INTERVIEW I

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INTERVIEWEES: WALTER AND BENNETTA WASHINGTON

INTERVIEWER: T. Harri Baker

PLACE: Washington, D.C.

Tape 1 of 2

B: If I may start with you, Mayor Washington, with the first contacts you had with Mr. Johnson. Before you took your present job, for a little more than twenty-five years you were here in the capital with the National Capital Housing Authority, of which you were eventually director. During those years, did you have occasion to meet Mr. Johnson?

W: Yes, I did, on several occasions. Initially, I believe, he was chairman of a couple of committees as vice president, and then, I think during the period roughly 1963, 1964, and 1965, I had a number of occasions.

B: Before that, back when he was in the Senate, did your work with the National Capital Housing Authority bring you into contact with him on legislative matters?

W: Not too much, no. There may have been an occasional visit, but I don't recall anything of great significance at that time.

B: Did you ever meet Mrs. Johnson in those years, Mrs. Washington?

BW: Yes, I did. Our two daughters were at the same school, so we met in the mothers' club and we met with planning for school affairs at National Cathedral School, where Luci and my daughter Bennetta were classmates.

B: Yes, they were in the same class and they graduated together, didn't they?

BW: They were in the same class. The President was also in the fathers' club. They were not inactive parents in that period.

B: Did you get out of going to fathers' club meetings, Mr. Washington?

W: No, not too much. I attended a number of the meetings, I suppose at the insistence of my wife.

BW: And your daughter.

B: I know how that is.

Did you form any opinion of Senator Johnson in those days? This would be before he became vice president. For example, it would seem to me to be fairly easy to see just another southern senator, particularly in regard to racial matters.

W: I think beyond racial matters I had occasion particularly to watch his performance with respect to legislation, which was basically legislation that was akin to what I was most interested in as a "Houser" and in the civil rights area, and he was in the forefront in both of these areas particularly that I had something to do with. He was, even at that time, demonstrating great leadership in these areas, particularly in programs that greatly affected the interest and the welfare of people.

B: Did that include things like the 1957 Civil Rights Bill?

W: Yes.

B: Was there any difficulty in those years with integration at the National Cathedral School?

BW: I would say yes, because my daughter was the first girl to enter that school in the high school, ninth grade. There was one other black girl who had been in at the lower level. I would certainly say that there was a warmth about the Johnsons in terms of acceptance. This was

something that a number of the parents really wanted to do, and yet there were those who were having a difficult time adjusting to this kind of thing.

B: I assume you're referring to the majority of the white parents.

BW: Well, there were only white parents, you see, because we were a first, except there were, of course, children of parents who came from other countries. So that you had some Asian children, and I don't know whether there were any of the African diplomats' children in until after Bennetta was there. It was not visible, at any rate. My daughter was really the first one in the high school years, which is a period of adolescence and fairly difficult for young people, and I would say that the response of parents is terribly important in this period. It was not anything on the part of the Johnsons that you would say was a specific act that they did, but it was their total attitude. We were really taken in as a very integral part of this school.

B: Did Luci and your daughter Bennetta become friends?

BW: They did become good friends, very good friends.

B: One can imagine that Luci would have absolutely no prejudice at all, wouldn't even think in those terms.

BW: Luci is such an outgoing girl and I would say that at the time that her father assumed the presidency, I would feel that there was complete empathy for Luci among the student body. They felt that she was moving into a situation that was extremely difficult for her. I heard my own daughter express this, and it was the general attitude of the school that Luci would be so much in the public eye and there would be so many things that every girl in that school was very anxious to do anything

possible to ease the situation for Luci. And then Luci was so generous as an individual that so many of the social affairs were open to the girls and she was always inviting them to the White House for social affairs that went along with the school program.

W: The graduation, of course--

B: I was going to say the graduation--

W: --was held at the White House.

B: And Mr. Johnson spoke, and the party was there.

BW: There was the party. One of the senior parties was there, and I would say that Mrs. Johnson herself backed Luci up when plans were being made for senior activities, in saying that they would be glad to host any of the things. So one of the very big parties was at the school at that point in time.

