

INTERVIEW II

DATE: June 9, 1969
INTERVIEWEE: GERALD W. SIEGEL
INTERVIEWER: T. H. BAKER
PLACE: Mr. Siegel's office, Washington, D. C.

Tape 1 of 1

B: Sir, we had gone in time up to about 1960. We have covered legislative matters when you were on the Senator's staff. Now, just to fix the chronology here, you joined the Harvard Business School faculty in 1958. But then, in about the first six months of 1960, you took a leave to come back to Mr. Johnson's staff.

S: That's right.

B: And you had mentioned, in the previous tape, that probably the reason for that was to help on the civil rights measure of that year.

S: Yes. And, of course, as you know, that was the year that the legislative program was of great importance to then-Senator Johnson. Because it was part of his effort to capture the nomination for the Presidency in 1960: to use the record that he had made as Democratic Leader in the Senate as, in effect, the launching platform, the basis and background of his qualifications to be the Democratic nominee and ultimately the President of the United States. So that it was not simply the civil rights measure, but the importance of using 1960 as effectively, legislatively, as he could, prior to the convention.

B: This may be a perfectly fatuous question. But it was definitely clear to the members of the staff that this was a motive, that the Senate record he was compiling there was for campaign purposes?

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S: I wouldn't say that was clear to all of the staff; certainly, it wasn't a matter that was discussed in any open sense, at least not to my knowledge. You know, there are circles within circles, and many of the conversations that I'm sure went on among the really top leaders of the political effort on Senator Johnson's behalf--and I'm talking about Congressman Rayburn and John Connally and others--I did not participate in. So that I wouldn't pretend to really know what was done or said and thought. But I do know that most of us who were of the senior staff level, both independently and collectively, knew what was going on, and what was going in Senator Johnson's mind, and what his aspirations were.

B: Did this make much of a difference in the atmosphere in the Senate? For example, the relationship between Senator Johnson and Senator Kennedy, also a leading contender for the nomination?

S: Yes, it got a little stickier as the year wore on, and I know I remember one incident. I was back only on leave, and my family was still living in Newton, Massachusetts. I was commuting quite often on weekends; one weekend, just shortly before the convention in July, it just happened that I flew up to Boston on a Northeast plane on which Senator Kennedy was flying. And he came by and sat down to chat a little and was sort of giving me gentle hell because of the then movement that seemed to be afoot to have a recess instead of an adjournment, in effect, with the convention being sandwiched between two legislative sessions. Which would have clearly been, you know, a fairly significant advantage for Senator Johnson, who was the Leader of the Senate and pretty much the

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Leader of the Congress, at that point, highlighting the pressure that he could bring to bear on the delegates to the convention who might have an interest in what Congress was or wasn't going to do both before and after the convention. And I could honestly point out to him that that was a piece of strategy that I had nothing to do with and, in fact, had not at that particular time really heard much about.

And I'm sure that Senator Kennedy was right that this was a development of somebody's who was working closely with Senator Johnson as being a very strategic, effective measure to give him a leg-up at Los Angeles.

B: Did Senator Kennedy really seem worried about whether or not he was going to get the nomination?

S: Yes, I could say that he certainly was not over-confident. He knew he was in a struggle. Now, I don't know that he felt even then that his true, real adversary was Senator Johnson, because I think he felt that Senator Johnson had the power to deny him the nomination, but not the power to get it for himself. If he didn't succeed in getting the nomination on an early ballot, his problem was someone else, not Senator Johnson, was likely to come along and dominate him. But after all, all he was interested in was winning it for himself. He didn't care who got it, if he didn't, I suppose.

B: Did you see anything of a personal relationship between Senator Johnson and Senator Kennedy in those years?

S: Actually, not a great deal, but it was not a bad relationship to my knowledge. I know that it -- and certainly my relationship with

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Senator Kennedy was always friendly to the extent that I think this reflects the fact that he was friendly toward Senator Johnson and felt that Senator Johnson was friendly toward him--made it possible for us to have a pleasant working relationship. I know there was mutual respect and admiration, and I say mutual, I know that it was truly mutual. And there was strong competition; I know, at times, Senator Johnson got a little irritated at the sheer force and mass of the opposition because the Kennedy effort was a damned good effort. They were good people. There was a lot of money. There was tremendous organization; it was just plain better than ours, and Senator Johnson never liked to be second best, you know.

B: You know, there's been a lot of speculation about Mr. Johnson's campaign for the nomination, about this apparent reluctance to definitely announce that he was a candidate as failure to enter the primaries.

S: Well.

B: Was this kind of thing discussed among the staff?

S: Again, not among the staff that I was a senior member of, but probably among some of the people who were the early nucleus of his campaign organization.

B: The more personal staff, would that be?

