

INTERVIEW IV

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INTERVIEWEE: GEORGE E. REEDY
INTERVIEWER: Michael L. Gillette
PLACE: Professor Reedy's office, Marquette University,
Milwaukee, Wisconsin

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R: He got it [majority whip] primarily through Senator Richard Russell. You see, what had happened is that Scott Lucas had gotten defeated in 1948 [1950]. That left a rather dangerous gap in the Senate. Up to that point there had been an understanding in the Senate that the Democratic leaders would come largely from the Middle West. It was because of the very delicate balance between the North and the South. They did not want them from the Northeast, they did not want them from the South; that tilted things much too much. Lucas had been selected primarily because he was right there in the middle. He was fairly liberal but he got along reasonably well with the southerners.

Now, what happened is that the very obvious choice for the leadership was Ernest McFarland of Arizona. There were all sorts of reasons at that point why it had to be him, considerations of geography and seniority. I think that Russell was a little concerned that McFarland wouldn't work hard enough at the job. McFarland, I don't precisely know what it was, but he seemed to be having some personal problems at the time, and Russell I believe selected Johnson

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and actively pushed his candidacy on sort of the understanding that he would make up for whatever deficiencies there might be in McFarland.

It was a rather intelligent choice. Russell was a very shrewd man. I think that he realized that Johnson would work much harder simply because it could be regarded as an advancement. He had very correctly gauged Johnson as the kind of a man who would work his head off if he were presented with a new challenge. Now, how the thing was maneuvered precisely, I do not know.

G: Did you ever hear that Senator [Robert] Kerr also wanted the whip position?

K: No. No, and I would rather doubt it. I think that if Kerr had wanted something, it would have been the leadership. I don't think he would have been content with the whip. I'd be rather dubious if he wanted it.

Now, exactly how it was engineered I don't know, but under the circumstances that would not have been a very difficult thing for Russell to have done and it may well be--I didn't know Russell quite as well at that [time]. I was still working for the United Press when that happened, you know. While I knew Russell, I didn't know him as well as I got to know him later. It may well be that Russell was already entertaining some thoughts of Johnson ultimately becoming president, and that he saw this as one step along the way, the idea being to put Johnson in a leadership position in the Senate. Now, he knew it would be impossible to make Johnson the Senate Democratic

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leader at that stage of the game, but I can well see Russell's mind, which was a very complicated and very subtle instrument indeed, thinking that this would be one way in which Johnson could get some exposure to the entire Senate without encountering too much opposition, thus paving the way for his becoming the Senate leader later on. That very definitely was engineered by Russell.

G: The Russell-Johnson relationship then was firmly established by 1951?

R: Oh, yes. Oh, it was a very, very close relationship. There were a number of things that helped it along. Johnson had established a very close relationship with Carl Vinson over in the House, and Carl Vinson of course gave him some natural passports to Dick Russell. But, yes, that was a firm relationship by then.

G: Let's go on to the [General Douglas] MacArthur hearings. You say that you had only been on the staff a few days when--

R: A few weeks. I've forgotten precisely how long now, but the selection of Russell to chair the inquiry into the MacArthur dismissal was dictated by all of the circumstances. Obviously this was going to take a very subtle mind. [It] also was going to take someone who did not have a reputation of being strongly pro-Truman or strongly pro-liberal, and who yet at the same time could be relied upon for a fairly responsible conduct. It was rather amusing to see the speed with which the Senate just automatically gravitated to Russell. They put the two committees together, the Foreign

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Relations and the Armed Services. There was no doubt whatsoever that Russell was going to be the chairman.

I had written Johnson a couple of memoranda on the whole Russell thing. They must still be in the files somewhere. One day he took me up to Russell's office with him. I'm rather surprised that he took me in at this point. But he said that Russell had a rather difficult task ahead of him in this particular undertaking, and that he would need a slightly different type of staff member available than he had had in the past. In his personal staff, Russell was not the kind of man who went in for very, very strong people. He had a number of secretaries who were quite good, and he had a young man, again whose name I cannot remember, but who was a sort of a political liaison. But the strongest people that were beholden to Russell personally were on the staff of the Senate Armed Services Committee. Most of those were technical people. There was General [Verne D.] Mudge, who had been commander of the First Cavalry during World War II. There were two or three other people. They were extremely good, but what Johnson said to Russell in effect is that you need someone with a somewhat different approach toward these. He thought that there was a sort of investigation in which I could be useful to Russell. So for all practical purposes I just worked for Russell during that entire investigation.

G: Was Russell's strategy to diffuse the situation by just allowing the hearings to go on and on?

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R: No, not just allowing them to go on and on. The fundamental Russell strategy was to lean over backwards in making the hearings absolutely fair to MacArthur. Because Russell believed--and I did, too, for that matter; it looked very obvious to me--that what was happening here was a tremendous upsurge of emotion, and that if time were given to look at the MacArthur position, that the ridiculousness of it would eventually become apparent but would not become apparent if there were an adversary investigation. And that's precisely what happened. Over a period of time, oh, it became very apparent to the American people that MacArthur for all practical purposes was indulging in pipe dreams. You know, he spoke of this accordion effect in which what he was saying was that unless we went north of the Yalu to attack the Chinese that we were just going to go up and down the peninsula through all eternity, which is a marvelous simile except the trouble is [the accordion ended in Moscow]. And it's something that both Russell and I realized together. I think this is where we, Russell and I, became very close, and I think part of it was because of a conversation we had one night about the whole strategy of this MacArthur thing. Because the accordion ended way back in Moscow, that was the real trouble with all of this. MacArthur had some idiotic idea that if you could just push them on back to the Yalu and secure the Yalu, that was the end of it. Nonsense! So therefore it was a question of gaining time, gaining time so that the American people would really look at it, and it was a very successful legislative strategy.

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Of course, there was one other aspect which Russell was rather concerned [about]--I myself didn't quite see it at the time--and that is the impossibility of maintaining for any considerable length of time a war in which there were no prospects of victory. You know, this influenced Russell's thinking very heavily in Vietnam. In both Korea and in Vietnam we were fighting for the status quo ante, and you can just think to yourself of what would happen if an army went down the street carrying up front a banner saying "Hurray for the status quo ante! We shall die for the status quo ante!" It's obviously ridiculous. The whole theory of Korea, as later the theory of Vietnam, was to push people back where they started from, and the men aren't really willing to fight or die for something like that. I think that if the hearings had gone on any longer--Russell put an end to them as soon as he could, because he did not want the broader question raised, which was how long would people go on fighting just to push the North Koreans back north of a certain line and be sure they stayed there.

G: Was LBJ at all instrumental in the course of the MacArthur hearings?

R: Oh, yes.

G: What was his role?

R: Adviser. Of course, he was on the committee, too, you know. But there were almost morning sessions with Russell, Johnson, and myself. I'd stay up most of the night analyzing the testimony; I worked until three or four every morning. Then I'd wait until Russell came in, and he and Johnson and I would spend about an hour, sometimes a couple

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of hours, discussing what was going to happen during the day and thinking of all the various eventualities. I always prepared an opening statement for Russell, which he never used. So once I didn't prepare one and he said to me, "George, please do it. You don't realize something. I may change it. I may not use it at all, but it gives me a sense of reassurance to know when I come down that that statement is going to be there." After that I always left one for him.

There are more people involved than that. Johnson also brought in the top staff people on the Senate Preparedness Subcommittee: Don Cook, Gerry Siegel, David Ginsberg, Saul--

G: [Solis] Horwitz?

R: No, not Horwitz. Horwitz was with [Stuart] Symington at that point. Saul. . . . There were two other men, I cannot remember their names now. They were giving a very legalistic analysis of the testimony and they'd also write separate memoranda for Russell. But that was one thing Russell really didn't need, you know, the legalistic analysis. What he needed was a political analysis, the kind of thing I was doing.

G: Did you have an opportunity to gauge Johnson's mail on the subject?

R: Oh, yes. Oh, and how! Very much so. Overwhelmingly pro-MacArthur. MacArthur really swept this country by storm. One of the last things I did for the United Press was to check him into the Hotel Statler when he got to Washington. I'll never forget watching him go up Pennsylvania Avenue. I had a very strong feeling that if he had said, "Come on, let's take it," and had started to charge toward the White House, that whole crowd would have gone with him. There

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was absolutely no anti-MacArthur sentiment in the country worth noticing. Only one man in the entire Senate had enough intestinal fortitude to get up and make speeches in the Senate attacking MacArthur. That was Bob Kerr. Boy, you could just feel the hostility in the gallery. They hated Kerr at that moment. It didn't bother Kerr any, he was awful tough.

G: What was LBJ's attitude toward the MacArthur situation at that point?

R: First place, LBJ I think regarded him as a subordinate general. And he wasn't terribly fond of MacArthur. You know, LBJ was out in the Pacific for a period during World War II, and he had something of a run-in with MacArthur. I've forgotten exactly what it was. But he told the story on two or three occasions of MacArthur in effect calling him into his command headquarters to censor him for something, maybe going on that mission. LBJ pointedly reminding him that he was still a congressman, that he was going back to Washington very quickly under Roosevelt's orders, and that back in Washington, while he was on the Naval Affairs Committee, which did have something to do with military appropriations, et cetera. And MacArthur changing his tune right on the spot. I don't remember the details of the story, but he was not overly impressed with MacArthur.