B: When Mr. Johnson was named to the vice-presidential ticket in 1960 by the late President Kennedy, was there any dismay on the part of the black community that "that man" had been named on the Democratic ticket?

W: I really wouldn't want to try to reconstruct that. From my own memory, I know the President at that time had taken a kind of leadership in the Senate, and I think that there were a lot of people who were very favorably inclined to his leadership in certain legislation, particularly civil rights legislation. But it's kind of difficult for me to reconstruct just what happened without going to impressions and I don't think that's something I would particularly want to do.

B: In this sort of thing, so long as they're labeled as impressions and hearsay, they are admissible. We kind of have to trust to posterity to recognize the distinction.

BW: I really think in that period, from the experiences that I had--of course, the black community is always leery--I think they looked at the positive things that had happened, but they sort of weighed those out against some of the life experiences of the President, and there was a "wait and see" attitude on the part of many people. Yet, certainly among the women, those who had ever had any contact with Mrs. Johnson felt that she was really such a warm and outgoing kind of person. The integrated community had seen her concern, and it was not something that she kept within herself. She was frequently with the prayer groups, do you remember, in that period?

W: Yes.

B: Would this have been during the vice-presidential years?

BW: During the vice-presidential years.

B: When Mr. Johnson was vice president?

BW: When Mr. Johnson was vice president.

B: What prayer groups were these?

BW: We had the congressional wives, but then we also have a presidential group. I think the congressional wives group extended itself a great deal into the community, and at the larger meetings it took in a great cross section of the Washington community. Many of those people watched both the President and his wife on these kinds of occasions and felt, I think, that they came across pretty well, that they were concerned about people regardless of their racial identity.

B: Do you recall your reactions to the assassination and Mr. Johnson's becoming president?

BW: One of the terrible things I remember--I had been in the hospital and I was just coming home--it really hit the adolescent youngsters at that school in a very terrible way. They came in and took Luci out. You know, at that point there was such horror about the incident itself, everybody was just so completely stunned. And I think the sensitive manner of response of the Johnsons was one of the wonderful things that helped people get over the period, not just the government but people in general in this country. Because the obvious kind of understanding that they were exhibiting, the sympathy to the country at the loss of a president, the sympathy to the Kennedy family, the whole thing came through, to people that I met personally, in a way that helped them get through a very difficult period.

B: Shortly after that Mr. Johnson pushed through what became the 1964 Civil Rights Bill. Was that an impressive performance from your standpoint?

W: Yes, that was quite an impressive area of leadership, I think. Even at that time, the matter of fighting for and taking the initiative in and leading the fight to get more responsive legislation in the civil rights area wasn't popular, and there were certain risks that one would have to take. I think here, again, we found him in that role of leadership, and these were things that I think had a lot to do with overcoming some question about whether a southerner is really out there, whether he's really doing this. Because there were political risks involved and, of course, he never assumed, from what I could see, that this was a risk at all, [but that] it was something that should be done for the nation and should be done for minorities, and that this was where he was going. I

think this was a very responsible effort that brought his leadership to the forefront.

B: About that time, did both of you become active with Mrs. Johnson's beautification project? I know you were connected with it. Was it about 1964 or 1965?

W: It was about 1964, shortly after Mr. Johnson assumed the presidency, that Mrs. Johnson undertook this as a very viable program. It was something that she wanted to do. I became, I think because I at that time was the director of the Housing Authority, initially one of the resources that she turned to in order to expand her program into the inner cities and in an effort to reach families of low income, basically poor families.

I think from that point I developed a closer and closer relationship to the whole family. Luci was known to us from the school.

BW: So was Lynda.

W: And Lynda from the school, and Mrs. Johnson then from this vantage point. And as we worked through the areas of beautification I became, I suppose, close to the entire family.

B: You also received from Mr. Johnson a career service award in 1965, a civil service award.