S: No, no. I'm merely talking about, I think, men like Governor [Buford] Ellington of Tennessee, former Senator Clements, Speaker Rayburn, John Connally, Bobby Baker. I'm not sure that I can

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even identify all the truly close political advisors that were involved, and I don't want to mention names by mistake. I think, Jim Rowe : was sort of in and out and Tommy Corcoran was in and out; I don't think Abe Fortas was, because I've always had the impression that--at least this was my own opinion, and I suspect that Senator Johnson had the same opinion in a way--Abe Fortas probably was worse in political judgment than most people. He really did not have political sagacity. So he was seldom involved in any of the political judgments and discussions. But that group, very likely, would have been thinking about the importance for Senator Johnson of not actively getting out in primaries because he'd get whipped and eliminated, and two, of maintaining the image of a man busily engaged in leading the country legislatively to progress. Which was fine. I mean, that was his basis and his strength, his real opportunity to get a Democratic nomination; and the other routes were just sheer suicidal for him.

B: Did you think he could get the nomination?

S: No, no, I knew it. I think he knew it. I can remember a conversation shortly before the Oregon primary where I said to him--we were talking on the phone on a Sunday morning, just kind of visiting--and I said, "Look, I know this probably doesn't make any sense either, but I suspect that if you had any real opportunity at all, you're going to have to go out, literally, just break away from the Senate, go out to Oregon. You're in the primary. You can't get out of that one. Go out there and try to either win it or make a hell of a strong showing." And he said, well, he just couldn't do that. He sort of implied that that

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probably was right; that he just wasn't going to put . . . I think he knew that he did not have the votes in a Democratic convention for the nomination. Something dramatic like if he had gone to Oregon and beat all the other candidates out there, this just might have done it.

Politics is a mystical thing, anyway. But short of that, it wasn't in the cards. And I think he knew that, I suppose, deep down, knowing as he did that anything can happen at a convention, he wouldn't have written himself off completely, but as a practical man, I think he knew what his percentage odds were.

B: Was there a deliberate attempt in this period, and even an earlier, on part of the staff, to give Mr. Johnson a public image as a Westerner as opposed to a Southerner?

S: Well, yes, I think we discussed this in the earlier interview.

B: Yes, I think we mentioned it briefly.

S: I don't say that there was any deliberate--no, it wasn't deliberate--staff project, by any means, but along the way somebody, I don't know who, recognized that it was possible for the Senator properly to claim himself as a Southwesterner, and then, therefore, as a Westerner, and to try to shed himself of the burden, especially the Democratic party political burden--of a Southerner. He did do this, and especially before the Los Angeles convention, he went out to some of the Western conferences of Democratic party members. Nothing really worked; nothing helped, at that time, but it was . . .

B: Was there any talk before the convention of a Johnson-Kennedy or Kennedy-Johnson ticket?

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S: Yes. I can tell you about a night I had dinner with Mike Feldman, in February of 1960, when Mike and I put the ticket together and only he was right.

B: Mr. Feldman was working then for . . .

S: Senator Kennedy. And he was, of course, predicting the Kennedy-Johnson ticket and I was predicting Johnson-Kennedy ticket. So we put it together that night, only Mike had the right arrangement.

No, there was no other talk about it and seriously, I must say this: that I do not believe that Senator Johnson went to Los Angeles with anything but a strong determination not to take anything but the top spot. And I don't know what happened there; but maybe the realization that one, he was needed and he recognized that without him on the ticket, the chances of Senator Kennedy winning were much less, if possible at all. I think he also realized that there wasn't much more for him to accomplish in the Senate; that maybe the Vice Presidency wasn't a great thing, but he'd sort of had it. You know, it seemed to me, too, that he could only kind of come down, decline as a member of the Senate. Maybe he thought, "Well, it's either resign from public office"--you know, out of public office--"or make this shift to a national ticket." And he may very well have thought he wasn't, you know, so old that this conceivably could be the only way he could become President, by serving as Vice President, showing himself to be a very constructive, cooperative member of a liberal ticket. If it won and had eight years of good successful administration, he might be the logical successor, and he would have not been too old to do it.

But, of course, fate played a little differently. But the fact is, he may very well--you know, who knows what really was going on in the recesses of his mind. And, of course, a lot of people were scrambling around, so-called advising him. Not I. He didn't ask for my advice.

B: Did you go to Los Angeles?

S: Oh, yes. I was out there. I didn't do much, but I was there.

B: Did you ever discuss the events at Los Angeles with Philip Graham or Katherine Graham?

S: No. With neither, actually, except that I think I mentioned to you, when I got to Los Angeles the first people I happened into were Phil and Bob Esterbrook. Both of whom were obviously convinced that the ticket had to be Kennedy-Johnson, and were working on it that way, and they were saying to me, "Look, we've just got to persuade Senator Johnson to take the second spot." Well, I don't know what I said. I suppose I said, "Well, I can't persuade him, but I'll be surprised if he would take anything but the top of the ticket." Which was the natural thing, I suppose, to say at the time, for him, before the convention began.

B: You didn't mention, this was on the first day of the convention, or earlier . . .

S: This was even before. This would have been, I guess, the weekend before the convention.

B: I asked you about Mr. Graham, because in the famous Graham memo, at least in the copy he sent to Theodore White, there is a pencil

notation to the effect of: "Now I know why Lyndon wanted the Vice Presidency?" And I was wondering if he or his wife had ever elucidated to you?

