INTERVIEWEE: OTIS A. SINGLETARY

INTERVIEWER: JOE B. FRANTZ

November 12, 1970

F: This is an interview with Dr. Otis A. Singletary in his office in Lexington, Kentucky, on November 12, 1970. The interviewer is Joe B. Frantz. I suppose, Otis, I've known you too long for us to be too formal.

S: Right.

F: How did you first get acquainted with Lyndon Johnson?

S: As you know, Joe, I was on the faculty at the University of Texas from the early '50's until the end of that decade. While I never got to know him well in any way there, I was around him some at social affairs of one kind or another, followed his political career with some interest, and had been something of a supporter of his, as you know.

F: Did you ever have any offer prior to the Job Corps offer to go with Johnson?

S: No. And in fact, it is my best guess that the offer to go to the Job Corps did not originate with Johnson but with Shriver.

F: That's what I was going to ask you--whether this came through Shriver, did you think?

S: I'm positive that it came through Shriver from a comment that was later made to me by Bill Moyers.

F: Where would Shriver have picked you up?

S: Shriver was a good friend of Vern Alden's (?). As you know, Vern Alden did some of the work in drafting the basic anti-poverty

legislation. Shriver was also acting as a kind of general talent scout, as you know. He was getting names from all over the place. I've been told by several people that Vern was one of some people who gave him my name.

I was in Greensboro in the fall of '64--Greensboro, N. C.

F: As Chancellor of--UNC, Greensboro.

S: Right. I just got a call one morning that said, "Dr. Singletary, this is Sargent Shriver. I wonder if you'd mind coming up here and talking to me."

I said, "What about?"

He said, "I don't want to tell you because you won't come if I do."

So I said, "Okay, in that case I'll come."

F: That intrigued you, didn't it?

S: So I went up. Shriver was a very shrewd recruiter. He talked to you about all the big jobs and all-around, but he never did get right down to any specifics. He wanted to see whether he was interested in you and whether you had any interest in what they were doing.

I went back a second time. This must have been in bout October of '64.

F: You were named on October 21 according to--

S: Then this must have been in late-September or early-October. We got down to talking specifically about the Job Corps, and specifically about the directorship. It is my feeling, in retrospect, that Sarge had decided that he wanted an educator to head that program--for better or for worse.

Secondly, I think that this delay was going on while he cleared--you

know, once he'd decided that he had some interest--while he cleared me politically, as they do these things and otherwise. I had no reason to believe that if he approached Johnson, that Johnson would have had anything for or against me one way or another.

The reason I mention this thing about Moyers, one time later when I was out at the ranch with Sarge right after the election in '64--would that be right?

F: That's right. You would have come in about two weeks before the election.

S: Right after the election I flew out to the ranch with Shriver to brief Johnson about what we were doing--in the prepping of the Poverty Program, which, as you know, he placed great stock in early in the game. It was a pretty long day for me because Johnson really zeroed in in the way he can do. He's a very intense man, as you know. He asked me a whole flock of questions about the Job Corps and then took me in at lunch and sat me next to him and continued all through lunch.

On the way back to Washington that night, Sarge and I were flying in that Jet Star, or whatever it was, Shriver said to me--and I assume you want it the way he said it--being the devout Catholic he is, he said: "Jesus Christ, when did you decide all that!"

I said, "Just sitting there answering those questions!"

F: You made policy, scrambling for answers, huh?

S: Pretty hard.

F: When Sarge offered you the job, did he have it very clearly formed in his own mind? I kind of get the feeling that this was made up as it went along.

S: There was some planning. Some of it was pretty good, Joe, and some of it was hopelessly unrealistic. Sarge knew some things he wanted. He had a concept of two kinds of centers. He had a basic concept that I still am kind of in love with. He knew that out there there were in fact millions of kids in that 16 to 21 year age group, who were out of school and out of work and for whom the normal system wasn't working. He saw two ways, one through the conservation center, and the other through the Urban Job Training Center, as a way of making these people in a sense, as he liked to put it in that good old way of his, "taxpayers rather than tax-eaters." You'd hear that all the time!

F: A little bit of, to put it in terms both you and I understand, the old Grantland Rice poem about all the Babe Ruths and Ty Cobbs that never got out of the steel mills.

S: Yes. That's right. It was an interesting time. I took the job with him under the clear stipulation that I would take it only if my Board of Trustees would give me a leave of absence for a specified time; that I had no interest in staying up there very long; that I would help him get it started and do what I could do to help him find a successor; and then I wanted back. Because my commitment clearly was to university and not to government work.