W: Yes. That was a very wonderful moment. I think in my life it was probably the first time to remember that there was local recognition of leadership in government. We had guys like Dick Helms, who was in that same group. Incidentally, we have maintained a friendship since that time because of our involvement there. But I was particularly pleased with that. I think these were the days when we really developed beyond

an official relationship, developed one that was closer and closer to family ties and to activities that were beyond just those that were related to the presidency, particularly in the area of Mrs. Johnson's work with the beautification program.

B: In 1966 you were offered one of the posts of commissioners on the old D.C. Commission, that is, before the reorganization. When did you first get an inkling that Mr. Johnson was considering you for that?

W: I'm not really sure in point of time, and you don't deal with inklings when you deal with the President. Until the President talks to you, you don't take matters too seriously, but there had been some discussion that some changes were going to occur and I did have some people feeling me out.

B: The people would be White House staff people?

W: White House staff people and people from the committee, particularly Louis Martin, people like that, which is a general feel-out, as they do in these situations.

B: There has been some talk that perhaps Mrs. Johnson was your strongest recommender.

W: I would say this, that I got to know Mrs. Johnson better than perhaps the President because I spent a good deal of time working with her programs, working with what she considered to be something significant for the city. She got to know me and my full projection, my views, my ideas, and was able to appraise the nature of my performance, which I think was very close to where she wanted to go with the whole beautification program. I think we agreed that beautification for beautification's sake wasn't enough; that we had to project a program beyond the

monuments and we sort of adopted that view of going beyond the monuments into the city itself. [We agreed] that it was so important that a young child in the inner city understand where beauty started, and it started in his own yard or in his schoolyard, that once she or he could understand that she or he would begin to understand beauty in a greater magnitude and appreciate what it takes to put it together. This was our basic thrust. And I think she felt so strongly about that, that the whole concept got through to the President and he began to look at us kind of together as focusing on a projection that I'm not too sure he was initially concerned about. I think he thought of the whole matter at that time as a bunch of do-gooders getting out planting flowers. That's fairly obvious for a man who is the president, not to look at this. But then the whole process began to take on something of significance, and he started looking at it, not only from a local standpoint but the whole national projection of beautification as a tool to involve people, and [he] sponsored a conference or two, talked about beautification of highways on a national basis. And I think maybe together we were sort of developing a viable concept as far as he was concerned that I think initially he looked at as sort of a bunch of do-gooders. He used to say this from time to time to us.

B: During the same stage?

W: Yes, running around and--

BW: But it's amazing how that really moved nationally, not only in our local community, but having worked with volunteers I know the difficulty to stimulate and motivate people. And it was with this kind of stimulation that I think Mrs. Johnson was a past grand master.

W: You see, the interesting thing I think, I think what really captured the President as much as anything was the fact that we were taking the program into schools. As you see in some of these pictures, the school-children were making projects that had some relationship to their educational component. They were taking a schoolground that we would beautify and then from that they would go into their own homes. We had window boxes and yard programs. Then the children would come back and they'd start using it as part of their English lesson, as part of their counting. This is what I think really got the President as involved as anything else. He saw that it captured the imagination of people generally, and it was an area in which hardly anybody could develop adversity. It was something that was helpful; it was something that really could capture a whole city. I think he started looking at it again from that impact. And with his views on education and involvement, I think this became something that was more and more viable. I think he had a little period of time, though, to get over his doubt about it, but I think we were all working on him. I remember one time he mentioned something to me about the fact, "What are you all doing? I get up in the morning, and the children are talking about it and Mrs. Johnson is talking about it; I run into you and you're talking about it." You know, it was just his way. As I could see him, when he started talking like that, it was something that he was rolling around in his mind and that he wanted to get more and more involved in without completely capitulating to these so-called do-gooders.

B: It sounds like a semi-organized campaign to convince the President.

BW: You know, it was fertile ground with the President. I remember his marvelous speech at Howard University that got so many quotes when he talked about opening the doors of opportunity, and that you not only had to open the door but you had to equip people to walk through the door of opportunity.

