure are hard to locate. Where are you?" And I said, "Mr. President, I'm at the banquet of the Business and Professional Women's Clubs here at the New York Hilton." He said, "We've been trying to locate you for two hours." I said, "I've been right here in this hotel." So he said that he was going on television in about forty minutes and that he was appointing--of course, the Detroit riots were at their height, and Newark was still smouldering. He said that he was going to appoint a citizens committee to investigate

the riots and that he would like for me to accept an appointment as one of the members. I said, "Well, certainly, if I can be of any help, that would be worth the effort."

F: That's slicing kind of close to announcement time, isn't it?

P: I was the last one that they were able to locate. I didn't know who the other members of the commission were. I didn't know how many members there would be until very late that night, because I went back to [the banquet]. We talked for just a couple of minutes, and I went back to the speakers' table there at the banquet and listened to the address of the Governor.

I was only able to get one message through, sent a note to one of the staff members and asked them to call my family in Hopkinsville to be sure that [they knew]. Mother's a great television advocate. She was talking to one of her buddies. These old ladies, they chat back and forth, and it goes on for an hour. Our line was busy. Mother had the television set on in her room, but she was also talking to one of the neighbors and didn't catch the announcement. But just right after she finished that conversation, the first person to tell Mother about it was our family doctor; Dr. Norman Shepherd had heard it and called. But I didn't know until after the banquet was over and saw the eleven o'clock news re-run, who the other members were and heard the President's speech.

F: At that time you found out what you'd let yourself in for.

P: Well, I really didn't know what I let myself in for until I got up early the next morning and came back to Kentucky, because I had

work to do at the department, I thought. So I left New York on an eight or eight-thirty flight and was back here in Louisville. When I walked off the plane, the press corps here in Louisville had been on the phone to me all night asking about the appointment, what it was all about, and I just had to tell them what little I knew. So when I got off the plane here, all the press corps was there, and my administrative aide from Frankfort was there with a telegram from the President calling the commission into session the next day in Washington. So I had the pleasure of flying from New York [to] here and made arrangements to go back to Washington on Friday afternoon. I did get my hair done here in Louisville. (Laughter) That's a long trip to get a hair-do! So I went back to Washington on that Friday night. Then the next morning the commission met with the President in the Cabinet Room.

F: They were all in attendance?

P: Yes. It was remarkable attendance all the way through on that commission. That morning the--

F: What went on that morning?

P: Ramsey Clark was with us, and . . . Help me with a name. Let me show you this picture, and you tell me who he is. Ramsey Clark, the Attorney General [and] . . .

F: Cyrus Vance.

P: Yes, Cyrus Vance. You see, Cyrus had gone, for the President, out to Detroit to try to pull the [Governor George] Romney-Mayor [Jerome]

Cavanagh situation together and see whether federal troops should go in, and all that. It was full attendance then, and Vice President Humphrey joined us that morning. After we had a very short executive session with the chairman, Governor [Otto] Kerner, we made two decisions that morning which I think probably set the tone of the entire commission work. One was that we could have no substitutes for our vote. If we weren't there, we could have staff members, but we could have no proxy votes. And two was that we would not be a staff report, that we would actually work ourselves, and we would conduct hearings. There'd been great criticism of the Warren Commission Report, that it was just a document put together by a staff. We decided that we would be a working commission, and that no one could vote for us.

F: Did you set up a regular sort of regimen of meetings, or was it just on call, or what?

P: Well, at the outset, the President was not at liberty that morning to tell us whether Dave Ginsburg was going to be able to accept the appointment as executive director. David was out in California with his family, and they'd just been unable to locate him on such short notice and get him back to Washington and go over things. But once David was appointed the following week . . .

F: Was Ginsburg a Commission appointment or a Johnson appointment?

P: A Johnson appointment. So, from about the first of August or that first week of August on, we had regular meetings. I believe the record shows that we had forty-eight or fifty meetings, official meetings of the commission, plus literally dozens of hearings across

the country. We divided ourselves into teams, and three or four of us would go to Milwaukee, or to Jacksonville, or to Cambridge, or to wherever there had been a civil disorder, or we decided to have the hearings. We went as a team from the Commission and reported back.

F: Was it a fluid sort of arrangement on the teams, or were you always with the same sub-team?

P: No, just however your schedule could be. Sometimes, I was on--

F: I'm free to go to Jacksonville, and somebody else is free to go to Jacksonville . . .?

P: That's right. I remember being--

F: Did you ever resign your Commerce Commission [post]?

P: Oh, no. I wore both hats. It kept me busy.

F: I don't see how you had time to put them on.

P: From August until December. I went out of office in December.

F: It was almost a relief, wasn't it?

P: Oh, to get one burden off. We decided in October or early November that we would not have an interim report. The President's Executive Order putting us together said that we should bring in an interim report by March 1 of 1968 and our final report by June 30 of 1968.

F: What'd you get, just a per diem and consulting fee?

P: Expenses and a per diem, and it was--

F: And a lot of work.

P: Oh! Sessions from eight o'clock in the morning to sometimes 'way past midnight.

F: Who decided who testified? Was this Ginsburg's job, or did the

Commission make [the decision?]

P: It was a joint effort. We, as commissioners, were free to make suggestions.

F: Were there any sort of schisms on the Commission, or did you work pretty well as a unit?