F: Were you set up physically in the Job Corps, or did all that have to be worked out too? I mean, this business of getting something started is always intriguing, you know.

S: That was the intriguing thing. Because, you know, when you get right down to it, what he was saying was, "Look, here's an idea that's only partially formed, and an empty office practically, and a desk,

and a hundred and fifty million dollars! Come on up here and create a program!" That is, in a sense, the chance and opportunity of a lifetime, and that is clearly what attracted me along with--I'll admit this, Shriver himself is a very attractive and persuasive guy, and he helped con me into that.

F: Did you have to do most of your own recruiting of administrative personnel, or did you have a good bit of help in that?

S: We had some already onboard when I got there from the task force and earlier planning groups, but we grew tremendously and were recruiting all the time we were there, Joe. We were just continually adding.

F: My concept of the Job Corps is a sort of either/or in so many cases. You could have gone this way or that way. For instance, there was this matter of whether to sort of have a rural CCC type or an urban center, and you sort of got into both. You don't have time for a lot of meditation and reflecting; you've got to make some decisions pretty quickly.

S: That's right.

F: How did you arrive at these?

S: There were clearly two needs to be met. One was for the kind of youngster who had no reading skills and who could fit the pattern that had already been advocated for some years by a fairly powerful group on the Hill--the conservation line. And the conservation center concept came out of that. You see, what these kids were going to do is presumably work halftime on the public lands and the public parks and on projects and improve, as they did in the '30's, as you know.

F: As time went by the CCC became kind of popular, in retrospect.

S: Absolutely. And as you look back in the '40's and '50's at the

park facilities in this country, anybody who knew anything about it understood how valuable the CCC had been in a way nobody ever saw very much. But there was literally millions of dollars worth of labor being done by these youngsters in the way of improving and expanding park and recreational facilities in this country, clearing out new trails, and all this kind of stuff. And indeed there was, and is today, a very real need for more of that.

At the same time there was an educational program built into it which was aimed at improving their basic literacy skills, with the idea that later when those skills were improved enough, they might well go to one of these urban centers, which were in a sense more sophisticated. But that was to deal with the kid who was just a dropout, but who was not necessarily illiterate, but who needed to be turned into some kind of productive guy such as a welder or an automobile mechanic or any one of a number of things you can think of.

You know, the first urban center we opened was the Camp Gary one down here, the first urban center.

F: Was that symbolic because of the President's nearness, or was that kind of a hard-rock decision?

S: There was a little more to it than symbolism. The President, in my opinion, whatever else he kept his interest alive in, he kept his interest alive in his old congressional district for a long time. I remember very clearly being there for the opening. He and Mrs. Johnson were at the ranch and came down and later took a group of us back with him to the ranch to spend the day. When he arrived that morning for the dedication ceremony, he was so pleasantly surprised, if I may say, at seeing a refurbished Camp Gary--and we

had at that time, I think, a thousand or fifteen hundred Job Corps enrollees scheduled to come into this facility. We took him on a tour and showed him these printing plants and places for mechanical drawing, language laboratories, the recreational facilities; and I think that it really stirred him.

I think it moved him. Because on the helicopter going up to the ranch after that was over he got Governor Connally and me in there and said, "Can you double it!" I looked at Connally and Connally at me--you know it was a problem for both of us because it was clear we were having to raid a lot of the public schools to get the kind of staff you needed in there. The President then told one of those stories of the type that you've probably heard from many other people. He said, "You know, when I was in the NYA, CCC, or whatever it happened to be--"

F: NYA.

S: Said, "We had a fellow out here and we asked him if he could do something. If he didn't sound like he could do it, we always sent him to El Paso. By the time he got out there and got back, we had it done. So I'm now going to ask you again, can you double it?"

I said, "Mr. President, I have been to El Paso. We can double it." So the decision was made on that helicopter ride to expand that from its then size to double its size.

F: Other than your recruitment of faculty, the state had no real part in it, did it? You had no tenderness of federal-state relationships here.

S: There was a little tenderness that involved the President and the governor.

F: With this particular governor, not governors of the class.

S: No, it was that governor, John Connally. John Connally has some pride and temper of his own. You know, he and the President are both typical Texans in lots of ways. The first fight I got caught in was that the President had apparently not read his legislation carefully enough to know that the governor could veto that project. The President went to San Marcos and made a speech, and in the speech he said the first one was going to be there at Camp Gary and indeed had not cleared it yet with the governor. So I inherited the situation where the Governor really didn't want a Job Corps center, or at the moment didn't think he did.

F: Do you think this was pique, or he just didn't want it?