Following that Howard University speech, there was a big meeting in Washington. Remember the civil rights meeting? He was really coming through and I think, as Walter talks about alternatives all the time, both Mrs. Johnson and Walter saw the beautification as one of the viable alternatives for young people. It was a period in which you really were building up hope. I think it was at that sort of beginning that people in the inner city and people in those housing projects had something they could visibly touch and see, that meant there is some alternative for our using our time and our energy. And it means something to us.

B: Mr. Mayor, back to 1966 and that first offer of a position on the old three-man commission, why did you not take the job then?

W: Well, that, as you know, has been discussed back and forth. I talked to the President, I had a very lengthy discussion with him in a little room there that he used, just a few of us. Mr. Califano and Louis Martin were present and we talked over the matter. There were many people who speculated about what happened, but I'm not exactly sure the President was dead sure exactly where he wanted to go with the matter of an appointment. We talked in pretty general terms, and I gave him some of my views about the city as I saw it. I'm not sure that my views were exactly what he was looking for at the time.

B: Where would you have differed, sir?

W: As I looked at the city, I thought that we needed some strength, some greater degree of authority in whoever was going to try to function, because I saw a certain fragmentation and I saw a certain polarizing developing as I worked through the community from my vantage point as director of the Housing Authority. I saw this coming on more and more, groups that were vigorously asking for more and more things at that time. I think what I saw was the need for a repository of some strength in the city government operation that would bring all of the units together. I honestly don't know what he thought, or what was in his mind, and the thing just didn't happen.

B: It sounds like you were advocating at that time something similar to what was developed within two years, but he was not yet, at that point?

W: I would say that and this is in my mind, and of course it's always speculative to determine what's in a president's mind at any given time in terms of where he wants to go, and what he may be hearing from someone he's talking to is not exactly where he wants to go under those circumstances. But I was talking--I've long been for home rule and fought for it for twenty years--and I could see more and more the need for assembling the strength in government operation at the level of the commissioners, and I spoke to this point. I couldn't honestly say what was in his mind. There had been some speculation that the President didn't want to break the police department out and he didn't want this and that, but we never really got to that kind of specific problem. We were talking more about the strengthening of the government.

You see, at that time there were commissioners, you had a Department of General Administration, you had some proliferation, and what I

could see ahead was the fact that we needed to begin to coalesce or to coordinate to even a greater degree the powers functioning in the operation. I could see this from my vantage point very, very well, and I was talking from the vantage point that I could see.

B: Did Califano and Martin contribute along the same lines at the meeting?

W: Very little. As a matter of fact, they hardly said anything as I can remember in that meeting. I think they were perhaps a little concerned with my forthrightness after the meeting.

B: It sounds like they may have mentioned that to you after the meeting.

W: Yes, I think one or the other did. They thought that I was being a little forthright. Yet I thought that's what the President wanted me to do. I later learned in my closer working relationship with him that this is precisely what he wants. Now he may not at the moment--because of what he would see--appreciate that all the time, but as I got to know him better and closer as a man, as well as a president, I came to understand that really what he wants and wanted from people was to talk forthrightly. All of us are peculiar sometimes about certain things. We open a discussion and we're not always sure that we want to hear just exactly what comes out, but my entire period in public life has been to try to say it as I see it. I think this was one of the earlier conversations that I had with the President, where we did have a rather forthright and candid discussion. Not amazingly but interestingly, he called on me on a number of occasions after that, particularly as I got into this position as mayor, and said, "Now, what about this?"

B: At that time in 1966, were you directly offered the commissioner's job, and did you directly decline it?

W: No, I think we were talking in fairly general terms. I don't really, as I recollect it, remember any direct offer and any direct observation on my part that here is something I wouldn't do. I think from what I was saying he might have been able to draw that, and I think Joe and Louis probably drew that, but that wasn't in my mind. I didn't assume that we--he opened the conversation up by saying that he had some thoughts here. I think perhaps if I had talked in another vein that that may have come out, but we were talking then about leadership and what I saw and I don't think that the framework of the meeting was designed to have me go into that sort of thing.