P: Oh, tremendous cooperation, there was--

F: No party lines drawn or anything like that?

P: Oh, no, none at all. Jim Corman, congressman from California, and Fred Harris, senator from Oklahoma, Democrats, were political members of the Commission. And Congressman [William] McCulloch of Ohio and Ed Brooke, senator from Massachusetts, were the Republican members. But I suppose Herb Jenkins, the police chief of Atlanta, was a Democrat because he worked for Ivan Allen down there. I have no idea how Roy Wilkins, what registration [he is]. Of course, Otto Kerner was a Democrat, John Lindsay a Republican. I suppose Mr. [I. W.] Abel, probably [is] a Democrat. I have no idea how Tex [Charles B.] Thornton is registered, but I know that Thornton was a great friend of the President's, but his company and his people, Mr. [Roy] Ash and others, have been great friends of Nixon's. So I have no idea how Tex was registered. But, no, politics was never a part of it.

F: Was the commission chairman named by the President or did the Commission choose?

P: No, the chairman and the vice chairman--Kerner was named chairman and John Lindsay, vice chairman, by the President.

F: On this first meeting, was the President agitated, subdued, or what? You might say all hell was breaking loose.

P: He wanted Ramsey Clark and Cyrus Vance to give the Commission really a detailed report of what had gone on the early part of the week in Detroit and what led up to the hesitancy in sending federal troops in. I think the President felt then--and it was certainly my feeling when we had Romney and Cavanagh and others from Michigan in--that there'd been a little politicking in Michigan, where Romney and Cavanagh were at outs with each other and they tried to toss the ball to the President, and in this delay, it costs millions of dollars there, as well as some lives. No, that morning the President was very warm in greeting each of us, and he stayed with us through the meeting when Ramsey Clark and Cyrus Vance made their reports. Then he excused himself, as I recall, and said he would see us at lunch. And we had lunch with the President and Vice President. I think the Vice President stayed with us through some of our further discussions. And we had lunch in the family dining room.

F: Upstairs?

P: Upstairs. The President told me then, as we were leaving the dining room after lunch and we walked out through the family living room to see--actually, this was before lunch. We gathered for a little hospitality before lunch up in the family living room, the Yellow Room, and the President said, "Let's walk out on the balcony,"--the Truman Balcony. From the balcony, we were looking at the Jefferson or the Washington Monument, and the President said to me then, "Katie, this

appointment on this Commission is not all I have in mind for you. We want to further pursue our conversations of early this week. But I appreciate your helping me in this particular thing."

F: Did Clark and Vance take a pretty active hand in the Commission? Did they stay close to it or did they pretty well turn you loose?

P: No, that was [it]. I don't recall that the Attorney General ever was back with us again. I think Cyrus Vance was back with us when we had the Detroit group in. I don't believe he was in at the particular time, but I'd have to verify that. I don't recall that either of them was ever with us again.

F: Did you get the feeling, incidentally, when you talked to Cavanagh and Romney, that either one felt he had mishandled it, or was each one quite defensive?

P: Oh, they were absolutely defensive on the thing. Romney brought his National Guard adjutant with him to the meeting before the Commission. He had these charts. And the Governor was so involved and so pulled up into this thing that he didn't let his staff people even move the charts from one space to another or flip them. He did it himself; he took the pointer--

F: He came prepared.

P: He ran the show. Cavanagh seemed then and later when we were in Michigan for some hearings--it seemed to me that Cavanagh felt like he and his city had been kind of caught up in a state-federal argument. He was defensive for the Detroit police force;

they were just caught at four o'clock on a Sunday morning with the lowest force, manpower-wise. It took a while for them to pull them together.

F: In a city that has been kind of looked on as a showpiece.

P: More money had gone in on federal programs there, on urban renewal, and it probably had more involvement of industry and labor than any city. But the average rioter in the Detroit disturbance was a non-white male in his twenties making one hundred to one hundred twenty dollars a week. But the living conditions, the housing and these things, were so deplorable. I think this was one of the areas and there were grievances. It was a hot summer day and they just blew.

F: You're dealing with disturbances from, say, Detroit to Jacksonville, north and south, and from Boston to Watts, east and west. Were there sectional patterns or was it pretty much the same repetitive story with some local variations?

P: Pretty much the same story, that they were just the results of years of neglect of the non-whites in housing and education and jobs, that we were beginning to see some of the results of poor welfare administration of the programs. But I know I didn't see any--I suppose there was more real hatred per square mile in Cambridge, Maryland, a small town, than there was anywhere else that I saw. It was a tremendous experience to see the real inside of a nation. I'm grateful to the President for the opportunities.

F: Were your witnesses trying to get at the problem, or were they propagandizing the Commission? What was your feeling in general?

P: I would say that the great majority of the witnesses were trying to be as helpful as could be. Of course some of the militant groups, they used it as a forum. Another decision we made was that we would have closed sessions. We would up-date the press as often as we thought necessary. The Chairman and the Vice-Chairman would speak for us.

F: You didn't give anybody a public forum?

P: And if they released their speech, they did it themselves. And we were free to question any of the witnesses.

F: Did you have subpoena power? You could pull in anyone you wanted?

P: Yes. The week after we went into action as a commission, the House and Senate gave us subpoena power. We never had to use it. We had to remind a few people that we had it, but we never had to use it.