S: I think in the beginning Governor Connally had real reservations about the program. I think there was a little pique too, although I would leave that for him and the President. I later saw them in situations that led me to believe that they didn't stay mad very long when they got mad.

F: I'm somewhere in the middle of interviewing John, so this will be something to ask him later.

S: Good. But I don't think there was anything more to it than that.

I want to say this about Governor Connally. This is an important part of this story. Once he decided to go, they did a lot more than recruit staff. John Connally himself took the lead in pulling together in there some of the major corporations and corporate talent in Texas--Texas Instruments and some of the large oil companies--and helped them design and set up the training programs. And it is my belief even today, Joe, that Gary was the best of the urban-type Job Corps centers

we created. I think that Connally is due a good bit of the credit for that.

F: That's one thing I wanted to ask you. What made a good Job Corps center, or what made some better than others? Because there was an unevenness.

S:S Sure. But you must remember this, that given the youth revolt and the youth movement, and all the rest of it as we know it today, the Job Corps was really the first place this hit. If you bear in mind that we were bringing together the most difficult age group in the country, that age group--out of school, out of work--they're tough kids mostly. We were bringing them into the residential situation. We really had our hands full. It was such a hot publicity item that a fist fight appeared to be a riot. And if it involved a black boy, it was a race riot, as the papers got hold of it! But anybody who would not have anticipated that we were going to have a hell of a lot of disciplinary problems with that age group in the residential situation, particularly as isolated as many of these were, simply missed the point. We did have those problems from the very beginning.

F: Was there much discussion in the beginning on this matter of whether to take boys and move them half-way across the country?

S: Right. One of the fundamental decisions, and one of the ones that I'm not satisfied with, quite frankly, is the--let me put it another way. For what I considered to be political reasons--that is, the need to move and move fast with his most popular programs, and partly because Shriver is a mover and shaker, in addition to the President's desires--

F: The two of them together must have been--

S: They put an inordinate amount of pressure on us to get centers opened

and ready. I could tell you some stories, if we had the time, of dealing with governors--

F: We'll take the time some time.

S: --that would just sort of make your hair stand on end to show how fast we did and how thin the line was. I think we made some bad choices in sites under the pressure of time. I think we made some bad choices of contractors. I think we made some bad choices about how to pick the kids to put in there. In other words, from the very beginning I had enough sense, I think, Joe, to feel what the problems were likely to be.

I think that we had to do several things. First of all, we really had to create a program that would not just take a kid who was in poverty, but take a kid who was in poverty and who had a domestic situation of a kind that made it important to put him out into the residential situation. I think we had to have a program that would really do something for that kid in terms of moving him from one plateau to the next in terms of his earning capability and his ability, in a sense, to cope with this century in that way. I think we ultimately had to find a way to do this at a cost that could be made acceptable to the taxpayer in the country--and to do it in a milieu in which there was a considerable degree of hostility to the program and which tended, particularly in the news media, to inflate the incidents that occurred and to cause a great deal of ill will against that program that today, for example, would be taken for granted.

F: Did you get the feeling that one transgression by a black Job Corpsmen was magnified 'way beyond what that boy would have received if he'd just been some kid on the streets that had gone sour?

S: Or had been enrolled at the University of Texas, for that matter, of course. They were newsworthy.

F: They were identifiable.

S: That's right. And that was part of the problem.

F: Since you can't police that many boys--and later women--how did you try to anticipate and, in a sense, to obviate public mistrust?

S: We did lots of different things, depending on the center. In some places we tried the use of some of them in senior positions of advisors and counselors and so forth--a sort of inside thing. In other places, depending on the size of it, we would have a small group of security personnel.

Out in the conservation centers the staff did it all. So it varied.

But I would say this, and these are the kinds of things that sooner or later somebody is going to have to take into consideration. One of the great things they talked about was the dropout rate. Well, hell's bells, if the dropout rate was 35-percent or so--which is pretty high if you compare it to some things--you've got to remember that it's not high compared to the freshman class that enters college this year, if you consider their graduating year. That's going to be about 50-percent, as I recall--about half of them are going to get degrees.

But far more important than that is the simple fact that you started with 100-percent dropout, and that for two-thirds of those kids, the program was to some degree working! And as you saw the youngsters, and as you were made aware as I was--having lived so many of my recent years on the campus where in spite of all the talk these

days about repression and all the rest of it, they're the freest and most privileged kids in the world.

That first bunch of Job Corpsmen very nearly broke my heart. There's a group right over there--that poster you see--the first thirty kids that came into the program. And I'll never forget watching them come off that bus down there. I can show you boys--

F: They went to Gary?