S: No, no. Neither. And I have not discussed it. I do remember in January of 1963, when the Tax Reform Bill was under great debate and consideration, Mr. Graham grabbed me on the street one day right after lunch and said, "Come on, we're going to the White House and we're going to talk to the President and the Vice President." He had become convinced that we simply needed a reduction on income tax rates, not the reform measures so much as reduction, because he felt we were headed into an economic recession and that it was vitally important that we handle the fiscal and monetary controls properly. He was not above making his views known and felt.

This was a very, very sad and yet, to my memory, extremely unique [incident]. Wish I could have captured it all, photographically and accurately. We did indeed go to the White House. The three of us, President Kennedy, Phil Graham and I sat in the President's office for quite a long time. Mr. Graham was insisting that the President call Bobby and Mr. Johnson to the office so that we could talk about unlocking some of the problems involved in the Tax Reform Bill.

B: Bobby would be Bobby Kennedy?

S: Bobby Kennedy. And the President was saying, "No," very firmly, but very politely, and of course prevailed.

B: Did President Kennedy give reasons?

S: No, he just said he wasn't going to do it. And I'm sure he was right. It wasn't a logical, sensible thing to do.

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- B: I better clarify this though. What he is not going to do is push for a tax cut bill?
- S: No, no, no.
- B: But what he is not going to do is call Lyndon and Bobby together.
- S: Call them over to his office. That's right. He just wasn't going to try to bring them together, under these conditions, to discuss the tax measure and some of the reform proposals which might or might not have stood in the way of what Mr. Graham felt was the more important objective of getting tax rates down so that the economy would get a little bit of a further boost that he thought was needed.

In any event, we left there and went over to the Vice President's office. And as I recall, he came from some other meeting, picked us up and drove us to his home. We rode in his car. We sat and talked to him about the same subject. Mr. Graham was not well. He was showing early symptoms of his illness. I recall him getting quite agitated and saying to Mr. Johnson, "No, just face it, you've got to face it: you're never going to be President."

- B: And what was Mr. Johnson's reactions to that?

- S: Silent. I think he sensed that Phil was agitated, something was disturbing, something was wrong, very definitely wrong. He called later that night and we talked on the phone for a very long time, because he was puzzled. "What is wrong?" I didn't know. I mean, I really didn't. Well, I said I didn't think Phil behaved right and certainly didn't conduct himself well. But I just didn't know what was wrong at that point. It was too early; before I realized. As I

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say, that was quite a day, because within months, you know, a lot of things had happened. Mr. Graham was dead; Mr. Kennedy was dead; Mr. Johnson was President.

B: Was the rivalry between Mr. Johnson, when he was Vice President, and Robert Kennedy, pretty open and obvious?

S: I have absolutely no knowledge on that. And I can absolutely give you nothing useful, but I will give you something that I said to a columnist once. That reflected my over-simplified way of describing the problem. There was discussion. Everybody was trying to probe and analyze that relationship, and I said, "You're all nutty. It's a very simple one. They don't like each other." And that's it.

B: Apparently that attitude toward Mr. Johnson was fairly common among the Kennedy circle, with the possible exception of President Kennedy himself.

S: I think the relationship between President Kennedy and Mr. Johnson was quite different than that between Senator Robert Kennedy, and perhaps any of the other Kennedys, and certainly the staff people.

I'm sure you've heard the story that I heard from Sam Zagoria, who was at the meeting where it occurred. There was a kind of background meeting of legislative people. Sam Zagoria was then working for Senator Case, actually, up on the Hill. I forget how the meeting was put together, but then-Senator Kennedy was asked who was the most qualified person to be President. He said, "No question, but that's Senator Johnson, but he can't become President." Then he said, "I'm the next best." And I think he meant that. This reflects

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what I think was the true relationship about it. They were totally different people. They were not friends; they could not have socialized together; their interests were totally different, outside of government. But as politicians, as members of the Senate, as government experts, they recognized each others' strengths and they were mutually respectful of each other.

B: To catch up on the chronology, you left Mr. Johnson's staff right after the Democratic convention.

S: Yes. I had to go back to school. My leave was up, and I went back.

B: Were you under any pressure to stay?

S: Some, yes. I think he was in a little distress. At that time, a lot of his --well, some of his old friends and supporters, were very angry and critical of him for taking the second spot on the ticket. I'm afraid he may have thought incorrectly that I was motivated that way. But I had tried to point out, and I think I did point out to him, that that had nothing to do with it. I'd run the string out on my leave. That special session in the Senate, I figured was not going to be very important, anyway, and that it was not necessary for me to stay there. And I had to get back, because I was going to prepare for the teaching, I had been doing research, and that was the first year I was going to teach, the '60-'61 year. And so I just had to. Well, then I helped a bit. When he came to Boston, I prepared a memo for him at his office's request. I sent out a letter transmitting a Harry Golden article that was favorable to Mr. Johnson to a select list of Jewish voters, and you know, that's really about it.

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B: This was during the '60?