F: Did you have, through this, a sense of urgency, so that you tended to meet oftener than you normally would have? Because you were all busy people.

P: I think the sense of urgency is underlined by the fact that we decided not to have the interim report, but to come out with one report. We felt it would serve no useful purpose to tell the country what the ills were in March and wait till June to give, perhaps, some remedies. So we voted to accelerate our efforts and to come out. We put a March 1 deadline on ourselves for one report, rather than an interim report. And we met in December up till Christmas Eve. I did my Christmas shopping in Washington on the morning of Christmas Eve and flew home. So we were working because we had to complete

enough work so that the staff could bring it back to us after New Year's. The staff worked all through the holidays to have ready for us--

F: The so-called holidays.

P: Yes. One person that was brought in on the staff was Vic [Victor H.] Palmieri of California. He'd been a very successful businessman out there. I believe he was a lawyer and then went in the business area. Vic was a tremendous second man to Ginsburg. He headed that staff and pushed things along. He was a great wordsmith; he could pull things together. Vic has just been named to take over the real estate part of Penn Central, Seven Flags Over Texas?

F: Six Flags. He's done a good job.

P: A very qualified young man.

F: Did the staff pretty well write the report and then ya'll chewed on it?

P: They would bring us an outline, and then we would go over it word by word. I have my files here, the pencil copies of the report.

F: This is a Commission report then?

P: Every word, literally, every word was written, from the very first page to the last. Sometimes we would discuss a phrase for a hour to make sure we had gotten the thing. And when we came to the summary of the report, we debated for days over wording. Some of the recommendations--

F: You must have done the same thing on press releases.

P: They were all brought to us. So it was an unusual sort of thing, but this was an unusual situation. Perhaps not since the 1860s had this country been so close to a fight between its own citizens.

F: Did you get the feeling, from all this testimony and investigation, that this could become, in a sense, incendiary on a national basis?

P: Yes.

F: That we were teetering a bit?

P: Yes, J. Edgar Hoover, one of the first witnesses, said that they were unable to find any area of conspiracy in the civil disorders of Detroit and Newark. It was close to blowing, because as a fire gets fanned it just hops from one to another. That period between April and October of 1967, we had over a hundred civil disturbances in this country, sixty-five of which were classified as serious.

F: Did you get a certain feeling, almost, of faddism. If your community hadn't had one, you were nowhere?

P: They were looking for it and I think that the young militants were looking for an excuse in many cities. Cincinnati is a good example. They used an excuse that a black man was on a trial up there for murder, and when the conviction was made they came out and used that as an excuse to start something.

F: You have one policeman on the Commission. Does he represent a sort of different stance, or did the thing pretty well jell?

P: Herbert Jenkins, in my estimation, probably made one of the finest contributions to the Commission, and I feel certain that Herb Jenkins

has meant more to the stature of law enforcement in this country than, perhaps, anyone else. His father was a very distinguished police chief in Atlanta, and Herbert is a gentleman from the first order. He was willing to take the criticism that was given to the police, but he always had solutions. I think, as evidence of his dedication, when there was trouble in August or early September in Atlanta, Herb flew from Atlanta to Washington in the morning and back to Atlanta at night to be on the scene. He and John Lindsay would leave the Commission meetings about four or four-thirty in the afternoon, and Herb would catch a flight back to Atlanta, be there overnight, and be back the next morning for session. And John would leave the meetings. There was a White House staff car that would take them to the airport. Many times they'd leave the meetings together, and John would fly to New York, walk the streets and be back the next morning. I continue to marvel at those two men but especially John, because of what he was doing, physically, staying out until three or four o'clock in the morning, how he was able to do it.

F: He was doing his sleeping on planes, wasn't he?

P: It was--and he kept it cool. He meant to do it. And Herb Jenkins kept Atlanta cool, too.

F: Did Kerner and Lindsay work together all right?

P: Yes. At times John would sort of overwhelm the Governor and the Commission members with the number of staff people that he'd bring down. He was, of course, operating New York City by remote control,

you could see that. But John was more liberal than other members of the Commission. John and Fred Harris were, I suppose, earmarked. Tom Wicker said they were the liberal ones, and Tom said that Tex Thornton and Bill McCulloch and Jim Corman and I were the conservative members of the Commission. But we didn't agree with Tom's labels, and Wicker took them out. He had them in the first edition of the Bantam Report, and then, that paragraph, after Governor Kerner and Dave Ginsburg objected to it as completely false, it was taken out.

F: Those would be, also, comparative labels in a sense, too, because by a lot of standards, nobody was conservative.

P: That's right. We pushed hard for--if we'd been conservative, we'd have never signed that report. The Commission members, even knowing that we were not going to get a warm reception at the White House, rather than just have the chairman and the vice chairman sign it, the Commission members insisted that all signatures be on it.

F: You never tried to tailor it to what you thought Johnson wanted?

P: If we had, maybe the President would have invited us back over for lunch and accepted it. (Laughter).

F: Well, now, in what form did you send it to the President? Did you just, in a sense, carry it over by messenger and leave it with a staff member?

P: No, Governor Kerner--

F: They presented it personally?

P: --and Dave Ginsburg and, perhaps, John Lindsay took it over.

F: Had Johnson seen an advanced copy?

P: The White House staff was well aware of what we were coming up with.

F: Did they try to make any recommendations on their own?