S: No. This first one went to Catoctin up in Maryland. Gary was the first urban center. This was a conservation center. But the dropout rate, I think, is easily defensible. They talked about the cost of the program a great deal, but you've got to understand--. You know the old cliché about, "You could send a boy to Harvard for what you could send him to the Job Corps for."

F: Except you couldn't send this boy to Harvard!

S: I once asked a committee up there--I said, "Fine. You can fill that stadium up there with Job Corps boys, and I will take out of this program the full payment for as many of them to go to Harvard as you can get Harvard to accept." And that pointed up the fact, Joe--the ridiculous fact--of trying to argue Harvard.

But if you look at it another way, if you looked at the number of American dollars that had been spent on that boy who enrolled as a freshman in Harvard that year in the first eighteen years of his life, as compared to what had happened to the kids we were dealing with, that's where you saw the real difference. That's where the real difference came in.

F: Could you make any sort of measurement, or was this just a feeling, that if you, in effect, put one boy all the way through the course and

made him a sort-of positive citizen, that this paid for X-number of boys that dropped by the wayside?

S: I don't see how you ever could evaluate that. I knew personally some real success stories out of the Job Corps. I know, as every teacher knows, that while you may not have the solution of what to do about old folks or grown folks or anything else, it is still possible to affect the lives of young people. They are at that malleable age where things can happen to them that will alter their lives. I saw that happen many times. I saw many dropouts and failures as well, but I saw kid after kid after kid really avail himself.

One of the great pleasures that I remember is being down at Gary one time--maybe this was even after I was out of the Job Corps and was back in Austin for a visit--but I was there when a plane came in from Oklahoma from some corporation to pick up eight of the kids who had just finished the welding program there. I've forgotten the hourly wage that they were going to pay them, but it was unlike anything those kids had ever heard of before, Joe.

F: Did you run any sort of a black-white quota, or did you just take them as you could get them, and they turned out to be more heavily black because of disadvantage?

S: The problem was this, quite seriously, politically speaking, the danger of having an all-black program was a serious one--if it turned into an all-black program, that Congress would probably not have supported it very well.

F: Let's go back to the beginning. You come in, you've got yourself a reasonably sizeable budget, although probably insufficient for what you'd like to do.

S: It wasn't enough.

F: And you've got a skeleton staff, but you've got a nation-wide organization to build. Where do you recruit your personnel for training?

S: We begged, borrowed, and stole. Part of the problem we had was that you couldn't get anybody on the payroll, even though you had the money. The Washington problem--

F: What was this, a bureaucratic mixup?

S: Yes. --of dealing with the Civil Service Commission and the Bureau of the Budget almost--the problem there was as great, in my opinion, as the problem of trying to create and operate the program. I left there, in my short time, feeling that they made it doubly difficult for you to get the job done, even after the Congress appropriated the money for you to do it.

F: You even have an academic problem, don't you, and that is that you're coming in in the fall and everybody's contracted.

S: Yes. Coming in in the fall like that, though, we began running training programs right away. You see, our big problem in the beginning, Joe, wasn't just for teachers. We needed people who could help us plan curriculum, do these things. We went to the universities and borrowed professors; we went to other government agencies and got people transferred on loan; we went to the Pentagon and got used equipment and clothing and everything for these kids. We begged and we borrowed and we stole from every place we could find.

F: Was there ever a strong push to put this under HEW?

S: Not to my knowledge. There was a very interesting interagency scrap about it, but that at that point it wasn't HEW.

The big problem was over the conservation centers. Ag [agriculture] and Interior were scrapping for that. They're old-line, well-established federal agencies, and they know how to play those games very well. The only control we had, quite fortunately, was that the appropriation was made to us; and the terms were pretty much settled because we did control the money and how it should be spent.

F: In lines of authority, you really fed to Shriver, and Shriver directly to the President.

S: That's right.

F: So that you didn't have to go through any other agency?

S: That's right. We were part of the executive office of the President. Shriver had four assistants, I've forgotten what they called us--presidential assistants, grade 4, or something like that: VISTA, Community Action, Job Corps, and something else. Anyway, I guess I was the first of the persons to fill.

F: You got there in October, and you divided your own office into four or five groups. You had Bennetta Washington, I know; and Smith; H. E. Brewer; Mullins; and Dr. Painter.

S: Right.

F: Where did you get those people?

S: Mullins was really in congressional relations with Shriver. Bennetta Washington, I recruited myself. She was a teacher--a principal--there in Washington and had done a lot of work with underprivileged ghetto children. She was a natural, I thought, for the Women's Center job. I persuaded her to take a leave of absence and come.