S: During the '60 campaign, that was really my involvement. And actually, after the elections, successful election, Mr. Johnson asked me to help, and I worked with Bill Moyers, who I think was involved in this, too. He had us meet with Irving Ferman who had been the staff head of what was then called the President's Contracts Committee. What it was, was the executive committee on civil rights, the means of pressuring industry to comply with non-discriminatory hiring and promotion practices for employees of industry members who had government contracts. He asked me to work on a redraft of it. And I did. I spent a good deal of time, just on my own, preparing a suggested Executive Order, and worked with Arthur Goldberg, Abe Fortas. Mrs. Anna Rosenberg, Ted Kheel, I think, got a bit involved. And I must say that perhaps the most important contribution I made was the change of the name. Contracts Committee was no longer needed to disguise the work; it was much better to name it what it was. So we got a more forthright description of it as the Committee on Non-discriminatory Employment.

He, at that time, asked me to come back and serve on his staff, as Vice President. I told him I could not; that, of course, I was just getting started on my teaching career and I didn't feel that there was any point or purpose in going in what I would consider to be a backward direction. I wanted to move forward.

About that time, actually, a week or two before Inauguration, I was down here working on a research report on government policy on

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communication satellites that a firm that I consulted for in Cambridge was preparing for the National Space Agency. And I got a call from Mr. Graham, saying that he wanted to talk to me. What emerged was we did; we talked, and he was interested in me joining the Post. And we, after a couple of discussions, agreed that I would come. One of the first things he asked me was whether I was going to join up-coming Vice President Johnson's staff. I know that he would have not wanted Mr. Johnson to feel that he had prevented me from going with him; I told him I was not, and then, he asked me to become a director, vice president, counsel at the Post.

Nonetheless, Mr. Johnson did display a bit of pique about it, and sort of jokingly ribbed me and Phil about his taking me away from him although he knew that wasn't the case.

B: You phrase that awfully gently. "Mr. Johnson displayed a bit of pique."

S: Yes, well, I mean it's . . .

B: Did he get angrier than that, at that time, you think?

S: Oh, no, not on things of that kind. He would just really do just that; say something about, "Well, Gerry, is going to go off and try to get rich, instead of serving his country," or some such thing, you know.

B: Then from the summer of '61 on, you were here in Washington, in the . . .

S: Yes.

B: Did you have much contact with Mr. Johnson during the Vice Presidential days?

S: Yes, a little. As I recall, he asked me to become a member of that

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President's Committee on Fair Employment Practices. Mr. Graham said I should not. He didn't feel that it was proper for officials of the newspaper to hold even part-time and sort of citizens appointive positions in the government. He didn't follow his own good advice. He would have been better off, I think, not to have gotten involved with the Communications Satellite Board of Incorporators, but he did. And there was another advisory group that Mr. Johnson asked me to serve on, and I, again, had to say no. Then he sort of stopped asking, but we did communicate. We talked. He was quite cordial. We were at his home a few times. And, as I said earlier, I think sometime in '63, his staff was, at his request, asked to put together some measures, provisions to incorporate in a new civil rights bill. Because as I understand it, the President's measure was deemed to be, really, to be a little weaker than it should be. But I had to decline that, because I'd been asked by Mike Feldman to talk with him about the provisions in the President's bill, and I didn't do anything but disclose it, but that was what I did and I did not work on Mr. Johnson's project at all.

B: That's an intriguing point. Mr. Johnson's office was working separately and independently on a draft bill of civil rights in '63?

S: Well, yes, this is my understanding. Although I didn't get involved in it, I knew that they were concerned and considering it; I think, possibly because they were fearful that, for one reason or another, President Kennedy and his advisors were not going to recommend as strong a bill as the times required and as, then, Mr. Johnson felt

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could then be passed. Sort of ironic in a way, because he had had to bobtail the earlier civil rights bills in order to pass them. But I think he recognized that, by this time, you know, conditions were different, and what was needed and what was possible and obtainable were different. It required more comprehensive and effective measures to meet the requirements.

B: Did Mr. Johnson seem under any kind of unusual restraint during the Vice Presidential years?

S: He was very unhappy, I think. Although I didn't see him that much, I believe that there were times when he felt he had made a serious mistake to accept the Vice Presidency, that it was just the worst possible place for an active man like himself, a man that was accustomed to leading, not just following and performing ceremonial functions. I think it was a terrible period for him. Because, as you know, our Vice President, in our scheme of things, is essentially a fifth wheel, although President Kennedy really went out of his way to try to give him substantive things to do, important things.

B: Well, to take us off, you mentioned some things to me in connection with President Kennedy's assassination.

One of them was, I believe you said that night, that Friday night, you were explaining Mr. Johnson to Washington Post reporters who were asking you what kind of a man is this.

S: Yes. People were asking, you know, what they could expect from him as President, because they didn't know him very well. They were raising the question of what kind of an intellectual he was, what his

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reading diet was, and did he read philosophy, and did he read serious books. And I recall, after becoming a little exasperated saying somewhat in anger that, no, he wasn't a reflective reader, he was an active politician and government expert; but they had to remember that he was not becoming president of a university, he was becoming President of the United States, and he came equipped with more qualifications, and experience, and wisdom, and knowledge for that Presidency

than any other man in history, in my opinion. Maybe that wasn't an accurate way to put it. But I honestly still believe it; that in terms of the requirements of the office, it is just not realistic to assume that what we need is an intellectual, reflective philosopher, wise man type. When, obviously, those would be fine qualities to have in the man, but the office of Presidency of the United States, in my judgment, is that of a political office that requires a more practical, earthy, a kind of knowledge and facility stemming from the kind of experience that a man can acquire only in politics, not in university seminars.