G: Later that month the Saturday Evening Post ran an article mentioning LBJ as a possible VP nominee. Do you remember that?

R: Who wrote the article, do you remember?

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G: I don't recall.

R: Let's see. Oh, is that the one written by a New York News man,
"The Frantic Gentleman from Texas"?

G: Bill White.

R: No. White was with the New York Times. This was the New York Daily News. He was a very Irish fellow; I can't think of it at the moment. He's quite well known. He's retired now. He wrote a piece called "The Frantic Gentleman from Texas," and I remember that piece very well. You say that it appeared about four weeks after the hearings?

G: Yes.

R: Same piece. I know what I'm talking about now. I'll think of the man's name before the day is out. What do you want to know about it?

G: Well, this seems awfully premature.

R: Healy. Paul Healy. Paul Healy wrote it. No, Paul had been very much intrigued by LBJ, so much so that he'd actually made a trip down to Texas. I remember how baffled I was by LBJ's reaction to the whole piece. I didn't understand it for many years later. He wasn't certain whether it was a favorable or an unfavorable piece. I kind of looked at him in amazement, I was so flabbergasted. But I didn't know how to respond to the question. When you come across something like this, which is the kind of thing for which public relations men get paid hundreds of thousands of dollars, and you have a man looking at you and wanting to know if it was a favorable or an unfavorable piece.

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One of the things that bothered him was the word "frantic", "The Frantic Gentleman from Texas." He was consulting various dictionaries to determine the meaning of the word "frantic." I tried to explain to him that it was a word that--English is an imprecise language in which one must judge words by the context. That in that particular context what it meant was that he was frantic to get a lot of things done and that it was a very good use of the word. Unless he had edited something himself or I had edited it, he was never quite certain whether it was favorable or not.

You know, one of the outstanding characteristics of LBJ was that he had no respect for the integrity of the language, and concomitant of that was he was never quite sure what it meant. He could respond to the sound of words. He knew certain words were good words, code words, and other words he knew were bad words, but he wasn't quite sure which was which unless the code words were very clearly established. Articles like "The Frantic Gentleman from Texas" bothered him very much.

G: Is it correct also that an initial reaction might be very influential? For example, if you came in and said it was favorable that he would immediately think of it positively rather than actually studying the context and deciding?

R: No. No. Well, no, I'll take that back. That's rather difficult to tell. He had certain pet reactions, like that fantastic reaction he had to the Helen Thomas piece. It didn't matter how anybody reacted to that, the mere fact that Helen Thomas wrote that Cousin

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Oriole came to the door in her bare feet, that was enough for him. But I can well see where on other occasions an initial reaction might have made quite a difference, yes. Because, again, he did not trust his own interpretation of the written word. He did trust his interpretation of people that he was talking to, and if they were about his age, or if they were the types of persons with whom he was accustomed, his reactions were very, very valid. But the written word always gave him troubles.

G: Also that month Truman vetoed the tidelands bill.

R: I don't remember that specific veto but I know the issue fairly well.

G: Do you want to talk about the tidelands now or should we wait until. . . ?

R: I'm perfectly willing to talk about it.

G: Let's go into your recollection of the entire issue.

R: Well, as an issue it was one of the most troublesome issues that Lyndon Johnson had before him, he and Sam Rayburn both. You see, the issue really was not worth all the fighting, that was the trouble with it. This was one of those symbolic issues in which it really didn't matter how it went one way or the other. In terms of substantive results, all that was really involved was a symbol. To this day they haven't found any oil in those so-called tidelands, which are not really tidelands, by the way. That's a misnomer. The tidelands are the line between low and high tide. What they were talking about here were the submerged lands beyond the low tidemark.

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I rather enjoyed that issue myself. It taught me something very, very important, because I examined it carefully, and I had no feelings about it one way or the other, and I discovered that both sides were right. The Texas side was absolutely correct, and the federal side was absolutely correct. I took another look and I discovered the Texas side was absolutely wrong and the federal side was absolutely wrong, which is characteristic of quite a few issues. It depends entirely upon the perspective in which you wish to view it.

But I've known of no other issue that aroused--even including civil rights--such a tremendous statewide emotion in Texas. People were really up in arms over that one. Here you had an issue which to men like Johnson and Rayburn was nothing but fluff. I think that it was drummed up basically by Price Daniel, who saw it as an excellent vehicle for a political career. Rayburn at one time, with the help of Johnson--how I do not know because it was before I came along--had worked out a compromise in which, as I remember, the title would have been ceded to the federal government, but Texas would have been entitled to two-thirds of the revenue, or one-third or something of that nature, all the way out to the continental shelf. Now, there was real oil out there, which to Johnson and Rayburn, that was a compromise that made some sense. The diehards in Texas, of course, weren't willing to buy it, and as Johnson would say to me bitterly--and he made this remark to me quite often--"Those idiots were trading one-third of something for

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three-thirds of nothing. They didn't even get their three-thirds of nothing," which they didn't.

But, you see, it was such a terribly difficult one because he had to be for the Texas position in the tidelands. It was just inconceivable to think of a man taking any other position. Now, what that meant was that he had in the northern part of the country an issue that was an absolute estoppel, because there was just about as much fury in the North as there was in the South. I can still recall the famous Herblock cartoon, one of the finest Herblock ever drew, called "Down by Smuggler's Cove," showing all the oil men in the white of the moon coming down to steal the public's domain from it. All of which again was sheer nonsense; nobody has ever found any oil.

Of course, in Texas part of the furor was whipped up by the fact that the Texas school system is paid for out of oil revenues. I remember one time the Houston Chronicle coming out with a huge headline saying that a reputable firm of geologists had worked out estimates on the amount of oil under the submerged lands and it came to something incredible, enough oil to have financed the Texas school system for the next four thousand years or something like that. And it was a very reputable firm of geologists. What the Houston Chronicle did not say was that these estimates involved all of the submerged lands all the way out to the forty-fathom level, whereas all that was really at stake were these ten and a

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half marine leagues from the shore. Well, it's about ten and a half miles, three marine leagues.

There were two issues that really put Johnson on a terrible spot, the Texas [natural] gas bill and the tidelands, and these gave him much more difficulty than civil rights. Civil rights in Texas did have some constituency, just to begin with. And secondly, a lot of Texans had an uneasy conscience about civil rights, if you just limit it to voting rights. But there was no such thing as an anti-tidelands constituency or an anti-natural gas bill constituency. Everybody was for those two measures.

G: Did the tidelands issue put a strain on his relationship with Truman?

R: I don't think so. Truman was a very practical politician. I think Truman must have realized that no Texas politician could possibly be against the tidelands. I just simply can't believe that Truman would hold that against a man.

G: And likewise, LBJ did not expect Truman to allow the legislation to stand?

R: Oh, no. Because LBJ could very easily see the position of a president in a situation like this. Of course, what LBJ wanted to do was to get everybody to straddle it as much as they possibly could. In the 1952 campaign--I don't know whether it was 1952 or 1956, I've forgotten which now--he had worked out a very careful statement for Adlai Stevenson to make in the Texas tidelands. Boy,

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it was a beaut! It didn't say anything! Which I always thought was appropriate because there wasn't anything to the issue. I have a bit of LBJ in me in that I simply cannot, have never been able to get my blood stirred over issues which have no substance whatsoever in them. That was the occasion when Allan Shivers went up to Springfield and baited Adlai into just coming out flat-footed against the Texas position.

As I said, those two issues, the natural gas bill and the tidelands, were much more troublesome than civil rights.

G: Was the natural gas bill considerably more substantive? Wasn't it?

R: Than tidelands? Yes, except that even there the bill was badly misrepresented. What was really involved was a battle between northern utility companies and southern gas producers. The consumer was going to come out about the same no matter what happened. See, the real difference [was] between regulation at the wellhead and regulation at the utility company level, one or the other, and the consumer would come out just about the same. There was, however, somewhat more substance to it because there were different people who would be benefited, depending on how the bill came out. The consumer would get about the same break, but no one else would. Obviously if the bill came out one way, the Texas gas producers were going to be in clover; if it came out the other way, the northern utility companies would be in clover. But what had happened is that the lobbying efforts of the northern utility companies was much more sophisticated. Texas oil men were terribly crude. They were so

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accustomed to dealing with state legislatures, where you can buy people like sacks of potatoes, that they tried to [do] the same thing to Congress, and it simply didn't work. Whereas the northern utility companies, they knew what they were doing. They immediately got their own interests identified with the interests of the consumer. They really weren't, but that's another story altogether. It was a much more substantive issue in that sense than the tidelands. Tidelands was pure romanticism, and tidelands is like fighting over pure white southern womanhood or something like that.

G: Johnson seems to have put an awful lot in the passage of the natural gas bill.

R: He had to because he had to maintain his base. You see, if you skip ahead to the speech that he made in 1955 after the heart attack--

G: The Whitney [speech].

R: The Whitney speech, the one in which he had his twelve or thirteen-point program. Obviously, with one exception, those points were not very popular in Texas. He had to have something. The natural gas bill was it.

G: That was really a national program--

R: Oh, yes.

G: --coming from a Texas. . . .