Hal Brewer was with IT&T. I've never really understood, quite frankly, how he was as available as he was from them. But we were able

to get him.

Dick Drumgould (?) was on loan to us from the Veterans' Administration. Incidentally, Dick has just written a novel on the Job Corps that I have not yet read, but it's called The Poverty Seekers. So you ought to read that as background for this.

I had a colonel from the Pentagon, John Carley, who was an assistant to me when I first got there. Wade Robinson, who was there in an acting capacity before I came, was on leave from HEW at that time.

F: You recruited your boys and your girls for Job Corps training. Now, you're dealing with a group that doesn't get the message too well. This has always been a problem. How did you see that it did get down to the people who would benefit by it?

S: We literally blanketed every way we could think of. We blanketed the country with what we called opportunity cards, which was the Job Corps announcement and you filled it in and sent it in if you thought you were interested, or wanted more information, or wanted to be considered as an applicant.

F: Or got somebody to fill it in for you.

S: Right. We had them in every post office, in every selective service office; in every employment office. We sent them to all the schools for people they might know to refer them to. In the case of the rural kids, we even got them into the trunks of the cars of every county agent that we could discover in the country and had them taking them out. And I will say that was a clearly successful throwing of the net, because while there was some argument about whether or not there was a demand or need for this program, what we got were hundreds of thousands of those cards sent back to us immediately.

F: What determined what turned a boy down?

S: Availability of space at the moment. He was interviewed, first of all, somewhere near where he was by some member of a team, whether it was a local employment office or something, and certain criteria came through. It was a computer operation, to a considerable extent, as was in the earlier days where you assigned him. And while there was a lot of talk about how you assigned him, in plain fact the original concept was that you started at the center and you moved out in a concentric circle until you found the nearest Job Corps Center to him where a vacancy for his particular interest and concern existed, and you put him there.

F: What did you do about these boys who are too ignorant to know what their concerns are?

S: We had a lot of that.

F: That must have been a problem.

S: Sure. Many of those who went to the conservation centers were like that. They didn't really know what they were interested in.

F: They went out there as a kind of a prep school--

S: They went out there to try it out. And in plain fact a lot of the first kids we got were really dumped on us by properly motivated, but very, very, unreliable welfare workers in the city. You know, they were just getting rid of their problems.

F: I was going to say, did you ever get a feeling that you were running a reform school in some cases?

S: They dumped all over us from these cities. We even knew of cases--we found other cases later where they said to the kid, "Instead of sending you up, if you'll take this Job Corps assignment, we'll let you go there."

Sure. And that hurt us a lot. The quality of input was one of the real weaknesses of the program. And could we have moved slower, Joe, could we have had fewer centers and fewer kids and more careful screening, I think we could have had a more durable and more defensible program in the long run.

F: On the crime side, did you ever run any statistics to see whether your boys had a higher or lower crime rate than comparable boys back in the ghettos?

S: Yes. I've forgotten. We had a weekly report on the number of things it involved, and it was considerably lower. As a matter of fact, over the long 4th of July weekend in '65--it was a long weekend, I remember that--in the whole United States of America, with, let's say, twenty-five or thirty thousand kids in this program, we had one Job Corpsmen arrested for having one beer too many--over that long holiday weekend!

F: That's really remarkable.

S: That was a remarkable fact, I thought, particularly having been acquainted with college campuses. And that kind of thing. Now, we had serious problems. We had toughs who ran shakedown operations, beat other kids up, kids for whom nobody, as it turns out, is likely to be able to do anything. But a lot of those I think were dumped on us, and it made it just a lot harder to do the kind of job you wanted to do.

F: The Job Corps never did come up to its authorized complement. Is this just a matter of insufficient time and personnel to build it up? There was always a feeling that there would be more people than you ever attained.

S: Well, the need was there. But the problem was, in the first year--I

think that my private promise to Mr. Shriver was that by July 1st of '65--or by midnight of June 30, the end of the fiscal year--we would have, I've forgotten, was it 20,000?

F: I don't remember.

S: Well, at any rate, we just made it. Whatever that figure was, we just made it, because I remember our group stayed up there until nearly midnight when we got that one word back in that that last one had gone in. Then we gave a big party for the staff. I still remember that.

F: In March of '65, you were named Deputy Director of the OEO. Was this a titular change, or did it constitute a real job change?

S: No. In fact, I think that title--

F: You were still head of the Job Corps.