B: An implication in that story is that at least some of the reporters were just sort of automatically going to draw an invidious comparison between Kennedy and Johnson.

S: No question about that. I'm afraid Mr. Johnson simply never did have the favor of the best reporters, or, at least, the most widely read, the most accepted, and, in many respects, the best quality of journalists and commentators. On the other hand, some of the best, he did have a good measure of acceptance from, and understanding, and a real appreciation. It's very hard to generalize about Mr. Johnson's relations

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with the press, Mr. Johnson's esteem by members of the press.

Like the man himself, it ranges and varies widely; it's highly diversified; it's highly complex. Part of his problem with the press was the problem that he had, just with everything. He was a man who, for some reason, seemed to want unanimity in acceptance of himself. He is so anxious that people appreciate what he is doing, and that what he is doing is right, and that what he is doing is motivated properly in the public interest that any kind of criticism just used to make him really lose his sense of perspective and his balance.

B: Does this apply to the senatorial years, too?

S: Well, really, those are the only years that I can speak to. Oh, in a sense, I can testify to the kind of same reaction that went on during his years as Vice President and as President but in a much less documented way. I know that Chal Roberts, one of the writers for the Washington Post, wanted to do a piece on him when he was Vice President, and asked if I would arrange an appointment for him, and I did. And they spent quite a bit of time together, and Chal wrote a really good piece, I think, but critical. It contained some evaluation and some images that were not as the then-Vice President saw himself. I recall his saying to me, the next time we talked on the phone, "Well, you say Chal's a friend of yours. Well, I hope to God you never send any enemies of yours to see me." You know, that sort of thing.

B: During the Senate years, did you or anyone ever try to moderate his stand toward the press?

S: Yes, but not very effectively; I suppose George Reedy, more than

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anyone, tried to educate him on how to deal with the press. George was his press man. I didn't then, nor even now, really have any expertise particularly on how to deal with the press. I guess I would have advised him--I don't know that I did, I just can't remember--that what he had to do was recognize that these people were not going to do as he said; they were going to do as they thought; and that the best thing he could do was give them the information they wanted, deal with them at arms length, and hope that they developed a proper sense of respect for him. But that was not his way. He tried, really. He alternated between treating them very shabbily and trying to curry their favor, and then, expecting that if he curried their favor, they would reciprocate with favorable pieces and with a friendship that he extended to them. Well, when it didn't work, from time to time--it didn't you know--this, again, you just can't generalize, but I know that he felt like a Caesar betrayed when one of the journalists who he thought was his friend wrote something caustic or different from his own assessment of a situation that he was involved in.

B: Did he ever call you, in your capacity here as Vice President of the Post, to praise or condemn reporters?

S: Not often. Very, very infrequently. And, of course, I suppose he called Mrs. Graham more often than he called me. After he got, in effect, oriented in that direction of complaining--and I don't think that was too frequent--but I'm sure he was not reluctant to do it. I guess he and his staff people called me more frequently when he was Vice President. I remember Bill Moyers was calling fairly

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frequently, before he became press secretary. After he became press secretary, he called Mrs. Graham; he didn't call me. He called me when . . . Well, I'm wrong about that. Because he had left Mr. Johnson and had gone to the Peace Corps and called me from time to time from there. But as Bill's stature grew and he had entree to more important people, he did not call me. He called others on the Post who he knew to be more capable of helping him.

B: While the tape was off, you mentioned the second story, about the time right after the assassination, a telephone call involving what kind of investigating committee to have.

S: Yes, this is a story that illustrates, I think, fairly well, some of the very strong opinions that Mr. Johnson holds with respect to the press. Even though, in this particular instance, he was wrong, I think he recognized he was wrong.

Very quickly after the assassination, a number of journalists at the Post, and columnist Joe Alsop among the forefront, began to campaign for a royal-type commission--what, of course, ultimately turned out to be the Warren Commission--to investigate causes of the assassination. And one evening Walter Jenkins called me to say, "For heavens sakes, this is something that the press ought not be pushing for." And very shortly, Mr. Johnson, himself, came on the phone; he said to me, "Gerry, for God's sake, don't let the press try to run the government." He was giving me his arguments for why this should be carefully thought through in the government and not by journalists. I think, in that sense, that he was putting his finger on the kind of mistake that is

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made by some over-active journalists who tend to extend their legitimate role of investigating, and exploring, and evaluating, analyzing and exposing what is going on in government, into the field of developing government policy and trying to make government decisions, where they have no responsibilities, in a sense, no particular qualifications or right to intrude. But in any event, as I say, he was quite unhappy about being pushed by the press on policy matters, and was always unhappy about being pushed by the press on policy matters. He wanted to make his own decisions, without pressure and without, in effect, having them made for him by the newspapers.

B: Was there any hint in that conversation that Mr. Johnson was seriously considering some other kind of investigative committee?