P: No.

F: They stayed clear?

P: I can say, absolutely, that at no time did I ever sense that there was a feeling of White House or government departmental recommendations. We were free to, as the President had said, "Let your search be free," and we made it free. I know that the President felt that, politically, it might be dynamite. I think history proves itself. The President, by February 28, by the time the report was out, already knew that he was going to make the March 31 announcement, but it was in his wisdom that it be dispersed. Of course, there was a news leak on the report, that someone, one of the reporters--I have my own idea of where it came, how it [leaked].

F: Did it come from the staff or the Commission?

P: It came from the press. The morning we did the signing of the document the press was invited it. We were meeting in one of the senatorial conference rooms, maybe it was the Caucus Room. I believe the room was called the Caucus Room.

F: Where would that be?

P: In the Senate. We'd had many of our meetings up on the Hill, so that the four members of Congress could go in for roll call on the votes and so forth. This was a Saturday morning, as I recall, that we had our final session, the final wording on the summary and the recommendations, and signed the letter of transmittal. And they

had all of us for pictures, and we were around a large conference table. They had us come, all of us, on one side of the table. And I remember, after the photographers had left, that Congressman McCulloch--we all put our names on our documents--was going through papers and saying, "Where is mine?" I remember there was quite a search at his end of the table. The congressman had been seated at kind of the end of this big conference table. In my mind, I've always thought that one of those photographers recognized what it was and lifted it because the press leak was not of any of the papers, the supporting papers; it was the actual report. I don't think that the leak was from the Bureau of Printing, as some have said. I don't know.

F: Were these bound copies, or what physical form were they in?

P: Yes, they were in draft form, and--

(Interruption)

F: The Commission did not go see the President personally?

P: No. So I've never been able to really decide in my mind whether the President would have asked us to come as a Commission to discuss the report with him. After it was released and many of the major papers printed the recommendations in their entirety, it was certainly not appropriate for the President, at that time, to make any comment.

F: Were you officially dissolved, or did you just, in a sense, peter out?

P: No, we were a one-year commission. We did some work after the report was issued, and some supplementary reports, and there was some discussion about our coming back together again a year after

our report was issued. Senator Harris looked into it, John Lindsay. By that time of course Governor Kerner was a federal judge. But we decided not to. The Urban Coalition issued a report of their findings of what had happened with the Kerner Commission Report. I think it was entitled The Kerner Commission Report One Year Later. Actually, the records show that very little had been done then, and very little has been done yet, to implement our recommendations. This is one of the pending items of business of this nation, is to bring us together, stop the violence. I think one of the key statements in the whole commission report was calling for the end of violence, not only in the streets, but in the hearts and minds of our people. And we are a long way from that.

F: Did the President ever thank you? Pro forma?

P: Oh, letters, yes. We all received the letter.

F: This is strictly opinion. Do you think he reads a report like that or does someone give him a short digest of it? I wonder, actually, how deeply he gets into it.

P: Of course, I have no way of knowing. I feel that the President was so involved in his great effort to end the fighting in Vietnam and we were in the period of the greatest loss of American lives at this particular time in the spring of 1968.

F: Sort of overshadowed everything else?

P: Right. And, frankly, I was involved in a senatorial campaign, and I--

F: I want to talk about that in a little while. Go back briefly. Were

you active in the 1964 campaign?

P: Presidential?

F: Yes.

P: Yes. I was vice chairman of the Kentucky delegation to Atlantic City. I saw the President, not only at Convention Hall, but also at some receptions. President and Mrs. Johnson were there, and the Vice President and Muriel.

F: You never had any doubt he'd be the candidate?

P: Oh, no! And we made a major effort here in Kentucky. We have voting machines in all of our 3100 to 3200 precincts.

F: You're ahead of Texas.

P: Well, we've had some congressional investigations of some of our elections up here, so the legislature has decided that the best way to do it was to get voting machines instead of tombstones. Anyway, on national television, Kentucky comes up as the first state, always, with the returns in.

Ned Breathitt decided that not only were we going to really support the President, but we were going to get out a heck of a vote. And we wanted to give the President the largest majority anybody had ever seen in Kentucky and we did. So I was very, very active in that campaign within the state. I didn't campaign out of Kentucky.

F: Did the President ever contact you personally on your efforts in Kentucky?

P: No, but the President came to Kentucky during the campaign. But, not in that campaign, no.

F: Did you go to Chicago in 1968?

P: I was one of the speakers on opening night, only woman nominee for the Senate.

F: I heard you.

P: I was there. I was there.

F: Did you get the feeling--the charge was made--that it was a rigged convention, other than the fact that Humphrey just had the votes?

P: Humphrey had the votes all along. Here at the Kentucky state convention, it was not a matter of where the Kentuckians stood, and how many votes we let the young people that were for McCarthy [have]. It would have been possible to have limited them to one or two votes. But as the Humphrey advance people--George Bristol, a good Texan, that was here with us--[said,] unity was far more important than delegates when we went to Chicago.

That was a contrived event, I think, the Chicago disorders. I went up on Saturday before the convention opened with Governor Breathitt, our national committeeman, and Mrs. Dann Byck, Sr., our national committeewoman, and we were staying out on Michigan Avenue at the Algonquin, I don't know, one of the smaller hotels. The hotel was where Don McNeil used to have his Breakfast Club. But we had to go down to the--

F: Something like the Adlerford . . .