R: You see, what he wanted [was] to get the thing out of the way. He knew that it was going to hurt him no matter how it went, but he was operating on the assumption that the more quickly the bill was

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passed, the more quickly he could start healing the wounds. He knew that something had to happen, that there had to be a determination one way or the other. By the way, one of the strange things about it is that since the bill did not reach a true determination, the production of natural gas really did go into a slump. It's too bad the issue wasn't decided some positive, definite way at that point. It was left much too much in limbo.

G: Did his support and shepherding of that legislation improve his relations with the oil and gas interests in Texas?

R: To some extent. He never really got along too well with the Texas gas and oil interests. There were a few individuals, people like Wesley West, and of course there was Charlie Francis, the lawyer who represented the oil and gas interests. I think he represented the whole industry in one plea if I remember correctly. There were individuals like that, but generally speaking, Texas gas producers were against Lyndon Johnson no matter what he did. There was an instinctive gut reaction. And of course he didn't like them either. The truth was that he was really savage where they were concerned, but for the simple reason that I think he recognized the fact that their strong hold over the state of Texas was one that was really weighing down on him like a ton of bricks.

G: He wanted to have more freedom of action, I gather?

R: Yes. Never underestimate the tremendous impact of the severance tax in Texas, the fact that every Texan was spoon-fed on the doctrine that the oil industry was paying for the education of his

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children. Don't underestimate that. That had a grave impact in Texas at that time. I don't know what it's like now. I suspect that the oil industry does not have nearly the clout in Texas today that it had then. But in Texas the oil industry had just about the same weight as say the dairy industry had in this state at one time. It seems ridiculous to compare the two, because the individual dairy farmers were very poor and the individual oil operators were very rich, but I'm just talking about the allegiance of the so-called average citizen. They felt in Texas about oil the way in this state they felt about dairy.

G: I notice that there were a number of Preparedness Subcommittee investigations that summer, some involving rent-gouging around army camps.

R: Yes.

G: Substandard housing, things like that. Were you at all active in these investigations?

R: Not in the investigations, no. I wrote most of those reports. I especially wrote the one on substandard housing, the one with the famous bottle house and chicken coop and things like that. That was a very dramatic one. Paul Popple was the man who handled most of those investigations.

G: LBJ seems to have, at that point, been endeavoring to increase his staff, to get more good staff people. [Walter] Jenkins had left I guess to run for Congress. Was this a rather continuing problem with him?

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- R: Yes. He was always trying to imitate Roosevelt, and I think the thing that impressed him the most about Roosevelt from the standpoint of modus operandi was Roosevelt's capacity to get young, very enthusiastic, very eager people around him. He was always on the lookout. Sometimes he would see them and sometimes he wouldn't. His judgment in young people was not nearly as good as his judgment in people his own age. He had very bad judgment in young people.
- G: Of course, you always hear of the people that he succeeded in getting, even people like Don Cook, who had reasonably prestigious jobs elsewhere. Were there individuals that he sought and did not succeed in getting?
- R: Not at that particular period, no. There was much more of that later on when he got into the presidency.
- G: Okay. He bought the Ranch I guess it was that summer.
- R: It couldn't have been any later than 1951.
- G: No, it was sometime before the end of 1951, in the last half, I'm sure.
- R: It couldn't have been 1952 because he had the Ranch by then.
- G: Did this change him in any way? Did it give him another outlet?
- R: I really don't know, because, don't forget, it's in 1951 that I went to work for him. I think that it gave him a refuge that he hadn't had previously. The closest he'd had to it before that was that house in Austin with the big back yard, and I don't think that was quite enough. The Ranch was a real retreat for him. He'd go to that, I think, and spin all kinds of dreams. Of course, you can

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always find something to do on a ranch, even if it's to dig a swimming pool or bring in some more cows or try to swap some more land. It was a marvelous thing for him. Also, I think it gave him some roots. I'm becoming more and more convinced, as time goes on, that to some extent LBJ always had some identity problems. I'm not quite sure that he knew what he was or what he looked like, and I think that the Ranch was something he could tie to. You know, actually it wasn't his father's ranch. I never got too clear on that. I think it belonged to an uncle or a cousin or something of that nature. I think his father's ranch was a little bit closer to Johnson City.

G: Let's see, the immediate owner before he bought it was his father's sister and her husband, Clarence Martin.

R: Clarence Martin, that's the name. I have a hard time remembering it for the simple reason that I always associate Clarence Martin--

G: That was his father's brother-in-law.

R: I know. I always associate the name with a would-be senator from West Virginia that got into a very tricky seating fight when I was covering for the United Press. Consequently the name Clarence Martin does not stick in my mind as being related to LBJ. I just keep thinking of that Clarence Martin from West Virginia.

G: Senator Alvin Wirtz died that fall at the Rice-Texas football game. Do you remember that occasion?

R: You see, I never knew Wirtz. All I really remember out of it was hearing about it in the office, and it was an especial blow to Mary

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Rather, who had worked for Alvin Wirtz and was very fond of him. I knew that it was very depressing where LBJ was concerned. He thought very highly of Wirtz. But that was all [I remember]. In later years I get more of an appreciation for the man. Apparently he was quite a man. I'd say that he was one of the people that probably--

(Interruption)

That caused more unnecessary trouble. He got me out of town deliberately on that one because he sensed that I would be opposed to what he did. What he did was to give Newsweek--I think this was arranged through Don Cook--an exclusive committee report, the famous guns and butter report. And you really can't do anything much worse than that. If you're going to give a newspaperman or a magazine or something like that an exclusive, for the love of God don't make it a formal committee report. It's too obvious, among other things. I think that he could have gotten the cover without that anyway. But instead what happened is that he got this cover of Newsweek, for whatever that is worth--I don't think it's worth too much myself--and in return for that he had the enmity of every economics writer in Washington. And they all set out to prove the report was a phony, and they did. They succeeded pretty well.

That report was not very substantive. It was based upon a very simplistic method of thinking. All the report did was to demonstrate, which was very easy to do, that a number of the plans for weapons systems and missile systems had not come through: the

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weapons hadn't been produced; they hadn't been produced in time; they hadn't been produced in sufficient quality. So the report said the reason was that the United States had made a choice between guns and butter and had decided to have butter instead of the guns. Oh, Lord, I'll never forget when that storm broke. They were not able to come up with one single demonstration of a gun or a weapon system or of anything needed by the armed forces that had been delayed in production because a higher priority had been given to any civilian need or desire. Oh, the thing was ridiculous! I can recall at one point arranging one of those off-the-record conferences where facts could be used but nobody's name could be cited, with Don Cook and some of his hot shots. And Lord, though, the press tore him to pieces.

G: Is that right?

R: Right. Don and his friends had made the mistake of assuming that these journalists really didn't know much, that they were just a little bit--he ran, of course, into some of the shrewdest, keenest economic minds in the journalistic press corps of Washington. They were not in any mood to have the wool pulled over their eyes. And he [LBJ] lost by that report, he lost badly. It became apparent to everyone very quickly in Washington that the report did not have any substance to it and that he had used it as bait to get this cover on Newsweek magazine.

G: Did LBJ do anything to recoup his standing with the economics writers after that?

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R: No. There wasn't much he could do except he never let another report like that get through. As I said, he literally got me out of town because he knew that I would raise holy hell over a thing like that.

G: What did he do? Did he send you on--?

R: He sent me on an investigation. I wondered why all of a sudden he said, "You want to take this trip, George? You were in the air force, weren't you?" I said, "Yes." "Well, we have some things out at"--oh, that army-air force point base out in West Texas near San Angelo.

G: Goodfellow?

R: No, the Goodfellow is in Austin, isn't it?

G: No, that's San Angelo.

R: San Angelo. That's where it was, San Angelo. I went down with another committee investigator. I had a rather interesting and relaxing time. When I came back I discovered they had wrapped up this Newsweek deal. He knew me well enough to know [I would object]. He thought this was just overscrupulousness on my part, which maybe it was, but at the same time I also thought it was stupid. I told him so. On things like that he was not very wise. He was so accustomed to the kind of trading that goes back and forth between politicians at all times that he thought you did the same thing with journalists. And of course you really don't. You really don't. I mean, if you are very nimble-footed and really know what you are doing you can do favors for journalists that will get you puff stories, obviously. But you've got to be awfully nimble-footed,

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and you have to know some of the rules of the game. And you don't play those games with exclusive committee reports.

G: Was there anything to the Goodfellow investigation or was that purely [to get you out of town]? I know there were [investigations].

R: It was a little bit. It wasn't worth it though. It was a very minor thing. There had been some complaints about the quality of the training and the quality of the crews. I went down there with a committee investigator who had also been in the air force. In fact, he was much better qualified for it than I was, because I was in very heavy bombardment. I was in B-29s; this fellow had been in fighters. But even I could see that most of the complaints were absolutely nothing except the standard sort of thing that always bobs up in any military post. There wasn't anything worth looking at really. I'm not even sure we ever even wrote a report on it. It certainly wasn't worth it.

G: About this time E. B. Germany came to Washington to try to get a steel allocation for construction of the Lone Star Steel plant. That was the celebrated occasion I guess when LBJ produced the letter that Germany had written in behalf of Coke Stevenson in 1948. It was a very anti-Johnson letter. Do you remember that?