S: No, he did not. . . Well, really, at that point was--

B: The main point is not that he was--

S: "Let us decide what needs to be done," in effect. And, of course, what was being reported in the press was that there was the possibility that an FBI group or a state or local committee was to be set up to do the investigation. Now, he didn't as far as I know endorse any of those approaches. But they may well have been what he had in mind, and he may not have been thinking about a Warren-type commission until the journalists put it in his mind. I don't know.

B: During the Presidential years, were you ever asked to join the White House staff?

S: I was. Yes, I was, actually after the '64 election, asked several times. I was not able to go, and I think the record ought to make it quite clear that that was a matter of great

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disappointment for me, because it just happened that my financial situation, here at the Post, with stock options, made it just the wrong time for me to leave and forfeit what could have been my only opportunity in life to accumulate a little bit of an estate and, you know, some property other than just working income.

I asked for an appointment and went up and spent several hours with President Johnson, as a matter of fact, explaining this. I really thought he understood; but again, he was joking about: I was a greedy sort of guy; and shucks, he gave up all these things to serve his country; I ought to do this. But anyway, this was to come up and work in the White House. For a period of months thereafter, I would get calls for various different appointments that he wanted me to take and I turned them down. Then in August of 1965, I guess, I was at a farewell party at the White House for George Reedy, and the President, I think, had just persuaded Arthur Goldberg to leave the Court to become UN ambassador. And he said to me, "You're just impossible. Arthur Goldberg will leave the Supreme Court to serve his country, and you won't even leave the Post." Something joking like that. And that was about the end of it.

I was not asked thereafter; we drifted further apart, and our conversations became less frequent; they weren't frequent, really, before. But from time to time, he'd give me the courtesy of talking to me about different things.

B: There must be some agony involved in turning down a chance to work in the White House?

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S: Well, it wasn't easy to turn him down, I'll tell you.

B: Do you have time to continue, just briefly?

S: Yes, if you want to run your tape out. We've really just about done it, haven't we?

B: I think so, sir, except one . . .

S: If you've got specific questions . . .

B: Well, there's one more thing I'd like to ask you about. I'm afraid it's not very specific. I mentioned it to you before the tape was turned on: a kind of survey and evaluation of the Senate staff.

S: Oh, yes, yes. All right, very quickly, there never was anyone who was the Senator's top staff man other than Walter Jenkins. And Walter was only his top staff man on Texas matters and on some personal aspects of serving him. And on anything administrative, I don't want to in any way narrow the importance of Walter, in that sense. But Walter did not really have much to do with Policy Committee, and when I was working up on the Hill, Walter really was running the Texas office staff, under the Senator, and didn't get too much involved in what we were doing on the total legislative responsibility of the Leadership that Mr. Johnson held in the Senate. I would say that, unquestionably and to my knowledge, Walter was one of the most important people in Mr. Johnson's public life, up until the time he had to leave. And a very able guy; not a policy-maker type; but a great deal more sagacious than most people, I think, realized in that area, too.

George Reedy, I think, was clearly one of the most influential and important staff men in the Senator's life, when we were on the Hill.

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Don Cook. I guess I should go back, because the man that I met Mr. Johnson through was an early and important advisor and really one of the wisest and one of the most loyal advisors that the Senator had.

B: Let's see . . .

S: Excuse me. Go ahead.

B: I was just going to prompt your recollection of more names, like Jim Rowe and . . .

S: Well . . .

B: Horace Busby.

S: While not a staff man, Jim Rowe was an old friend and advisor and I think, considered, you know, as an old dear friend by Mr. Johnson, but I doubt that he was as influential in the advice that he gave Mr. Johnson, politically, as many others.

In fact, I said earlier Abe Fortas was not much of an influence on political advice; though I think in many other respects, on other kinds of problems, Mr. Johnson did look to him and respected his advice and judgment as an extremely wise man and highly competent lawyer.

B: Were they close in the senatorial years?

S: Yes, they were close, not real, real close; but they were always close, and they were very good friends. That's how I met Abe Fortas. Well, it isn't really. Actually, I met him when I was with the SEC, but I got to know him better. But they were and always had been good friends. But Abe did not play a very prominent part in the Senate years, in terms of matters that I was involved in. Although he got involved. Really, we consulted with him on all sorts of things that

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were involved in major legislative questions. I say, "we," as staff people did; I'm sure the Senator did, directly, in ways that I don't even know about. Well... Solis Horwitz and Jim Wilson, and Harry McPherson were three of the lawyers who worked on the Policy Committee staff and had varying relations of proximity. They were all good, and they did a hell of a good job. But at that time, not any one of the three became really very close to Senator Johnson. Later in the White House, Harry McPherson did. And he developed a totally different--well, even before then, during the Vice Presidential years, when Harry was counsel for Senator Mansfield. He took over the role that I had played, and was counsel to the Policy Committee under Senator Mansfield and worked quite closely with Vice President Johnson. Then Harry moved eventually into the White House, where he became even closer in the way of an aide and an advisor.