P: Allerton! Allerton, Algonquin is in New York. Allerton Hotel, yes, Allerton.

So on Saturday afternoon we had to go down to the Hilton to pick

up some boxes of the credentials and the materials for our delegation, and I needed to go down to pick up my pass. They wanted me to come out to the auditorium on Monday morning to run through the teleprompter and type thing for the program that night. So as we went in the hotel, the militants were already harrassing the police, and this thing was--in chatter I remarked to Governor Breathitt and Mrs. Byck, "If these policemen are able to keep their cool this week, it'll be a miracle."

We were down back in that area on Sunday, and then it was getting even worse. The miracle of all is that somebody wasn't killed. And I don't approve perhaps of some of the innocent people being treated as they were, and some young people, perhaps, were perhaps roughed up more than necessary, but as a delegate--not as a delegate, but as a speaker--I gave my delegate position away to some of the young people in Kentucky who wanted to go, and I didn't need to be a delegate to this particular thing. If we had not had the protection of the Chicago Police, as far as those of us who were delegates--you were there and you know--we would have been physically harmed.

F: This was not a classic piece of violence, in the sense that your commission had been studying?

P: I could see that--

F: This was something that was, in a sense, set out and organized to happen.

P: Oh, the record shows that it was. They'd started, as early as April, to focus on this violence there. The protection that the police gave

that Wednesday night in keeping them from marching on the auditorium, in my estimation, saved perhaps hundreds of lives. The type of people who were there as delegates aren't used to being part of a rough-house.

F: Could've had a kind of Bastille Day or something.

Okay, you've got a senatorial race on your hands--oh, I want to ask one more word about the convention first. The charge was made by some of his critics that President Johnson's hand on the convention was pretty heavy and that he was manipulating from Stonewall. Did you see any evidence of that?

P: No. None at all. Well, I think that the proof of it is the hour of pro and con debate on the platform, on the Vietnam policy in the platform. Certainly if Lyndon Johnson had been handling the convention, that much time wouldn't have been given to either side, much less to one of his opponents. I think the charges are unfounded, and I think he meant it when he said on March 31 that he was going to devote his efforts to ending the war and bringing peace. And I think the fact that he didn't actively participate in the fall campaign was. . . . He was trying his best to get us out of this war situation, rather than to be. . . .

F: Back there on that first day of the Commission's meeting, he said this wasn't the last time he was going to call on you. Did he ever follow through on that?

P: There wasn't an opportunity because the Commission was so involved; we were meeting two and three days a week, and the President was

well aware that--

F: You couldn't take on anything else!

P: I had more than I could take care of at that time. Well, then I announced for the Senate on January 15. The word was out in November that I was probably going to be a candidate.

F: I tried to vote for you, but I never could figure out how to vote in Kentucky. (Laughter).

P: We'll send you a graveyard! (Laughter).

The Democratic National Committee was meeting in Chicago in early January of 1968, and on a Sunday, about noon, Ned Breathitt called me--I was home in Hopkinsville--and said, "Come go to Chicago with Mrs. Byck and me tonight." And I said, "For what?"

F: Who's Mrs. Byck?

P: She's national committeewoman. Mrs. Dann C. Byck, national committeewoman.

F: B-I-C-K?

P: B-Y-C-K. She's chairman of the board of Byck Brothers, ladies specialty shops, one of the largest specialty shops--

F: Yes, I've seen their stores.

P: Great Democrat, been really active for twenty-five-thirty years in the Democratic Party.

F: Down there on Fourth Street, aren't they?

P: Yes. And so I said, "Ned, I can't go to Chicago. I've got to be in Washington Tuesday for a meeting of the Commission." He said, "You can fly from Chicago to Washington, and I think it would be

good for you to talk to the various ones, and let's see how things are going, and it'd be a good time to get some advice about your campaign." So Larry O'Brien was going to be there and George Bristol and quite a number of my friends. So I hurriedly got packed and we caught the plane that afternoon and arrived in Chicago, and we discussed my candidacy with several leaders and it was decided that I should come back home and announce. So there was no reason to postpone it. I was of course challenging [Senator Thruston] Morton.

But meanwhile, I had been on a little vacation over the Christmas-New Year's holidays down at Florida. New Year's Day, Liz Carpenter had called me from out at the Ranch, and said, "Katie, Mrs. Johnson wants to resume the Women Doers Luncheons,"--I had been to some of the earlier ones she's had--"and she wants you to be a speaker on the safe streets bill, that crime in the streets thing and the President wants to give emphasis to that." And [she] said, "Could you suggest some people who should be on the panel? You be the speaker and have some people on the panel." So I suggested a friend of mine up in Indianapolis, Mrs. [Margaret] Moore, a newspaperwoman, and we were able to get her.

Anyway, this decision to announce, I felt, was going to be a conflict with my White House speech, which was going to be later. It turned out my announcement was on Monday, the fifteenth of January, and I think the Women Doers Luncheon was the seventeenth or eighteenth, something like that, later on in the week.

I talked to Liz about it, and she said, "Katie, I don't think it would have any bearing as far as the Washington press is concerned.

They all know you are going to run anyway. Go on and announce, but just don't let it interfere with your making the speech." So, little did I know I would run into Eartha Kitt and come up with that thing. But I did announce on the fifteenth of January.