R: No. I recall the incident but not very much. Gene Germany was one of the most conservative men I've ever come across in my life. Oh, Lord! I think the John Birch Society was too liberal for him. He later became quite a strong Lyndon Baines Johnson supporter, and of course Marvin Watson came out of the Lone Star Steel Company.

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Johnson pulled a typical tactic, which was to get Gene Germany so tightly bound to him one way or another. Gene Germany and somebody else was involved in Lone Star Steel, I've forgotten who now. It doesn't matter; it's irrelevant. But Johnson was awfully good at that. He'd take somebody who had been very anti-Johnson, and he'd gradually work them around one way or another and usually finally wind up having them completely surrounded and so completely bound and under obligation to him that they couldn't get away even if they wanted to. Which, of course, was very, very impressive because it discouraged other people from opposing him.

G: Sure. Was it mainly through pork-barreling or projects that they were interested in?

R: Not necessarily. Johnson was a genius at determining people's weaknesses. You know, Drew Pearson came out with a terrific anti-Johnson feud. My God, Johnson personally put an end to it finally by having a reception for Drew Pearson's stepson when Tyler [Abell] married the daughter of that Kentucky [senator].

G: Earle Clements, yes.

R: Earle Clements' daughter [Bess]. And Johnson knew exactly what he was doing. He could sense that young Tyler was the apple of Drew's eye. God, he was terrific. He had a very deep, almost a radar-like capacity to spot any point at which a person was vulnerable and to steer right in on that point.

G: He and Drew Pearson must have had an intriguing relationship.

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- R: Oh, it was strange. Drew was for him--you know, if it hadn't been for Drew Pearson I'm not sure he would have been elected to the Senate in 1948, a very famous column. After the first [primary] election, the one which did not produce a majority for anybody, Coke came to Washington and made the mistake of holding a press conference. Drew Pearson, or at least one of his representatives there [Jack Anderson], asked Coke how he stood on the Taft-Hartley Act. Well, it developed Coke had forgotten about it. He'd made a speech, but he said he had to look up the speech. Pearson wrote a very sarcastic column about "Coke Stevenson caught with his planks down," and that really circulated through Texas.
- G: But weren't Johnson and Pearson just at odds one day and then friends the next?
- R: No, there were three stages. They started out by being very, very close to each other. Then, Johnson, as a member of the Interior Committee, held a hearing on--oh, Lord--see, this is before I worked for Johnson.
- G: Was it that Elk Hill [investigation]?
- R: No. It involved some New Dealer that was very unpopular with the oil interests.
- G: Oh, Leland Olds.
- R: Leland Olds! That is exactly it. Now, Leland Olds and Drew Pearson were very close friends, and there was a whole crew of people that never forgave Lyndon Johnson for that. Pearson finally forgave him, but quite a few others did not. For a period of years after that,

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Pearson never passed up an opportunity to attack Johnson, which by the way had certain compensations. Pearson's attacks were frequently so terribly unfair that they would actually drive people into supporting Johnson who would not otherwise have supported him. I remember Spessard Holland one day saying to Johnson, "You know, Lyndon, every time I get mad at you I pick up a Pearson column and he treats you so badly that I just can't sail into you the way I wanted to." Pearson had very little conscience. If Pearson was against you, he didn't give a damn about facts or anything else, he was just against you.

G: I'm going through 1952 now. Anything on Cook's appointment as chairman of the SEC?

R: Not particularly. Obviously Johnson threw everything he could into it, but I doubt whether he could have engineered it. You know, he had gotten to know Don Cook back in the days when he served on the House Naval Affairs Committee. He had a very, very high opinion of Cook, very, very high.

G: My impression is that he was instrumental in putting Cook in the Justice Department as an assistant to Tom Clark.

R: Probably. I wouldn't know.

G: Do you know why he did that or what his motivation was?

R: Probably I would think just that it was something that Don wanted. He would go way out of his way to help Don at any time. He had about the same respect for Don that he had for John Connally, although they weren't quite that close.

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G: I noticed throughout this period Johnson is meeting a lot with Tony Buford and occasionally Augie Busch when he's in St. Louis. That's an element that I really don't know much about.

R: I don't either. I never fully understood that. He was very close to both of them, much closer to Tony Buford than to Augie Busch, and I could never see any particular reason for it. I mean by that that I could never see any ties or anything that he got out of it or that they got out of it. But there was no doubt whatsoever that he was quite close to both of them. Usually we'd go to St. Louis quite often, and [he] had conferences mostly with Tony Buford, not nearly as much with Gussie Busch. The Tony-Gussie combination was a very famous one.

G: Did it have to do, do you think, with his friendship with Symington or was that merely a--?

R: I don't think so, although Symington also was friendly with Tony Buford. That may be how he met them. But I think this was above and beyond anything [to do with Symington]. As I said, every once in a while Johnson would come up with some friendships or with some connections to which I could--there would probably be a connection if I really wanted to look for it, but I don't know what it is. Walter Jenkins would probably have a better idea in that than anybody else.

G: One of the investigations that I want to ask you about is the Moroccan bases. You remember that's when LBJ got into the squabble with this colonel's wife or something.

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R: Oh, God! Is that the one that involved Downey Rice?

G: I just don't know. I know Frank Pace was really under pressure on it.

R: You know, I remember it, and I can't remember what it was about. I have a feeling we may have fallen into that one because of Downey Rice, which was one of the bigger mistakes that we made.

G: Why was that?

R: Downey had been working for the Kefauver Committee, and his whole world was a world of crooks and gangsters and racketeers and what have you, and really that was a little bit off the subject. That wasn't what LBJ was after; LBJ was after things much more substantial. Downey was always seeing crooks. I think that LBJ found himself engaged in a number of investigations where really there was virtually no substance to it whatsoever, and I think the Moroccan air base was one of them. It's funny that I don't recall that more clearly.

G: There was another one called Code Name Bluejay that had to do with Greenland.

R: That's Downey Rice, definitely. We had no business in the world being in that one. You know, Downey Rice really should have stuck to the cops-and-robbers deal. What intrigued Downey was all the tremendous sums of money that were being poured into it. Well, of course, the very obvious reason, which never occurred to Downey, [is that] it was one of the few bases from which we could bomb the Soviet Union at that particular point. But Downey, who was not very sophisticated in those things, it never occurred to him that the

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Greenland base was worth the hundreds of millions that we were pouring into it. All he saw was an awful lot of money.

G: Anything on Tom Connally's decision not to seek re-election in the face of opposition by Price Daniel?

R: Nothing that isn't rather apparent.

G: Johnson didn't have a role in that at all?

R: No. Tom had reached a point where he just couldn't take another campaign. He was getting pretty elderly.

G: Was he also having mental lapses?

R: Yes, had been having for quite some time. He was very elderly then. It rather startled me, because when I covered the Senate before the war, Tom was no spring chicken then. That's not worth following up really. There's nothing there that isn't readily apparent.

Actually, his relations with Connally were not too close. There wasn't any antagonism or anything like that, but in those days Texas politicians had very little to do with each other. That was one of the characteristics of Texas politics. I think it was changing. He actually had more to do with Price Daniel than with Connally, but I think that was primarily because Price was a little more contemporary. Connally was really, by the time Johnson got to the Senate, of another generation altogether. He was back with Ma and Pa Ferguson and that crew. There just wasn't enough rapport between the two.

G: Well, my impression is he hadn't been friendly to [W. Lee] O'Daniel, for obvious reasons.

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R: Pappy? Oh, of course not.

G: Price Daniel was not particularly close to him, nor was Yarborough.

R: No, but he could work more easily with Price Daniel and Ralph Yarborough because he understood them. They were his generation. I think this was entirely a generational thing. He was not closer to any of them personally, it was just that he understood them better than he understood old Tom.

G: Anything on LBJ vis-a-vis Truman's seizure of the steel mills?

R: No. I wouldn't know, I wasn't working for him then. I was still at the United Press. But that would be the kind of an issue that he would duck if he possibly could. You know, he was very, very unsophisticated about labor. If I had to list all the important factors in American politics and place them in some sort of numerical scale, LBJ's knowledge, when it came to labor, there he was at the very bottom.

G: Why do you think that was?

R: I think partially because it was not much of a factor in Texas, and once he hit Washington, it wasn't much of a factor in Washington either as a local thing. He didn't understand it locally. During most of the period that he was in the Senate, he left almost all of these labor matters entirely in my hands. That was about as close as he ever came to. . . . If I'd tell him something, I think he'd do it simply because he didn't know what else to do.

I remember the lack of his sophistication became apparent on a number of occasions, once when they had some kind of a bill up before

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the floor involving the building trades. I don't know if you're familiar with them, but the intricacies of labor-management relations in the building trades are incredible. Somebody had told him that under that bill it would be possible for two men--one representing the union, the other representing the contractors--to set wage rates. And he came to me and said, "Is that true?" and I said, "Yes." "Well, goddamn, I'm against this," and he stalked away before I could explain the thing to him. I discovered a long time ago there was never any sense in trying to explain something to him; you always wrote him a memo. I wrote a long memo in which I explained very carefully that without the bill one man was going to set the rates, that [man] being the contractor, and that one man wouldn't be checked by anybody except his fellow contractors. Whereas under the bill two men could set the rates, all right, but they had to be approved by union votes, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera.