Bill Moyers was a very young man when I first met him. That would have been, actually, in around '54 or '55, I think, when he came one summer to work part-time. And then he went back and worked for Mrs. Johnson's radio-television station; finished school. Then I knew him in '60. He must have come after '58, when I left the Policy Committee to go to the Business School. Because he was there as a very junior staff person in '60, but bright; bright, brash; and developed, even then, a technique of endearing himself to Senator Johnson, and becoming more and more useful, and working with him in the political campaign area, fairly closely. I understand--I don't know from personal knowledge--that during the 1960 campaign, he became, really, an

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extremely close and highly prized aide of the President. Then, of course, he went on to become very influential as a legislative aide in the White House and ultimately press secretary. My own feelings about Bill are sort of mixed. I think I admire him for a bright guy, but I don't admire him for a particularly straightforward, genuine, sincere, decent, honest person. Bill, I'm afraid, is what I would, in Iowa, call an angle-shooter. He was a fellow that was putting Bill number one, always, which is perfectly proper. But in a way that I guess I just did not respect very much. So I don't feel that Bill was really quite as effective for President Johnson as he was for Bill Moyers at the White House, which is not the way an aide ought to function. He really should serve his President, at the cost of his own reputation, if necessary.

B: You know, you hear a great deal about Mr. Johnson's judgment of men. Bill Moyers, as you've described him, and the obviously close relationship between the two doesn't seem to square with Mr. Johnson's good judgment.

S: No.

B: Unless we are verging on the realm of amateur psychology here.

S: Well, I'm sure we are. Oh, I can say facetiously that, in many respects, I always felt that he underestimated my abilities. You know, I guess I say this about everybody. No one, no one appreciates my talents, except me. (Laughter). The fact is that anyone can make mistakes, and I'm not sure he did in this case. It may be, but I certainly was not close to it. I had my own personal feelings about Bill based on some

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fairly personal exposures and incidents that I'm aware of--that I don't even want to bother to put on record--that make me express the judgment that I do. They're not important as I say. He's just bright as all get out; an extremely able, intelligent, capable young man.

And he may have served far better than I realized. But I just say this: the one thing that I noticed when he was press secretary is that the press secretary looked awfully good, and the President looked awfully bad, and that is not, in my opinion, effective performance of the duties of the press secretary, you know. It may be there was no reason for the press secretary to look other than good, but if it is at the cost of the President--and you can go back and read the articles, just the way they were being written--then something is wrong, something is wrong. I just don't feel he deserves quite the credit that he was given by the press.

B: Bobby Baker and his . . .

S: Bobby Baker was bright as can be.

And, well, we mentioned, of course, Busby, who certainly ranks very close to the top of Presidential aides and Senate aides. Gosh, he worked for Mr. Johnson, I think, when he was in the House, for that matter. There were a lot of other very, very competent aides who worked with Mr. Johnson.

B: I believe you mentioned Booth Mooney's name.

S: Right. Mr. Mooney, and Bill Brammer, Ken Belieu, Max Lehrer.

John Connally of course was an aide for a period of time.

But the ones that, of course, I worked with, I shouldn't forget.

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Pauline Moore, who is still working in the Senate Democratic Policy Committee and trained all of us. She was--she wasn't then--she's now a lawyer. But she's probably the most experienced and competent staff person in the whole Senate of the United States; you know, she's obviously not out in the front where people get aware of this and publicize it. But I know this for a fact, there just isn't a soul alive who knows the Senate, knows the legislative process any better than Pauline.

Bobby Baker--to get back to him, because he's obviously a man of history, now--I met as a bright, brash assistant secretary to the Minority Leader in the Senate. He was under Skeeter Johnston--who was another right able, competent staff man up there. He really wasn't Mr. Johnson's staff man, but he was sort of on that team in 1953, when I went up to the Senate. I always sort of liked Bobby in a way, and I always sort of didn't like him. He was a pushing type, and I'm a kind of retiring violet. So we didn't really blend too well, but when our paths crossed, we occasionally had some sharp words. Bobby could show the steel that he has in him, and he could show his toughness, and restiveness. But really, by and large, we got along well. We were friends. And I liked him and I respected him. He began to grow up when he became secretary for the Majority--after Skeeter became secretary to the Senate, he really began to work extremely well and hard in the job, which was an important job in itself. He really made it a very, very important position of power influence in the Senate. But during the time that I was there, and during the time that Senator Johnson was controlling and directing him, I don't think he abused

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that power. I don't think he ever had an opportunity to, or maybe he had no inclination to. Whatever happened thereafter, I certainly am no expert on it, but I sensed even without knowing all of the facts that Bobby was wheeling and dealing a bit, and throwing his weight around, and exerting a bit of influence. He was a powerful guy to know, and he wasn't bashful about letting people know that he was. Beyond that, I can't testify.

B: Although that means that Senator Johnson must have sensed these characteristics, too?

S: Well, I certainly think that Senator Johnson sensed the ability, and the power, and the dynamism of the guy, and how all those things can be channeled in constructive directions. Sometimes they can be channeled in not so constructive directions. Sure, I think without any question, Mr. Johnson realized that he had quite a little powerhouse on his hands there. He was a self-starter and a real potential politician. Bobby always used to speak about going back to South Carolina and running for office, and I thought he would. But I guess he never got quite around to it. He would have made one hell of member of Congress, I'll tell you.

B: Is Mr. Johnson hard to work for? What's it like to work for him?