F: You didn't have anything to do with Morton's decision to retire, did you?

P: Well, Thruston said that it would be a hard campaign, that it would have to be a shirt-sleeve campaign, to get out. I had some insight that Morton was not going to run again, woman's intuition, I guess, though it was about the first week of March that Morton announced that he was going to retire. Up until then, I had been a great hero to Democrats here in Kentucky, "Oh, Katie, you run. You're the one," this sort of thing.

F: You stick your neck out. (Laughter)

P: Then after I was in the thing and after Morton withdrew, I was over speaking at a civic club in Lexington--

F: Up to that point, you had no opposition in the primary?

P: No. Oh, one former state representative had announced, but it was just very token opposition. So I made the civic club speech over at Lexington on the morning, it turned out, that Thruston was having his press conference. The night before, Judge Bert Combs called me from Cincinatti. I was down in West Kentucky speaking to an industrial development group. And so they called me out of the meeting,

and my home had called and said, "Judge Combs was real anxious to talk to you." I said, "Well, I'll call him when I get back to Hopkinsville."

So then I got called out of the meeting again, by a fellow with the Lexington Herald, a young fellow named Phil Bacon. He said, "Katie,"--this youngster had grown up in Hopkinsville--"We've just heard from some sources in Washington what Morton's going to say in his press conference in the morning, that he is going to retire." And he said, "What comment?" And I said, "Look, Phil, I don't have any comment. Let's wait and see what he says." He said, "Well, I'll call you back later when we have more information." Of course, the Washington Post broke the story. So by midnight, I knew that he was going to withdraw, retire.

Then Judge Combs was very helpful in suggesting what I say the next day at the civic club speech. He advised me to be very warm and complimentary of Morton's work. From that day in early March until they closed the filing date about the middle of April, they really, the Democratic party in this state, debated about whether a woman should be a candidate and whether Katie and--at one time, I had fourteen opponents in that primary! (Laughter). On election day, I had eleven! But I was able to get about as many votes as all the rest of them put together. So that the campaign--

F: President Johnson made a firm policy never to interfere in primaries.

P: That's right.

F: And he showed no interest at all in this. What about after your primary? Did he ever give you any sort of encouragement?

P: Yes. Mrs. Johnson came and spoke for me. There was very much evidence of his interest.

F: Was that volunteered by them or at your invitation?

P: I guess it was a combination of the National Committee as well as the Democratic Women's Clubs of Kentucky.

F: What did you lose on? What do you think?

P: Nixon's sweep. You see, Nixon carried Kentucky by a little over 90,000--

F: He dragged your opponent in?

P: --and I ran 65,000 ahead of the Humphrey-Muskie ticket. Wallace, probably, was the cause of my defeat. Wallace received 250,000 votes in Kentucky, carried five counties. But when you total the number of votes cast in the presidential and the number of votes cast in the senatorial, it shows that 150,000 people didn't vote in the senatorial. There was no senatorial candidate on the American Party ticket. And many of these were dissident Democratics, especially from western Kentucky, who didn't know how to--

F: Manipulate the machines.

P: --vote for both. To give you an example, in my home county, I carried it by several thousand. I think it was seven or eight thousand. Wallace also carried it by three thousand. But the chairman for Wallace there in Christian County was a good friend of

mine, lives right on the corner on Alumni Avenue, Mr. Bassett. They saw to it that in every precinct, they had a Wallace person who was saying, "Vote for Katie for senator, and then vote for Wallace." So they showed the people. But that was at their instigation and at their . . . I completely refused to have any bumper stickers or any coalition with the Wallace people, although perhaps it would have been the margin of difference, but I started out with convictions, and I came out with convictions.

F: Right. Well, you ran a good race. Where did Mrs. Johnson speak?

P: Here in Louisville, at the state convention of Democratic Women's Clubs.

F: How'd it go?

P: It's the largest attendance we've ever had, at a function of Democratic Women's Clubs. And she made a very warm speech for me, as well as for Humphrey.

F: This isn't worth lingering on, but how did Happy Chandler get in that flirtation with George Wallace?

P: Mr. Chandler just plays the ball park. I don't know. Happy called me. The first call that I received after I got the nomination, it was a call from Happy and his son Dan and Molly. They were all on the phone, saying, "Katie, how can we help you?" And then Happy [said], "We're for you. We're proud of you. We remember your mother and dad." And that sort of thing. And then, when at the Democratic State Convention it was decided that--since Happy had bolted

the party in the governor's race and had supported Governor [Louie B.] Nunn, it was the vote of the delegate body at our state convention not to make Chandler a delegate to the Chicago convention. Then he turned his wrath on me and all Democrats, and I think this was probably. . . . But you'll have to pursue that. Republicans certainly weren't, in the presidential thing, anywhere for Chandler to go, and he was mad at the Democrats because we wouldn't let him go to Chicago as a delegate.

Chandler could have been a force of a few thousand votes against me, but the current secretary of state and former treasurer of Kentucky, Mrs. Thelma Stovall, has always been in the Chandler camp. She's the best vote-getter in Kentucky. Regardless of who runs, Thelma Stovall gets the votes. Thelma is a very great friend of mine and supporter. In fact, she signed my papers when I filed. And so I think that she kept many of the Chandler people in line for me that normally he would have taken.