But he was always popping off that way, and he had literally no understanding of the various unions and how they operated. To him they were all alike. He had a very simplistic concept. He got into an awful lot of trouble over and over again on the point, which is rather peculiar because many of the labor leaders liked him. Walter Reuther really liked him and George Meany did.

G: [David] Dubinsky.

R: Oh, Dubinsky thought he was great. But he had no understanding of Dubinsky's problems or Reuther's problems or Meany's union problems, none whatsoever.

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G: Anything on the 1952 campaign?

R: He didn't play much of a role in them. I can tell you pretty much anything you want to know about it though. He recognized from the beginning that Stevenson did not have a chance, that the Eisenhower tide was absolutely irresistible. I think for a while he wanted to duck it completely, but eventually he came around to the realization that if he did he would have no future whatsoever in the Democratic Party. What he finally did was to arrange the minimum decent participation; that was just about it.

G: Did people, particularly more liberal Democrats, try to get him to do more than he did?

R: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. But they couldn't do it. It was a strange thing. People thought that the man lacked courage. He did not really lack courage, but he was not willing to fight fights that were lost in advance. He could not see the point to it.

G: How serious was Johnson in backing Senator Russell for the nomination? Did he think that Russell had a chance?

R: No, neither did Russell. That is one of the things that I go into in length in my forthcoming book, because it was a very, very important matter. Russell was looking around for some device by which the South could be kept within the Democratic Party. It was very, very obvious that the South could rally around Russell without any problem whatsoever. God, I think I was most of the Russell campaign, except for Russell himself. The whole point was that Russell was going to put up this campaign, come to the convention with all the

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southern votes. Then when he lost he was going to make a big speech saying, "Look, if I had won we would have expected them to support us. Well, we lost fair and square. Now we've got to support them." Which is what he did, if you will remember. We made that speech as soon as it was over.

G: But wasn't he bitter about being rejected?

R: Yes. Now here's what happened. That was the other thing I was going to go into. One of the worst things in the world that could possibly happen to a man happened to Dick Russell. He discovered he had to do some campaigning. Well, it was ridiculous. He didn't want to campaign, but the campaign had to have some respectable semblance of campaigning. Well, I remember he went to New Jersey first to talk to some of the New Jersey leaders, and he got the same reaction from all of them: "My God, Senator, we'd like to support you. You're the best man around, but we can't support a southerner." Well, he knew that academically, but it's one thing to know something academically; it's another to have it hit you in the face.

Have you ever read Cardinal [John H.] Newman's distinction between notional and real knowledge? Cardinal Newman makes an important distinction. He said, "Notional knowledge is what you know because you've been told or because you've read it. But that's different from knowing because you have felt something." Well, Russell knew of course that a southerner couldn't possibly be president at that time. But to hit this first in New Jersey and then in Pennsylvania and then in Ohio, to get all these northern Democratic

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leaders, every single one of them saying you are the best man-- which he was, I don't think there is any doubt about that. But then to be told that because he had been born two hundred miles south of a certain point he could not be president, that is what embittered Russell.

G: Did it affect him later on? Was it something that--?

R: Hard to tell. It affected him to some extent. I quite often heard Russell refer to that with some bitterness. But I do not believe that it changed the way he handled himself or the way he cast any votes. That was a tremendous blow.

G: Johnson and Rayburn were trying to get some sort of agreement from Shivers to support the nominee.

R: Yes, and they both felt that it was impossible. Both Johnson and Rayburn were rather well convinced that if Shivers could find anything to hang his hat on, he would walk out. He badly wanted to go to Eisenhower. I think they both sensed quite rightly that the tidelands would be the big thing that he would hang his hat on, because at that particular time the natural gas bill did not have much of an emotional wallop. But the tidelands bill did.

G: Yes. It was during this period that that Sam Smithwick letter to Coke Stevenson was released. I think the Dallas Morning News gave it a good play. Of course, the fellow that committed suicide in the cell and there were all sorts of. . . .

R: It was still kind of tempest in a teapot though. It was nasty, but it didn't make much of a jolt really.

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G: Did Johnson think that Shivers had anything to do with that?

R: No. He thought Shivers was a very tough, hard fighter, but I never heard him attribute that particular one to Shivers. He did not dislike Shivers, strangely enough. There were some people that he liked, some people he disliked. Shivers was not in the category of people that he disliked.

G: The Democratic state convention that year was in San Antonio, the May convention. It was dominated by the Shivers forces. Were you there?

R: No. There would have been no point to that whatsoever. Shivers had that totally under control.

G: Now you spent that fall with LBJ.

R: Yes.

G: What was he doing that fall? Why did he have you down there, first of all?

R: I think mostly because of the campaign. He didn't do much campaigning, but he certainly had lots of problems in connection with it. I had all sorts of odds and ends to do for him, various speeches, including one that I think had quite a bit to do with his becoming the Democratic leader. He had this speech in San Antonio to some sort of a rural electrification outfit two or three days after the election. I wrote a speech for him saying that it wasn't the end of the world, that the American people weren't going to go back on all the programs of the New Deal and Franklin Delano Roosevelt, et cetera. Dick Russell later said that he heard an account of that speech over the

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radio and that that was the speech that convinced him that LBJ was viable as the Democratic leader.

G: Is that right? Russell told you that?

R: Yes. In fact, what happened is rather interesting. Johnson called me out to the Ranch to discuss future relations. He said he was going to keep me on the payroll somehow, he didn't know how, because obviously he had lost the Senate Preparedness Committee, and he couldn't put me on the Texas payroll very well. And Russell called him while I was there. They had this talk, and LBJ at first was very, very uneasy about the whole idea but he did think it was feasible. But he [LBJ] went up to Washington. I think I went with him, I believe I went with him on that trip, spent a couple of days in Washington. No, no, no, I think he went by himself, that's right.

But Russell was the one who kicked off the campaign. Some other people, Mike Monroney and a few others, joined in very quickly. And it did turn out, Russell said, that Johnson was the ideal bridge, and he was right. That speech was a very good basis for it, that one that I had written for him in San Antone.

G: And that was right after the election?

R: Right.

G: Okay. Let me see if I can find that.

R: The reason I know that, I remember the theme.

G: Yes, you're right. Here it is in the outline.

R: That was a very important speech.

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G: Yes. Sure enough.

Did Eisenhower's election change LBJ's philosophy or strategy of operating in the Senate? Of course, now he was [minority leader].

R: Oh, of course. It had to. Obviously the whole situation was different. I remember there he was really seeking advice. I wrote one memorandum for him which eventually circulated all over the Senate, that the role of the leader was to try to unite the Democrats in whatever they did. I remember the main theme of that memo was that this was not going to be just a question of outright opposition, that that was ridiculous. That it was going to be very apparent that Eisenhower was going to be in much more agreement with the Senate Democrats on many issues than he would be with the Senate Republicans. You'll probably find that memo kicking around the files somewhere, because he showed it to everybody in sight. In the first place, there was still a very strong isolationist strain among the Republicans, and that we're probably going to get many occasions in the next few years in which Eisenhower would have to rely on the Senate Democrats to get his programs through against the opposition of Republicans. Which of course turned out to be what happened.

G: Was this the origin of that loyal opposition strategy?

R: Yes. Yes, very much so.

G: Were you there at the Ranch after McFarland was defeated and Johnson started plotting for Democratic leader?

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R: Oh, yes. Well, what happened, though, Russell is the one that kicked it off. I told you about that, about the phone call from Russell.

G: Yes.

R: But what had to happen then, of course, was to start building the bridge, and there had to be a basis for it. The basis that he used, by and large, was that memo that I did for him on the role of the leader and the fact that it wasn't going to be just automatic opposition, that that was absolutely foolish.

G: Sure. Were there any other key senators that Johnson lined up in that immediate period?

R: Most of the western senators, yes. That had been one of my ideas, that the western senators [were the key]. You know, in the United States Senate in those days, the westerners had the most flexibility. They were not tied to a number of old issues the way the northeasterners and the southerners were. They weren't tied down completely in either side of civil rights or in any one of a number of things. They were going to turn out to be pretty much the key to the whole thing in my judgment, which they did turn out to be. I remember Mike Monroney was very important in that, I think Mike Mansfield. There were not many Democrats from New England in those days. If you were a Democrat from New England, that meant you were either from Connecticut, Massachusetts, or Rhode Island. There weren't any from Maine or Vermont or New Hampshire, or states like that. Actually, by the time he got to Washington that whole thing was pretty well set. There were only five or six people that were

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opposing him, because it was absolutely ridiculous. They had one idea of putting Jim Murray forward as Senate Democratic leader. Well, they were really scraping the bottom of the barrel on that one. Poor old Jim was practically senile at that point.

G: They saw it I guess as more of an honor that you would bestow on Murray rather than a working position.

R: Oh, he could not possibly have led the Senate. That was ridiculous.

I'm sorry that we're getting to sort of the end of the time I've got today.

G: Well, according to my notes I think we've finished 1952 anyway, so perhaps that's a good break.