S: Well, it is hard to work for him. He's not at all an easy person to communicate with. His mind is very fleet and very good. He sort of expects you to know what he's thinking almost without expressing it. After you get to working with him, you reach that stage where you almost can anticipate him. As you know, it's legend that he's got a sharp

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tongue with his staff, and he has.

B: Did the staff members ever get used to that?

S: I suppose some do and some don't. And it wasn't really as bad as it's been painted in some respects, and then, I suppose, in other respects it was worse. There weren't, really, that many occasions. What you had was a man who really had never quite learned to control this tremendous power within him. This, for a lack of a better word, temper, emotion, the well of desire and ambition, aspiration, just flowed out of him like an explosive force. Whenever it was frustrated, he sort of behaved like a youngster with a temper-tantrum, turn on us, lash out without restraint. Not always, I've seen him, on important things, when he was more restrained than Job himself. But on the lesser things, that is where he would erupt like a volcano and lash out with some very colorful criticism. This is a great man, in my opinion. As I've said, you expect this sort of thing, it seems to me, from someone who isn't motivated by a two-cylinder engine. And this guy is not. Self-controlled people can be really very dull, and it can be very easy to control yourself if you haven't got much to control. [With] this guy; it would have taken a thousand horses to control the force of his feelings, at various times in his life. I think you have to be aware of that.

I found this man a fascinating man. I could get mad as hell at him; I could get emotionally, really very affectionately disposed toward him. I was proud of him. On so many occasions, I can recall tears coming to my eyes when I saw him perform in what I knew was a selfless

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and great manner in connection with certain things that happened on the floor of the Senate. And, as I say, I could get just as unhappy about his petulant and almost incredibly juvenile behavior when he lost control of himself over situations that simply didn't warrant it. But he was a man in a hurry. He is a man in a hurry; driving determination; and every time he got interfered with, the sparks flew.

B: Were you in any position to see if there was a change in that characteristic over the years? He controlled himself better?

S: No, I don't. . I can't speak. I never saw him lose his temper in the White House, because I wasn't there to see it. And really not during the Vice Presidential years--I didn't have an opportunity to see this; oh, maybe a couple of times, a couple of occasions. I understand that it tempered a little, but basically he wasn't going to change. The world had to change. Why should he change? You know. This is a tremendous guy.

B: I'm out of questions. Is there anything else you would like to put on this record? Would you essay an evaluation? In effect, I think you just finished one up, but if you would like to formally evaluate the man?

S: Well, I would say this: that in terms of innovating truly new directions, new goals, new policies, new courses of human conduct, he would not rank at the top of American leaders; and I don't want to say Presidents, because I haven't known the Presidents. In terms of his skill as a leader, as a legislative leader and as a administrative leader,

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I doubt that he has very many peers. I can't think of anyone who I would rank above him as a technician. I'm drawing a distinction, now, between a man who can come up with a new concept, like Social Security, and a man who can make a Great Society's panoply of goals become pretty close to a reality, even though he may not have developed the Job Corps idea or any of the various elements that were sort of new in bringing about the attack on discrimination and the attack on poverty. His skills were in doing, really more than in being creative as a President. But once an idea has been dropped near him, I'll tell you, it becomes his. It grows. It develops. It becomes reality, where it might otherwise simply die in the hands of lesser kinds of people.

I don't know whether he has been stubborn and wrong about Vietnam, or stubborn and right. As far as all the kinds of issues that we will eventually use to judge him as a good or bad President, I, at this point, could only say that my own feeling is that he's been very good. He's been a lot closer to being right than closer to being wrong, as far as my own judgment is concerned, on big issues. He produced a sustained period of improvement, not only in the health of our economy, but in the health of our society. Maybe what he did made it possible for the Negroes to become, in effect, rebellious and kick over the traces. Because they couldn't do it until they could achieve enough independence, enough self-reliance, and enough security to be able to spit in the white man's face, literally. And sure maybe. . . it had to be done. And I think, in a way, I would credit our disturbances today to

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him, in that constructive, not critical, sense.

I would rank him as a great President. History will clearly have to rank him as a great President. And I'm sure that despite a basic sense of insecurity and inferiority that he has of himself, that he knows that he's a great President. He knows he did the best he could and that his best is pretty damn good. I'm sure he knows he has made mistakes; I'm sure he regrets a number of things he's done, but on the whole and on balance, he wrote a pretty darn good record as President.

This is a forceful man. I don't know that I ever mentioned this on the record. It's something that's not important and, yet, it's symbolic and it's significant. My wife is a very shy, sort of timid person. And I suspect that Mr. Johnson would be surprised if he heard this. We were in a group of friends, oh, back in 1960. Maybe it was even before that. And the conversation got around to this great charm that Senator Kennedy had with women; that women just flocked over him and he was just so irresistible. And Helene piped up and said, "I don't understand that." She had met Senator Kennedy. She didn't know him well. And she really didn't know Mr. Johnson that well. But she said, "The difference in the masculine force of the two men is like night and day. One is a man, and the other is a boy."

B: This is an appropriate ending spot.

S: A good place to stop.

B: Yes.

[End of Tape 1 of 1 and Interview II]

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