F: Let's talk a little about that Doers Luncheon. Now, I presume they picked you because you had been on the Commission on Civil Disorders.

P: Yes. And the Commission was still meeting.

F: Right.

P: First, I must tell you of my complete ignorance of the entertainment world. Dave Ginsburg called me on--as I say, I had been in Chicago with the Democratic National Committee, and I flew from Chicago to Washington and I got in sometime Monday afternoon or Monday night, and there was a message for me to call David at home. So I returned the call, and he said, "Katie, I want to come by

the hotel and meet with you." I said, "Fine," and we agreed on a time the next morning. So he came by and he said, "Katie, Eartha Kitt is coming in town tomorrow [and] is going to be at that luncheon on Thursday." And I said, "David, who is Eartha Kitt?" "She's a nightclub entertainer." I didn't know if she was an opera star or who she was, because I just don't happen to follow that kind of music. I do follow opera a little bit. But he said, "She's demanding to be heard by the Commission." And this was January, and we had completed all of our testimony back before Christmas. As I said, the Commission wound up so the staff could start pulling things together for us. So he said, "Would you talk with her at the luncheon? We're going to have her met by one of the staff, one of the young attorneys, a Negro man who was on the staff. We'll get as much information from her as is possible. But at the luncheon, if she wants to talk about things would you listen?" I said, "Sure." So that was the way it was left.

F: You were at least alerted to her.

P: This was on Tuesday, and she arrived in Washington on Wednesday. And then the luncheon comes about. I had been over at the White House, either on Tuesday or on Wednesday. It seems like to me it was probably on Tuesday that Liz and Bess and I went over the final guest list and arrangements. Then I gave Liz a copy of what I was going to be saying. So I arrived at the White House at twelve or twelve-fifteen, whatever the appointed hour was, and the other speaker, Mrs. Moore, was there. A young girl, a VISTA worker from Atlanta,

was also on this panel. [Martha Coe]

F: A white girl?

P: Yes, but I've forgotten her name. So there was the usual receiving line that was normally held in the East Room for a group like this and then the ladies were invited on into either the Red Room, or the Green Room for tomato juice or orange juice, sherry, whatever, you know, the usual little silver tray sort of things.

So Eartha Kitt arrived. Oh, we were just about ready to go in to lunch. So I would say that it was very close to--if we were going to lunch at one o'clock, or maybe the meeting was one o'clock, and we had thirty minutes for the reception. Anyway, we were almost ready to go in. In fact, I think some of the guests were already starting towards the family dining room where we had the luncheon. Liz Carpenter came up and said, "Katie, we want you in the East Room to make some more pictures." We'd already made just scads of pictures, but Eartha Kitt was there. So they posed Mrs. Johnson and Eartha Kitt and me before the fireplace there in the--there's not a fireplace in the East Room--before some sort of mirror. It's not a fireplace; it's a mirror there on the west wall of the East Room.

So while the picture-taking is going on Eartha Kitt starts on me in front of Mrs. Johnson about our Commission and about the fact that we weren't hearing her. I didn't try to debate the issue with Eartha Kitt in front of the photographers and Mrs. Johnson. I was so embarrassed for Mrs. Johnson to have to hear this. I wasn't prepared for it.

So we go in to the luncheon, and from then on. . . . There were fifty of us, roughly, ten at a table, maybe sixty. They were the round tables and eight or ten at each table, and Mrs. Johnson was seated at one of the tables, not a head table, near the front of the room, and I happened to be at the table right at the center. The table was at the exact center of the room. Bess Myerson was next to me, and several ladies that I had known in organizations around the country.

So everything was going fine; the luncheon is underway, and all of the sudden Liz appears at the door and said, "Mrs. Johnson, we have an unexpected guest." Well, the President was having lunch in the next dining room, the small one beyond the family room. And just as you would do at your house if your wife was having a bunch of gals in to play bridge, you'd drop in and say hello. The President walked in, walked over and gave Mrs. Johnson a little kiss on the cheek and turned around to the ladies and welcomed us, and said that crime was certainly a major problem to all of us and he appreciated us coming. Just like, "I'm glad to have you in my house, and enjoy your luncheon." He had gotten just about to the center table where I was seated, and Eartha Kitt was seated at one of the tables near the podium.

F: She wasn't at your table?

P: No, she was at the next table. And I couldn't believe my eyes when she got up and literally grabbed the President's arm, and stopped him. Of course, when an arm came on his arm, he stopped. And you know how tall he is, and I'd say Miss Kitt is probably 5'1".

F: Undersized, right.

P: Well, the President was stunned. Everybody was. She asked him what he was doing about mothers, and the question she asked. Literally, this man was just caught flat-footed. He said, "Well, I know that you have a fine group here to discuss that problem, and I'll be anxious to have your suggestions." And then she started at him with another question, and the President just kept walking.

Of course, everybody was shocked that this was happening. But then we went on with the luncheon. Mrs. Johnson opened the program, and we heard from Mrs. Moore and the young girl from VISTA. Mrs. Johnson was presiding all the time, and I was saying "Now make notes, because you're going to be able to question these speakers." So then I was introduced, and I guess I had about a ten or twelve minute speech that was to kind of be the keynote.