[End of Tape 1 of 1 and Interview IV]

MU Marquette University

Milwaukee, WI 53233
414-224-7132

June 2, 1982

Dear Mike:

I was quite startled the other day to hear your comment that many researchers were trying to understand why Johnson had permitted Richard Russell to dictate the terms of the Civil Rights Bill. The comment is so completely at divergence with what happened that I had problems in even finding an approach. Upon reflection, however, I realize that this misunderstanding rests upon the unfortunate reality that the Senate is the least understood of all American political institutions. There are subtleties to its operations that simply do not register in the public consciousness.

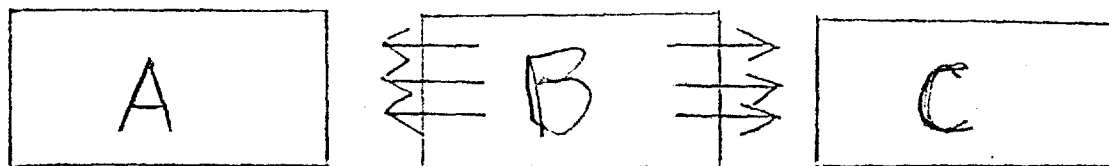
The basic problem is a widely held misconception as to the authority of the Majority Leader in the Senate. Actually, as the term "authority" is understood in executive or management circles, he has none at all. He has the "power" to call party caucuses and meetings of the Policy Committee and the Steering Committee. He is also, by custom, recognized first if he and other Senators seek to take the Senate floor. But the caucuses he calls are no more binding upon anyone than the caucuses called by anyone else under any circumstances and the Policy and Steering Committees are only advisory. As for being recognized first, that is solely by courtesy and can be abrogated any time the Senate decides to do so.

The real "power" of the Senate Leader depends upon his skill at brokerage between various blocs in that body. An indifferent leader merely drifts. An ordinarily competent leader keeps order. An extraordinarily gifted leader can tilt the negotiations in such a manner that the outcome fulfills his policy goals and bears the stamp of his personality. Lyndon B. Johnson was an extraordinarily gifted leader--perhaps the ablest in our history. But even he could not go outside of certain political limits imposed by the forces at work within the chamber.

Far too much of the literature on the Civil Rights debate--both contemporary and posthumous--assumes that the problem was simply one of an intellectual choice between various alternatives. Observers have a tendency to regard Senators as men and women completely cut off from society with no constraints upon them other than intellectual. The reality is that they are there to represent people. This, after all, is a democracy and the voice of the people is heard--but is heard as a consensus. There was no such thing, in this instance, as a choice between a bill dictated by Dick Russell and a bill dictated by Hubert Humphrey. The outcome was actually determined by negotiations between extreme positions. The negotiations, however, were held under conditions so volatile that without the leadership of Johnson there would have been no bill at all. One would have passed a few years later, perhaps, but that is a speculative question.

My intent primarily is to straighten out, insofar as I can, the record on the Civil Rights bill of 1957. I have decided, however, that I cannot do so without first discussing some of the least understood aspects of Senate opera-

tions. I do so by starting with a very simple diagram--so simple that you may wonder why I go to the trouble of putting it down. The reason is that I have discovered its utility in keeping the mind focussed on reality while attempting to follow through an extraordinarily complex set of forces.



This chart represents the divisions that the Senate--in my experience--has always followed in consideration of a highly controversial measure. Block A represents the positive pole and Block C the negative pole of the issue. These are the groupings of Senators who, for reasons of conviction, constituent pressures and previous commitment, have no alternative other than to take the extreme position even when it is suicidal. Block B represents the group of Senators who will have leanings on the controversy (the reason for the arrows) but who also have the option of taking survivable positions in either direction. In most cases, of course, their room for maneuver has some limitations but they remain flexible.

Blocks A and C are, in many respects, mirror images of each other. Both treat the object of contention as a moral issue. Both are ready to ride roughshod over the other with no compunction whatsoever. Both regard any concession as a compromise with evil. Both would rather go down to complete defeat (because they would regard such an eventuality as the outcome of fighting with honor) than to settle for a partial concession which they would regard as "appeasement".

In sharp contrast, the members of Block B approach the issue in terms of a practical problem that must be solved. Such Senators may or may not see moral implications in the argument but they do not regard a partial solution or a compromise as inherently immoral. Most of them are imbued with the philosophy that even the most crucial of issues will involve some windbagery and they see no principled reason why the windbagery should not be used in reconciling hostile factions. The most important characteristic of this group, however, is a deep conviction that any viable solution to a political issue must carry within it elements that will aid the losers in accepting their defeat. This is the point at which Block B differs most sharply from Blocks A and C. The latter usually hold that the other side has no claim whatsoever to any considerations of face saving or wound salving.

The vital factor in this equation is the group of Senators in Block B. Obviously, it will usually be impossible to put together a majority in either direction without their help as they represent the "swing" element. But what is much more important lies in a factor which has been little noted--their capacity to engage in the subtle accommodations and compromises which ultimately make laws acceptable to the nation at large. In the public eye, Blocks A and C represent the legislative process because the members of the two groups are wedded to simplistic positions which are easily understood and expressed in the mass media. But if the legislative process is to be defined as a search for solutions to political problems, A and C are not taking part in it at all. They are merely obstacles which must be overcome. All they can say is "yes" or "no" while the members of Block B do the real work of a parliamentarian.

Thus far, what I have said is only beginning to become complex. At this point, I must introduce a complicating factor. It is the fluidity of the membership in the three blocks. As the issues shift, the senators find themselves

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moving from one block to another. What is even more unsettling is that Senators will frequently shift from one block to another on the same issue as the debate progresses or as history progresses. The most effective Senators strive continuously to remain in Block B but even so determined a centrist as Lyndon B. Johnson found himself in both A and C on such issues as the Tidelands or the Natural Gas Act. (He once made the mistake of trying to effect a compromise on the Tidelands issue and was so badly burned that he never tried it again.)

This fluidity has some interesting consequences. The members of Block B are always exasperated with the antics of those in A and C. But they remain tolerant because they are aware of the fact that they may be forced into a similar position at any time. They are almost always willing to welcome a member of A or C back into the fold when the issue has been settled and what they regard as sanity has returned. However, this tolerance can become weakened when members in A or C become so obsessed with their moral stand that they cease to be useful on other aspects of the legislative process. Please burn this into your mind because otherwise it is impossible to understand what happened in the Civil Rights debate. The Senate is a continuing body and its processes tend to isolate those who drop out of the ongoing legislative process.

There is a subthought here that deserves a passing comment. It is that effective Senators analyze their votes in a much more complicated manner than is employed by most observers. Outsiders regard a vote solely in terms of the resolution of an issue. To many Senators, however, it is also an instrument with which they can carve out a career. Naturally, the impact of a vote upon an issue is primary in their minds. But they are also aware of its implications in terms of the past, the present and the future. It should never be forgotten by any student of the Senate that a vote can pay off past obligations; declare a current position; and create future obligations both of and to the senator. Even more important is the fact that a vote conditions the future. Despite a widescale public belief to the contrary, politicians are convinced that they must be consistent and that they cannot change their positions without a plausible explanation to their constituents--something that is very difficult to handle. In a sense, the members of the Senate's "inner club" vote in the same style used by a champion billiards player who shoots straight pool. The ordinary player regards a shot as merely an opportunity to sink an object ball into a pocket. The expert not only sinks the object ball with each shot but does it in such a manner that his cue ball is in position for the next shot.

I now come to the final reflection which is essential to an understanding of what happened in 1957 with Civil Rights. It is the method through which A and C, with the aid of B, transact business when one or both finally comes to the realization that further membership in the block is unendurable. Obviously, there are extreme difficulties. It is impossible for either one of them to really discuss the problems. They can do nothing but hurl defiant speeches back and forth and neither of them dares to state "Look! I'm tired of this. Let's make a deal!" They distrust each other to a point where they cannot even hold negotiating sessions under conditions of absolute secrecy.

To me, the most fascinating aspect of the Senate is its capacity to operate under such circumstances. Actually, nobody ever does "make a deal". No positions are abandoned, no constituents are betrayed, the entire process takes place in plain sight. And yet, out of all this emerges a compromise. It is done primarily through sensitive men who are well aware of the reality that every act has consequences and who know how to control those acts in such a manner that the consequences will be acceptable. To some extent, it reminds me of an

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account I read many years ago of the manner in which the ancient Phoenicians traded with the people of Cornwall. The Phoenician galleys would appear off the coast of Cornwall and the sailors would go ashore and leave trade goods and then go back to sea. Once the galleys had anchored off the coast, the Cornishmen would go down to the beach and leave tin alongside the trade goods. When the Phoenicians returned, they would examine the tin and if it was sufficient they would take it and go home, leaving the trade goods behind. If they thought the amount of tin insufficient, they would anchor off the coast again and wait until more tin was offered. This process could go on for weeks with neither side exchanging a word or even seeing each other. The Senate can be like that.

First, let me examine the composition of the three blocks at the beginning of the year.

Against that background, the 1957 process may make some sense.

Block C consisted of about 20 Senators, all from the former Confederate states. On the surface, their position appeared to be impregnable. They unquestionably had the power to defeat--through filibuster--any or all Civil Rights proposals and there was no prospect whatsoever of shutting off their filibuster through a cloture move. Southern anti-civil rights strength seemed so great that many observers doubted whether anything other than a token effort would be made to bring President Eisenhower's bill to the floor.