B: There has been some speculation since that Mr. Johnson might have been a little angry at the time. I guess your previous remarks explain that. That is, angry at you for not jumping at the veiled offer of the commissioner's post.

W: I think you put it well; it was a veiled offer, and either I didn't quite understand where he was going or I was trying just to be candid about leadership as I saw it. I got the impression from people that he was not pleased, or he may not have been pleased with my reaction and my statements. And yet I thought I was being helpful here in trying to forecast what I saw as leadership in the community.

BW: It really didn't stop communication between the two of you, did it?

W: No. No!

BW: It didn't reach the point where if he were angry he wasn't obviously in control of whatever anger there was, and it certainly didn't stop communications between our family and their family.

W: No, as a matter of fact, I think we did more, you know, with Mrs. Johnson, even at that time, because I'd see him and he'd hear about us taking trips through alleys and going into slum areas and looking at conditions and seeing what we could do. There are many people who interpret a president, I think, who would interpret him from an instant reaction, but the thing that I learned is that his views ran deeper than a lot of people could really interpret it at one period of time. He had instant reactions, and I've had that. He called me on the phone from time to time about matters, even as mayor, at seven o'clock in the morning, and said, "Hey, what about this thing!" He was concerned, obviously concerned and a little displeased at what he saw, but you wouldn't take an instant reaction of his being a little miffed or upset. He just, if he had something on his mind, got it out, and he had a way of doing it that you had to learn to understand.

B: When that discussion took place there in 1966, was there already for you a possibility of the New York housing job?

W: In the housing field, I had had at that time a number of other opportunities. For instance, I was being considered at HUD for a position. Bob Weaver had talked to me about it, and so had Louis. I had one or two other things that people were offering at that time. The position in New York had been vacant for a year or so and John, Mayor John Lindsay that is, had been putting together a number of packages. Interestingly enough, my closest relationship developed with John around National Cathedral School, too. He had some youngsters there.

B: He had children there, too?

W: Yes.

BW: He had a daughter there.

W: Then we got to know each other, particularly from my vantage point in housing. That was just the kind of thing that was in motion. But I think perhaps the strongest thing that was in the forefront at that time was a position with HUD, with the Federal Housing Agency.

B: Why did you decide eventually to go to New York?

W: John was putting a pretty good bite on me. This was a field of great interest to me, and I called it the "Supreme Court of Housing." It was the biggest, greatest challenge. I had not left, I had not by virtue of any other offer removed myself from the housing field and that field of interest. I was doing some innovations in turnkey and developing some other models in the leasing program which was coming on, and was new. And I thought this offer a fantastic opportunity to really do some things that I had always wanted to do, and with the magnitude and scope of that operation I felt I could do that.

B: Your leaving didn't indicate any despair over the future of the district?

W: I had problems with that, of course, because having worked as long and as hard as you had in a community, you certainly just don't pick up and go without some feeling about it. The housing program and the beautification program at that time were so closely interwoven, and I had really very strong feelings about my continued work with Mrs. Johnson. I think just about the day before I left we were out at Spingarn. The Dutch Ambassador had given us some bulbs and we went out and planted them.

B: That's Spingarn Park?

W: Spingarn High School.

BW: Wasn't the President in the hospital then?

W: The President was in the hospital, and it was raining. Nobody thought that she would go, but she had talked to him and when we met to go out to the ceremony she indicated that he wanted her to do it and be active and continue her work. I sent at that time my best wishes for a speedy recovery and we talked about the President and about the program. I'd forgotten it, really.

B: You see how things come back when you do this?

W: Yes. It was a very emotional feeling. He was in the hospital and Mrs. Johnson had worked very hard on this particular ceremony and it was a rather focal one because we were developing really a beautification park at the grounds of a high school. She indicated to me that that's what he wanted her to do, to continue her work, that he was all right.

B: I don't want to restart any family arguments, but was it more of a wrench for you to leave Washington, Mrs. Washington?