S: Right. And I think that I was from the beginning Assistant Director of OEO, and head of the Job Corps; and I think all the other three guys were Assistant Directors--. So there was a director and four assistants, I think, Joe, as I recall the structure. But I never had any broader responsibility in the program than Job Corps. To be perfectly frank, it was the only part of that program that really interested me.

F: Was there any difference in the effectiveness that you could tell between the training program for men or women?

S: Yes, I guess so.

F: Which came out best?

S: There was a special set of problems, I think, with the women's center, the kind of people it attracted around it--males in particular hovering around.

F: What did you have, to put it inelegantly, sort of like a bitch in heat with a real gathering?

S: That's the way they would make it appear. But any time you pull together in a residential situation that number of girls, it's going to be sort of like a dormitory over here. There's going to be a lot of traffic in and out. And the public pretty generally put a bad light on that. But the need was certainly no less for the women.

One interesting feature, though, about the women was the number of volunteer recruiters we had working for us across the country, including Junior Leaguers and what else, giving time to interview and identify; and in many ways, I had the feeling that there was a more selective job done in choosing the women than the men for Job Corps.

F: You didn't get into any sort of clash between sort of middle-class values and ghetto values in this?

S: Oh, yes, sure. You always heard this. One of the criticisms I remember that came out of Rutgers, that team, about Camp Kilmer was "what you guys are really trying to do is change these kids life styles." Instead of taking that as an accusation, I took that as a statement of fact. My answer was: "Exactly. Precisely."

F: And speaking of the Rutgers report, it also criticized you for a sort of paramilitary procedure. And the question that arises is how do you handle whole hunks of men any other way?

S: Not only that, Joe. What that report overlooked was the kids themselves liked that arrangement. There's not a question of that being imposed nearly as much as it was a question of them deciding how to organize themselves internally for musters and this kind of thing.

F: You kind of got the equivalent of master sergeants through your

supervisors who grew out of your own people. Did they run a fairly hard-boiled operation? Were they respected? The fact that they had risen above?

S: Some did, and some didn't. Lots of times you could take a corpsman who had been in for a year and put him in a group leader position, and he could do more with them than anybody else, although there were some cases he couldn't handle them--it just got that way.

On the other hand, they respected him as a guy who knew the ropes, you know, and who was not some symbolic authority figure "off yonders but one of us." Some of them had very good rapport.

F: Did you have any opportunity to observe Shriver's relationships with Johnson?

S: Several, yes.

F: Tell me about it.

S: Let me talk about Shriver's view of Johnson first, and then Johnson's view of Shriver--as I saw it, and that's all this can be, of course. Neither one of them ever discussed the other to me.

I had the feeling that Shriver had a considerable degree of respect for the President. And I would guess, out of all of the Kennedys--if I may call him a Kennedy--I think that he had a better sense of the obligation he had to serve faithfully for the government whether that man had been of his choosing or not, although I think, from what I saw, I would be willing to say that Shriver had some appreciation for the real strengths, raw though they frequently were, of the President. That was my observation.

On the other hand, I think that the President rightly viewed Shriver as an extremely intelligent, hard working, active, able man.

I heard him say out there at the ranch at the time that Shriver was filling both jobs--both OEO and the Peace Corps--Shriver asked him the question: "Mr. Johnson, I'm getting queried about this all the time, and I'm just simply saying that that's your decision; that I will give up either or both jobs any time you ask me to."

He said, "That's just the right answer, and I will just tell you this. I have you doing those jobs because I think you're the best man in the United States to do those jobs." And he said it not in some fawning way. It was a direct statement. There was nobody standing there. I happened to be in the golf cart going back from the plane to the house and heard that statement. And I will tell you I was impressed, knowing what little I've known of the President. He didn't just throw that around to people, you know. You didn't wallow in praise when you were around him.

F: You were in the position of being involved in one of his very most pet projects--in a way everything Lyndon Johnson did was a pet project, but this was one very dear to his heart. Did he bypass Shriver and come straight to you on occasion? Did that cause any thin-skinnedness on Shriver's part?

S: No. He did bypass Shriver on some issues, but they were not policy issues. They were issues in which he wanted to chew my tail out. For example, the road equipment at Camp Gary. He was very impatient with me because I did not get the heavy road-building equipment in there fast enough to suit him. It is my feeling, it was my feeling then, it is my feeling now that had I got it the way it was being recommended, that I would have made his administration vulnerable to a charge of local favoritism down here and maybe even a scandal! And

I insisted that we go the route of the GSA. It got slower that way. And every time he went to the ranch, some of his friends--and I will mention Cecil Ruby by name--would get to him and say, "We're not getting that equipment down there." I would get the call--he'd have Jake Jacobsen or Bill or somebody chew me up.