The members of Block C, however, were not really in a good position. They could defeat civil rights legislation but only at the cost of further isolation from the Senate's parliamentary processes. They had paid a heavy price to block civil rights legislation in the past through forging the Republican-Southern Democratic coalition. The problem was that the coalition was entirely negative. It stalled off an outcome that was deeply distasteful. But it did not secure anything positive in terms of Federal action needed for the well-being of the Southern states. In fact, the Coalition meant that the Southerners had been forced to turn their backs on Northern colleagues who had helped them secure the agricultural, flood control and rural electrification programs that the South really needed. This was a most ungraceful posture for a group of men who were deeply conscious of the necessity of paying off obligations. Furthermore, their coalition with the Republicans had been weakened by the presence of a Republican president in the White House. Conservative Senators felt that they no longer need worry about "liberal" legislation because they had a President who would veto it. And Republican Senators could help the Southern Democrats only by opposing--directly or indirectly--a Republican President who had submitted a civil rights measure himself. This did not mean they would abandon their Dixie colleagues but their enthusiasm was certainly waning.

Finally, the Southern Democrats were operating under an unusual constraint. The Democratic Leader of the Senate himself represented one of the former Confederate States and he had determined that a civil rights bill was an absolute necessity. Furthermore, he had one of the best tactical minds in the Senate and that, accompanied by a full understanding of Dixie political vulnerabilities, meant that he could not be easily outmaneuvered. There were other aspects to this factor which will be discussed later.

Block A, interestingly enough, was not composed entirely of Senators with large civil rights voting constituencies. For example, Hubert Humphrey did not have to face a large Black vote in Minnesota. But he had become so thoroughly identified with the Civil Rights organizations that to leave them would have the

appearance of "Treason." Generally, however, these members were from the Northeast, the Middlewest and the West Coast where there were large groupings of minorities.

On the face of it, Block A appeared to be in a hopeless position. Its membership was probably a bit smaller than the membership of Block C, although this is difficult to determine as everyone outside of Block C was forced to give lip service to the Civil Rights cause. There was definitely insufficient strength for the group to pass a bill without massive assistance from Block B which was beginning to turn sour on the Southerners but was not yet ready to desert them. Furthermore, Block A was composed largely of Senators who had never learned to play the Senate game and who, therefore, had not picked up obligations to draw upon from other Senators.

However, the weakness of Block A--like the strength of Block C--was not the whole story. The Civil Rights advocates had a number of positive assets. One of the more important was that they stood on the "respectable" side of the argument. North of the Mason-Dixon line, no politician dared admit a distaste for a civil rights bill even though he or she might be secretly sabotaging it. The segregationists were strong in the Senate but in the nation as a whole they were on the defensive. What is probably more important is that the advocates of Civil Rights had a growing constituency that obviously had a future whereas the segregationists were shrinking under the impact of Supreme Court decisions and growing militancy on the part of Blacks who had moved off the plantations and into the large cities where they had strategic geographical positions. Finally, there were a few members of the group who really understood the Senate and were respected by its members. The outstanding example was Hubert Humphrey whose name was anathema in the South but who, after an uncertain start, had become popular with his Senate colleagues.

One of the important characteristics of this block in 1957 was that some of its members were not so intransigent as their public statements. They had become tired of fighting lost causes from which they could emerge with honour offset by bloodied heads. They were committed to absolutes and expressed complete contempt for the "half a loaf" theory of political progress. But it was clear from private conversations that some of them were willing to listen to reason as long as there was some progress and they could vote against it on the grounds that halfway measures were not enough.

The membership of Block B was scattered throughout the nation except in Dixie itself. Their major areas, however, were in New England, the Rocky Mountains and the Great Plains. Their feelings on civil rights were highly mixed but there was a very apparent growing awareness among them that "something had to be done". Many of them were very reluctant to force legislation through the Senate by clamping down on filibusters (unlimited debate is regarded as an absolute principle by many Senators. It is NOT just a dodge to keep civil rights legislation from passage) but they were become somewhat weary of Southern intransigence. What was probably the most important element in assessing this block is that as a whole, it was ready to pass a bill if it was assured that a genuine legislative effort was under way rather than merely another exercise to assist segregationists and civil righters in building a record for their constituents.

There were two unusual factors in 1957 that require some comment. Both have been touched upon but both need some elaboration. They were the occupancy of the White House by a Republican and the occupancy of the Majority Leader's seat by a Texan.

The Eisenhower Presidency changed many of the normal rules of Senate combat. In the case of Civil Rights, it meant that the Southern Democrats were able to put the onus for whatever happened (in talking to their white constituents) on a Republican rather than a Democratic President. This was a factor which made them a bit more tractable. The point was that they could be somewhat more cooperative with their Northern Democratic colleagues if they could say that both political parties were nationally against the South.

The more important factor, however, was the Lyndon Johnson leadership. His Dixie colleagues had no illusions as to where he stood on civil rights. He was determined to get the strongest possible bill that he could. But they also knew that he would give them some "face savers" and that he had sufficient understanding of their plight to do things in such a way that they would not be isolated from the legislative process. What was much more important, however, is that the most important Southern leader (and I suspect several others) thought of LBJ as the only Southerner who could become President (other than Kefauver whom they regarded as a traitor) and were aware of the fact that he could not become President if he shared their unyielding opposition to civil rights.

At this point, it is essential for me to inject a personal note so the last paragraph can be given the weight it deserves. The Southern leader was Richard B. Russell, of Georgia, who was then the unquestioned and unchallenged chief of the Senate's southern block. Johnson had "loaned" me to him during the hearings which he chaired on McArthur's return from Korea and during that period the two of us developed a very close relationship. We were poles apart on issues--especially on civil rights--because we started from different assumptions and had different experiences of life. But intellectually and temperamentally we were akin and at ease with each other. He was a reflective man who was interested in why the world works the way it does and I could talk with him in a manner impossible with LBJ who only wanted to know what to do.

There could be no question about the depths of Russell's opposition to civil rights laws--he was NOT just keeping his constituents happy. To him, they were intolerable intrusions into private lives and he predicted that if they were passed, they would result in a monstrous bureaucracy. He conceded that Blacks were treated unfairly but simply did not believe that legislation would cure the matter. There was one other aspect of his thinking, however, that is relevant. He also regarded the North-South division in the United States as the greatest threat to the nation's strength. His hope that LBJ could become President was based upon the thesis that Johnson could bridge the North-South gap in the nation as effectively as he had in the Senate. But during one memorable (to me) evening the two of us spent in Paris at a NATO parliamentary conference he confided to me that "we can never make him President unless the Senate first disposes of civil rights". Russell never went so far as to say to me that if he had to choose between accepting a civil rights bill or leaving the gap unbridged that he would accept the bill. But I had the clear impression that such a thought was somewhere in his mind.

I do not know whether Johnson had active ambitions for the Presidency at that time. But I do know that he was aware of these Southern feelings and that he felt they gave him a certain amount of protection. At the very least, his Southern colleagues did not crowd him to sign documents such as the Southern Manifesto or to make inflammatory statements about race relations. As Leader, he was regarded in a somewhat different class.

As for the notion so fondly held by Northern liberals that he had been a

segregationist, prior to his assumption of the leadership, it was simply not true. What he had actually done was to duck the issue--not a very heroic stand but possibly the only one that made sense in a state like Texas. This meant that he was in a rather good position to move in any direction. Furthermore, whatever his feelings on legislation, it was absolutely clear to all who knew him that he did not share the normal Southern white feelings on race.

I became aware very early in 1957 that he had determined to make an all-out push on Civil Rights. Characteristically, he did not say so to me or to anyone else. My awareness arose out of the fact that he accepted a good deal of my advice on how to position himself on the civil rights controversy and he knew that I believed he should get behind a bill and push it to passage. It should be made clear at this point that this was the method through which I usually found out where he stood. Unlike Russell, he was extraordinarily closemouthed about such matters. I do not believe he told anyone that he was going to vote for the bill until the end of the debate when he accepted a speech I had written (without direction from him) announcing this intention.

Despite his reticence on how he would vote, however, he was quite clear on his strategy. Early in life, he had grasped an important political principle and it had quite a bit to do with his success. It was that the outcome of a public debate on a political question is usually determined by the manner and the circumstances under which the question is presented. For the contest on Civil Rights, this principle was crucial. The issue before the Senate was whether civil rights legislation should be passed. This could be answered either "yes" or "no" and on such questions, a determined opposition usually has the edge. Johnson's thesis was that if the question could be answered affirmatively, the next question would be "what kind of a bill should be passed" and on that kind of a question the affirmative side usually has the edge. In other words, he thought that if a bill with any substance could be passed--no matter how weak--that it would then be possible to follow through with much more far-reaching legislation at a later date.

This is the point which has probably caused the most confusion among students of the political process. Their mistake has been to examine the 1957 bill solely on the basis of its merits. The more important reality is that it broke down the barriers to civil rights legislation and made possible more sweeping acts which followed later. Again, it can never be repeated too many times that the Senate is an on-going body and its acts must be analyzed not just in terms of what they do but how they pave the way for doing other things.