So then Mrs. Johnson opened it for discussion, and there had been maybe one or two questions asked when Eartha Kitt got the floor and lambasted Mrs. Johnson. The papers and the accounts of it were all wrong when they said how stunned Mrs. Johnson was, that it brought tears to her eyes. It wasn't tears; it was fire water, if anything. Mrs. Johnson made, I thought--and not because I consider her a personal friend--some of the most eloquent statements that because we were involved in the war there was no reason we couldn't solve our problems, crime in the streets, and poverty and these other things here at home. This was no ghost writer thing; this came right from Lady Bird's heart.

This composure--

F: She kept herself in control of this?

P: And Mrs. Richard Hughes, wife of the governor of . . .

F: New Jersey.

P: . . . New Jersey, was the first to rise after Eartha Kitt's outburst and after Mrs. Johnson's statement, and she told that she lost her first husband, in the war and this thing. So it was an unbelievable thing. You sat there and couldn't believe this was happening in the White House. CBS asked me that night or the next day what my feeling was, and I said I never had wanted to be small enough, smaller than I am, before, but I said that I was sorry that I wasn't small enough to crawl under the table. Really, I was embarrassed for our country that this type of thing [had happened.]

F: Miss Kitt was really a kind of Johnny-come-lately to any sort of civil rights movement, wasn't she, except as her own career might typify?

P: That's right. Hadn't ever been one.

F: But she evidently came there that day with something on her mind.

P: She came to Washington, from the very outset. And as Ginsburg had said to me on Tuesday, the Commission was trying to do its best. Some people have said to me, "Katie, why in the world was she ever invited?" I pointed out to them that it's been the policy of the White House for decades to include at state dinners

and luncheons a cross-section.

F: A rather remarkable person. You probably know all about her now. But, you know, [she] came off a North Carolina dirt farm and became something of an international figure.

P: Oh, yes. And was a great talent. But she could have certainly helped the cause of her people in far greater . . .

F: Did you get the feeling as a result, that the reaction was really more against her than in support of her?

P: Oh, yes, very much so, with both the black and white communities. Especially did I have an opportunity here in Kentucky to get the reaction of the black community because, you see, I was campaigning at that time.

F: They let you know.

P: Dozens and dozens called or came or wrote how embarrassed they were for their race. If it had happened anywhere except the White House, I think it would have been probably more acceptable to them. After all I think all of our 206 million--I saw the Department of Commerce sign yesterday. We're 206 now.

F: I see.

P: But they certainly share that involvement in the pride of equal citizenship.

One last thing about the Kerner Commission Report: my opponent, Judge [Marlow W.] Cook, tried to use it as a campaign instrument against me. So we just countered by my using the Commission Report visibly, in front of television, at civic club speeches.

I would take along the commission report and hold it up and say, "The statements in here, I stand by. We must be one society." The statistics on welfare and employment and education and housing and these things.

Although we haven't been accepted, our recommendations in the legislative and executive branches of the federal government, to the extent that I would hope we would be, I think that we served a very useful purpose. The way the report has been used on college campuses and among religious groups. I think that, perhaps, we've done more to get to the real conscience of the church body of America than anything that has happened in probably this century.

F: Well, that coming in advance of the Campus Unrest Commission's Report, as back-to-back documents, they make quite an impact, I think. And it seems to me they have become almost textbooks for current problems.

P: Well, we've got to get at this job of solving these problems. I noticed in the Washington Post or Star yesterday, day before, that they've added, in the month of September, 200,000 more to the welfare roles bringing them to 12.6 million. And we're losing generation after generation. We've seen it here in the hills of Kentucky. We're in the third generation, now, of unemployment over there.

F: Do your East Kentuckians tend to be rather conservative in their political voting, despite the fact that they belong, in a sense, to the disadvantaged?

P: No, most of the ones that we consider the Appalachia-East Kentuckians

are in Carl Perkins' district, and Congressman Perkins is certainly one of the more liberal members of Congress, and he's just been re-elected with an overwhelming majority.

F: Did you have a feeling that youre presence on the Kerner Commission handicapped you in your own race?

P: No, it was a great advantage, great advantage. The President--

F: They could see you as a woman of some stature.

P: I know Kentuckians were proud of the fact that I was chosen to be on there. They perhaps didn't want to agree with my feeling of one society and open housing, and things of this [nature], but they realized that this was a necessity. And I had been fortunate in being a success in the broadcast industry as well as in the Commerce Department position, so there was a real feeling of, "Well, Kate must believe this, or she wouldn't be saying it."

F: They respected you for, in a sense, having been to the well.

P: That's right.

F: Whether they liked the water you'd drawn or not. (Laughter)

P: That's right. It was a real plus in my campaign.

F: Have you seen anything of the Johnsons since?

P: Well, let's see. I have not seen the President, and I'm trying to think if I've seen [Mrs. Johnson] since they went. I saw the President when he made his State of the Union [Address]. Well, that was the night before the Eartha Kitt thing. That was the last time I've seen the President, when he made his State of the Union [Address]. Oh, no, when he came into the Eartha Kitt thing, that was the last

saw him. I have to stop and think. Time runs by in such a hurry, doesn't it?

F: Yes.

P: You know, with television, it's hard to sometimes realize when you've been with people and then you see them on television.

F: I have a little difficulty sometimes realizing I wasn't there.

P: Yes. Don't you get the feeling?

F: Yes. Well, thank you, Miss Peden.

[End of Tape 1 of 1 and Interview I]

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