I remember one day at noon I was over at that desk--a particularly harried day--and I was having a glass of milk and one of those miserable sandwiches in the middle of the day. The phone rang, and it was Bill Moyers. Bill said, "Otis, I just left the President's office, and as I was going out the door he asked me if you had that heavy equipment in at Camp Gary yet." And I said, "I do not know." He said, "Well, go get on the phone and find out and tell him, by God, to get it in there, and I don't want any excuses. I want it in there." You know, that stuff.

Well, Bill hit me at the wrong moment. I was already uptight about lots of things. And that's the only time that I really--And I said to Bill: "Well, Bill, you go back in there and tell the President of the United States that you've relayed his message to me, and that I have heard it and that I have this reply. And that is, that this is his program, and he can have it run any way he wants to--he has that right--but he doesn't have the right to have me run it any way he wants to. I am getting that equipment as fast and as best as I know how." Bill said, "Cool down. Be glad of one thing--at least, you're in a different building!"

F: When the staff called to gouge you a little bit on the President's behalf, were they kind of half-way apologetic about it?

S: Sometimes they were, it depended on who called you. Moyers, I always

had a lot of confidence in about this kind of thing. Bill didn't call up and needle you. He wasn't so impressed with his White House position. Bill knew how tough it was to work for Lyndon Johnson, let me put it that way, so he didn't try and complicate it. But there are always, Joe, around the President people who like to throw their weight around.

F: Did you get any feeling that sometimes everybody on the President's immediate staff was trying to run your business?

S: No, I did not feel that way. I can remember two or three times, even fairly late in the evening, of going over and sitting down and talking to Bill Moyers, just to really ask him what he thought the man would prefer of some choices--that kind of thing. So what comes out of this is that I had some high regard for Bill Moyers.

Although as a footnote to that, I will say that I think Bill Moyers' effect on the President as a public image and as a candidate was not beneficial. You know, I think he tried to make him into a Baptist preacher. In my view Lyndon Johnson just "don't" come over that way. The real strength of that man is what's important, I think, and ought to come through rather than the kind of pious stuff that they were preparing for him. The best I ever saw him was when he got mad at that press conference that day and took that thing up in his hand and went to ripping and snorting the way he had done for all the years I'd known him. And nobody wrote that speech for him!

F: You had another basic decision back there on whether to turn these programs over to professional educators or whether to contract them to private firms. You went in both directions finally.

S: That's right.

F: Was this just, again, the way things grew, or were there some hard rules why you--?

S: There was some decision to experiment, quite frankly. We contracted with some universities. We contracted with the Texas Education Agency. We contracted with some private corporations. And strangely enough, it is kind of hard to judge out of this--except to say that on the whole the universities were the least effective operators of Job Corps centers. The corporations did pretty well, but the Texas Education Agency did very well. But I have always in my own mind, Joe, thought that resulted more from John Connally's help with the high-powered industrial folk there who helped set the training program up.

F: They got some good men down there at Gary.

S: They sure did.

F: Did you get the feeling that physical facilities made a real difference? I'm thinking about Kilmer vis-a-vis Gary.

S: It helped. The appearance of the place, there's no question, had something to do with it, although I can think of some very beautiful conservation centers where things didn't go too well. It's hard to make that generalization.

F: Is there any generalization to make between rural and urban effectiveness in the program?

S: I don't think so except to say that the kind of things the kid did in the rural center was likely to be with his hands other than his reading program and his educational program; whereas in the urban training center, he could be working in retailing, you know, training in retailing, or any one of a number of things like that.

F: Office management.

S: Yes. It was just a far more sophisticated program.

F: Why did you quit?

S: I really didn't quit. I stayed the time that I agreed to stay. I took a leave of absence till the beginning of the second semester, and I really left on January 1st. I think I was back at my desk January 2nd in Greensboro. I stayed exactly as long as I agreed to stay.

F: Now, Dr. F. A. Johnson took your place, and he only stayed through the next November, or at least he announced his resignation then. I wondered if the job were a bit of a killer that used you up pretty fast?

S: Yes it was, a killer. There was no question it was a killer. Frank was, although I was very much engaged in the business of helping to locate him, Frank was in my judgment, as it worked out--although let me make it clear, I supported him for the job. Of the people who were then available I thought he was the best candidate. I will tell you now, in retrospect, I don't think that was a good judgment. Frank became more a ribbon-cutter and a program-appearer at the time when the program still had to prove itself, Joe. It still had to have that internal gut decision. And Dave Squier, who was his second man, as I recall, did a very good job with the inside.