Actually, the 1957 act had much more substance to it than most of the analyses indicated. There were a number of reasons for this misunderstanding. Obviously, it fell short of the ideals for which the advocates of civil rights had fought for so many years. No bill that could have been passed in that year would have been satisfactory when judged by their standards. But a second factor is that it suited the purposes of the Southern Senators to have the bill depicted as a toothless beast and they fostered this picture actively. They could always salve the feelings of their constituents by telling them that they had "outmaneuvered them Yankees"--as good an alibi as any. A third factor is that the legislative practice invariably suffers from the descriptions used by the mass media. For example, the search for accommodation is always described as "watering down" or "back-scratching" or "horse-trading" or by some other pejorative phrase. Of course, all of these words are valid but the whole thing would be placed in a more balanced perspective if the adjectives were less emotional.

There is one other feature of the Johnson strategy which requires comment. Even though he was not fully a southerner, he was sufficiently close to them to understand their psychology. It was his conviction that Southern Senators had a bad conscience on voting rights. He did not think that most of them were unduly troubled by job discrimination or discrimination in public facilities, and lynching of blacks had ceased to be a routine pastime in Dixie. But the Southerners were Constitutionalists (this was not just a phony stance on their part) and the Constitutional mandate on voting was clear. Johnson believed--and events bore him out--that they could not fight a voting rights measure with the same fervor that would be employed in a battle against FEPC.

Against this background, the debate opened with an impassioned speech by Russell--a speech delivered even before the measure had reached the floor. Russell denounced as iniquitous (that may not have been his exact word but it was his thought) two provisions in particular. One authorized enforcement of the law by court trials without a jury; the other, according to the speaker, authorized the reimposition of post-Civil War reconstruction. The latter was too complicated to sum up in a pat phrase and it became known in the Press, after its numerical designation in the Bill, as Title III. In most of the commentary, the speech was interpreted as the opening gun of the Southern campaign to kill civil rights legislation.

As I was working for a man who was seeking the passage of the bill, I was in no position to go directly to Russell and talk to him about it. But the public interpretations of his act seemed to me wide of the mark. My own thoughts were:

1. If Russell's objective was to kill Civil Rights legislation, the speech was totally unnecessary and Dick Russell was not a man to do meaningless things.
2. As I had listened to the speech in the Senate gallery, what had come through to me was that the jury trial provision and Title III were iniquitous but very little had been said about the balance of the measure. I had learned early to analyze Russell statements from the standpoint of what was NOT said as well as what was said.
3. The practical impact of the Russell speech was to center discussion on the two points and to place a heavy burden of proof on the advocates of Civil Rights. There were only three responses available to them: to refute Russell's charges; to admit that they sought to punish the South; or to modify the provisions of the bill. I did not believe they could refute Russell's charges (they couldn't); it is never politically profitable in the Senate to stand on a platform of vengeance. This left only the third alternative--to modify the measure.
4. Should the measure by modified, this would place on the South an obligation to respond in some affirmative manner. To oppose any and all items in a bill was a defensible position, no matter how reprehensible. But to oppose two items and to secure a positive response from the Senate shifted the strategic position completely. The question then became the kind of bill that should be passed rather than whether a bill should be passed. Should the Southerners resort to filibuster under those circumstances they would lose forever (or until they had made up for it) their ability to function in the nation's legislative body.

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I will never know whether my thoughts were parallel to those in Russell's mind. But I do know that in expressing my thinking to LBJ on the next day, I added: "If I am right about the impact of that speech and I am smart enough to figure it out, so is Dick Russell." Johnson did not argue with me. What is even more important is that he had not been downcast by the speech. In fact, I got the distinct impression that he knew about it before it took place.

Regardless of who was thinking what, however, the scenario that popped into my mind was followed out with every i dotted and every t crossed. Title III was removed easily as it was far too complex to be enacted without much more study. Its removal took place with so little effort that I speculated for a while upon the possibility that it had been put in only for trading purposes. But that would have required a level of cooperation between Johnson and President Eisenhower that I do not believe was possible. Many of its provisions were enacted at a later date after they had been studied more carefully.

The jury trial provision was more difficult and resembled to a much greater degree the process of trading for tin in Cornwall. A number of compromises were tried on for size but each one drew from either the Civil Rights Senators or the Southerners a reaction so sharp (the Civil Rights people were not going to permit the act to be gutted by southern white juries but the southerners were not going to permit men to be branded criminals without a jury trial) that it obviously would not work. An article by Prof. Carl Auerbach, of the University of Minnesota, in an intellectual magazine provided the solution. He pointed out that it is customary in the law to impose penalties for civil contempt without a jury trial and that the penalties for civil contempt could be much more drastic than the penalties for criminal contempt. This was quickly interpreted by a brilliant lawyer in our office, Solis Horwitz, and translated into a legislative amendment by members of Dean Acheson's law firm. It did the trick. In effect, the Southerners were willing to settle for jury trials without juries and the northerners were willing to settle for juries as long as they had nothing to do with the trial.

This whole process was made possible only through the efforts of the Senators in Block B. Once convinced that there was a genuine legislative effort underway, they entered the parliamentary process wholeheartedly. The compromise amendments were offered by such Rocky Mountain state Senators as Anderson, O'Mahoney and Church and New Englanders such as Kennedy. And a brilliant floor argument by Pastore, of Rhode Island, rescued the jury trial compromise at a crucial moment when it appeared to be going down the drain. In effect, Block B saved Blocks A and C from their own follies.

I do not know how many of the Southern Senators had figured out the inevitable outcome of the Russell position or even whether he himself had figured it out. But once the jury trial amendment was adopted, they could no longer continue the battle. A filibuster must have a moral base even if the cause for it is regarded by others as immoral and the southerners had no justification for a filibuster once their chief objections to the bill had been met. They stopped talking (with the exception of an abortive one-man talkathon which received no support) and allowed the bill to pass--naturally voting against it. Of course, they were able to go home and tell their constituents that they had beaten "them Yankees" on reconstruction and had blocked a foul design "to brand you a criminal without a jury trial."

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The advocates of Civil Rights had a somewhat different problem. A "clearing house" of committed civil rights organizations had been established in Washington to lobby for the bill. It had been consistent in its determination to endorse the most extreme provisions of the measure and to denounce all efforts at modification. The group did not have widespread influence in the Senate but its influence over the members of Block A was decisive. The passage of the bill would have meant little had there been total rejection by the people most interested.

These were the circumstances which led to a remarkable flurry of activity on the part of some of the Senators in Block A. Led by Hubert Humphrey, they worked with members of the Civil Rights clearing house. The ultimate result was a statement heavily critical of the bill which had been passed but stating that it made some progress and therefore was worthy of becoming law. This was "damning with faint praise" but from an overall standpoint, it was essential to future progress. Had Block A ended with solid and unrelenting opposition to the legislation, it would have been difficult--in fact close to impossible--to mobilize the members of Block B for another parliamentary effort for many years to come.

I can well understand how this process can be confusing to those who have not been deeply involved in the Senate. Furthermore, it cannot be clarified by a study of the record. There were no formal meetings between the factions or the leaders of the factions. At no point did anyone "cut a deal" or shake hands over a deal. There were absolutely no changes of position on the part of any individual. The Southerners emerged from the debate with a record of unyielding opposition to Civil Rights legislation and the Liberals emerged with a record of adamant refusal to compromise in any form. There were unquestionably informal conferences between Johnson and Russell; Johnson and Humphrey; Johnson and the various leaders of Block B. But these were always on separate occasions. I doubt whether there was any contact whatsoever between the members of the three blocks during the entire debate except on the Senate floor where they were in public sight.

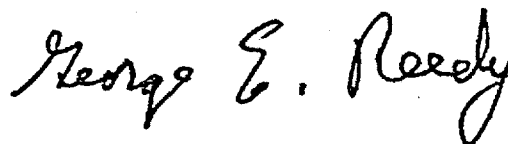
Nevertheless, there was a compromise measure and it was achieved by a directing intelligence. Russell was in no more control of what happened than was Hubert Humphrey. The Georgian as the representative of a block was able to negotiate for certain things his followers had to have. But there was a limit to what he could achieve--as became apparent very quickly when he tried to secure juries for every trial under the act. The Humphrey block had limits beyond which it would not go and it had the power to block legislation altogether. The efforts that Johnson had to make to bring the southerners into the consensus were more visible but he also had to satisfy the other side that genuine progress could be made.

I doubt whether this whole thing would have been possible in any body other than the Senate. The House of Representatives, despite its many virtues, is too clumsy for such an operation. Its members operate in blocs and even a skilled leader such as Johnson is limited in which he can do. The Senate, however, is attuned to subtleties. Most of its members are highly sensitive men or they would not be there. Those that are not sensitive are easily manipulated by their colleagues. It is absolutely unique as a legislative body and that is what makes it so difficult to study.

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This has been written because I do not believe any study of the record can recreate the actuality. It is my hope that this will go along with the materials on Civil Rights so those who research it in the future will at least be aware of the interpretation of one of the strategic advisers on the debate.

Sincerely

A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading "George E. Reedy". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style. The first name "George" is written with a large, looped 'G'. The middle initial "E." is written with a small 'E' followed by a period. The last name "Reedy" is written with a large, looped 'R' and a trailing 'y'.

Michael L. Gillette
Chief of Acquisitions and
Oral History Programs
The Lyndon Baines Johnson Library
Austin, Texas 78705

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