BW: I would say it was difficult. I did not join my husband to live permanently in New York for six months. I resigned my job.

B: That was at the high school?

BW: No, I was director of the Women's Job Corps at that point.

B: Yes, we want to get to that in a minute.

BW: I was doing a great deal of traveling at that point. We were opening centers all across the country, and so I had to make my base New York when I was in Washington. Fortunately, at that point Bennetta had gone off to Radcliffe College so it wasn't a matter of rooting up as much in family, although I had lived in Washington all my life and even in the same house. You can understand the difficulty. We never broke that

house up at all. But I was interested because of the kind of challenge that it offered Walter. New York was really something, what he walked into in terms of problems with labor almost the week after he had been there. It was very fantastic.

W: They went on strike.

BW: Furthermore, John Lindsay was very smart in knowing that we wanted to be together a great deal and at that time he asked me to join a committee that was headed by McGeorge Bundy on the decentralization of the New York City schools. I got my teeth into the educational problems of New York, had already taught at New York University for a number of years in the summers as a visiting professor. We found New York a very exciting city, so the alternatives and possibilities were great. I would not have moved to New York if Walter had not decided that this was where he wanted to go, and it was difficult to leave a city which I loved and which he loved a great deal, too. It just wasn't easy for us. I will remember my daughter saying that all her friends were so excited about what her mother and father were doing. They said: "Your mother and father are acting like really young people in their middle age. They're starting out again on a new career." But it was important for me to tie the ends together of the Job Corps because I had put a great deal into that program, and so I was commuting for six months and you know what that is. Nobody likes it that much.

W: But all during that period I can say that I had this under consideration, I think that one of the persons that encouraged me perhaps the greatest was Mrs. Johnson, and of course my wife, as she had indicated, but we had developed just an excellent working relationship. She said

something to the effect that "I know you'll do well wherever you go, but we're just going to miss you so much out of our own activities," because they were sort of peaking and taking on a philosophy and an institutional kind of characteristic. She was exceedingly encouraging to me.

B: While you were in New York, the plans got under way in the White House for reorganizing the District of Columbia government. Did you get involved formally or informally in drawing up the new plan?

W: No, not at all. I heard about what was going on, obviously, but I did not get really involved in the process.

BW: He didn't have time to get involved in anything.

B: I can imagine.

W: I was pretty busy. After I got over the strike, which came just a couple of weeks after I got there because the contracts had--

B: That being New York, I just have to ask which strike was that?

W: This was the Housing Authority strike, where some eleven or twelve thousand employees went out. Their contract was about to expire and it was really that. They had not renewed their contract. So, I got there and got involved in that. That was the first thing I had to do. We brought it in, fortunately, in about four days when we worked around the clock. I didn't sleep during the entire period. And [I] made a lot of friends as a result of it, too, because I got to know the people faster and in a better way than I could ever if I had--

B: Like learning to swim by being thrown off the dock.

W: That's right. That was pretty much what it was. And these have become lasting friends.

B: Were you ever able to put into effect the plan you had for the city to lease buildings and then rent them to low-income families?

W: In New York? Yes, we expanded the leasing program. They hadn't picked it up very much. We started an accelerated leasing program. We were leasing units in private buildings. We started just a whole [new program]. The thing I had really wanted to do and I hadn't done here I was able to get started, with Colonial Village and a couple of places like that. We started taking twelve-fifteen units out of a hundred in some of the bigger ones. We were really leasing right into the private operation. And then we started what we called "vest pocket" projects.

B: From the standpoint of a big city housing administrator, as you were in New York, is HUD helpful? There has been an awful lot of comment of just how effective the HUD Department really is.

W: Without evaluating that in its full round, I'd say, as a big city administrator--and that's in the housing field--I had the first observation that I didn't think that many of us were using all the resources that were available to the fullest degree. That's what I was doing, pushing every facility and putting them in what I call in tandem, taking conventional housing, using leasing, using turnkeys, a lot of other things. Of course, in New York they went to the state legislature and knocked out the kind of turnkey that I was talking about at that time. But I think before you can evaluate that fully, you have to be sure that you're using all the resources that you have at your disposal. That has always been my projection in public service: to use what you have and point out the deficiencies and other needs that are apparent.