F: The whole poverty program, and the Job Corps in particular, since that's our interest, started with high hopes, good press, made some very noticeable impact; and yet, in public esteem, in congressional esteem, kind of dropped off. And still, at the time when the Nixon Administration came in, in a sense with a mandate to discontinue it,

it had the devil knocking it off, as you know. There were congressmen from Ralph Yarborough on, who just in effect warned Congress and warned the Administration that it had just better not do it. How do you explain this kind of behavior? Is it something sort of like the old OPA, or being Secretary of Agriculture, that it touches people on a nerve that remains raw?

S: I would have to give you the obvious answer. I speak only from Job Corps. There was unmistakable evidence of a real problem and a real need that somebody had to fulfill. And if that program doesn't do it, they're still going to have to find some other way to do it. That body of youngsters out there is still there, and getting bigger. And I think we're seeing some evidences in this society today of the failure to deal with that problem, along with some others. Now, sooner or later, that problem is going to have to be coped with, if we have the will and the imagination. And even the hardest headed, most economical congressman, no matter how he cast his vote, could not be unaware of the nature of that problem, because the evidence was overwhelming if he did any homework at all.

F: If he doesn't deal with it in Job Corps, he's going to get it somewhere else.

S: If Job Corps hadn't been created, something else would have to have been created. And if it's wiped out, or if it fails altogether, they're going to have to try some completely different approach. But the problem of what to do with that 16 to 21-year old group that's getting bigger all the time, that is out of school and out of work, and can in fact be prepared to cycle back into this society!

You've got to remember this, Joe. As hard as we talk about times

being, there are thousands and thousands and thousands of these kids over here out of work, at the same time that there are thousands and thousands and thousands of jobs going begging. Now, right now, in the present administration, that's not as obvious as it was once before, but you can look in any major city newspaper and find pretty job application lists.

One of our tricks was how to match those kids with those jobs and get them put in it. It's a national problem, and it isn't going to go away. And whether that will be the model they follow--it may be that that's just going to become an experiment, and what else we learned, we learned how not to do some things.

F: Did you actively recruit jobs with firms, or did you let the firms come to you?

S: Did both.

F: Did you use employment agencies?

S: Yes, sir.

F: In other words, you just worked the job market for what you could get out of it.

S: That's right. We took as many kids as we could and tried to find places for them. We had contractors visiting those camps and centers every time we could. We had feeders out to all the employment offices. Yes, sir.

F: On these early classes--it has now been right at six years since you moved into this program--did you follow through on any of these early boys?

S: Follow-up studies have been made. I was not there long enough to have them done, Joe. We had follow-up on the first hundred, or the first

thirty. But there have been some rather substantial studies, and I think they would be available to you through Rumsfeld or whoever is running that thing up there now. He could give it to you.

I have obviously stayed away since I left. I think it's bad to go back and look over their shoulders, so to speak.

F: Did you participate at all in this study group that recommended to Nixon that the program be discontinued and transferred to Labor or HEW? Did they consult with you on this?

S: Most assuredly not. I believe that Lyndon Johnson's own career as an NYA administrator and so forth did in fact give him a special feeling for this youth program. There was never a time when I was there that I did not think that he was not properly interested. In fact, sometimes I thought he had too much interest in that program, as you know.

F: You wondered who was the Director, huh!

S: I just wanted him to be interested in some other program. The other thing is that I am satisfied that until this day that his vision was a correct vision of the need to do something about that aspect of this population for whom little is being done and yet who is potentially in my mind a very explosive element in the population.

F: Did Johnson ever talk to you about this in strictly dollars-and-cents terms, or, as Shriver says, as the tax-makers?

S: Oh sure.

F: How much more income can be created--

S: In the sense of that, yes. He also saw it as an investment, not just in camp sites and more jobs, but also an investment in what he liked to call the human potential; that along with those things, some benefits

come into the nation at large and some benefits come into the man through increased earning power, and to the government, was also that thing he used to talk about about the quality of life. And, see, a lot of people think that a politician is always a phony when he starts in on that. In plain fact, he can have those feelings as well as the next man. And having seen him--he was up at Cotoctin with me or I was up there with him, let me get this straight--we were at Gary together, and I've forgotten where else. I saw him a number of times, both in and out of the White House when I was there and never had any reason to doubt his interest in or sincerity in that program. And I was always impressed by that, although I found him to be a very difficult man to work for.

F: Did you ever consider another position under him?

S: No.

F: You had your taste of public service.

S: The university never looked better.

F: Right. Okay, thank you, Otis.

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By Otis Singletary

to the

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