B: When were you first contacted about returning to Washington as mayor--I know the formal term is commissioner but I'll use the term mayor--mayor of the newly reorganized government?

W: I think the record will show the exact point of time.

B: I know. Were there rumors or informal contacts before?

W: That's the thing. John Lindsay--

B: There must be one.

W: I just can't pinpoint the date, but it was in August, I guess.

BW: You joined me for a few days down in St. Thomas.

W: But it wasn't then.

BW: It was right after you came back from St. Thomas.

W: It was early August or some time like that. Sort of the first inclination I had was we were getting ready to have the youth games, and I had gone out with John Lindsay to the opening affair, the opening reception, at one of the downtown hotels in New York. And John said, "I just came back from Washington and I hear rumors about you down there. You don't want to get yourself hung into that thing! That's a no-win situation."

I said, "Well, nobody has said anything to me." I guess ten days, two weeks after that, I got a call. A very interesting thing about this that I guess I ought to put on the record: Louis had called me and said, "Hey, do you think you might be interested in coming down here?" I said, "I don't know, Louis." He said, "If you think you are, you might get a call. I hope that you'll handle yourself properly."

(Laughter)

B: Sounds like a reference to that earlier meeting.

W: I don't know. Then the next day, I think, I got a call, and there was some indication that I might have an exploratory [meeting].

B: From whom was that call?

W: Somebody in the White House.

B: Some White House staff member.

W: Or it even could have been the [Democratic National] Committee. I just can't remember exactly, because Louis called on the other phone.

I said, "You know, if this thing is getting warm, I'd better call John and talk to him about it." So I did. John was taking a walking tour down the East Side. He got word through his communications, and he went into a little store and called me. I said, "John, I don't know what's coming up, but this is the second call I've gotten now and I understand that there's some indication that they want to explore something with me. I don't know exactly what." He said, "I told you all of this. These guys down there!" And he reaffirmed the fact that this was a no-win situation and I had a good thing going there and there was some future there and there was not any future down in Washington--that New York was taking to me well and I was doing a good job.

That evening about ten o'clock I went to my apartment and I got a call from the President.

B: What did he say?

W: He said, "Walter, I'm sitting here with a friend of yours. We've been working down here on this thing and I'd like to talk to you about it." I said, "Well, very well, Mr. President. I have a couple of things that I'm doing the next couple of days. When would you like for me to come?"

He said, "Get the morning shuttle, the first one out. Come into the White House and come right upstairs and let's talk."

The interesting thing is that I had called John. John was coming down the next day, he was on the same shuttle at seven o'clock that morning.

B: Neither one of you knew the other [was going].

W: Neither one of us knew that we were coming right at that time because I hadn't gotten back to him, but I had talked to him about it, the fact that I was being asked to explore. He looked at me and I got on. He was in the first seat and he said, "I knew it!" But fortunately I had called him. So we came on in together and he had a car at the airport. He was at that time working on the violence panel. He was vice chairman.

B: The Advisory Committee on Urban Problems.

W: No.

B: Oh, the Committee on Urban Violence.

W: Yes. He was the vice chairman. He had come down presumably to work at the President's request, more or less, to try to get some additional support from certain congressmen. So I rode over to the Rayburn Building with him, and then came back to the White House and went upstairs to see the President. By the time I got there John had placed a call to Joe Califano, and about five minutes after the President came out Joe came in and called the President aside. And the President told me that John had called, very irate about this whole thing, which he considered a raid on his top staff.

That set off a Mack Sennett comedy in the White House. The President told this later, last year when he came for a dinner at Kay Graham's he told part of it, and we put it together. It was just a Mack Sennett thing, because John was so upset about the thing that he insisted on seeing the President. I had not really at that time had a chance to talk very much to the President, but he was telling me that he was interested in my doing this. About that time John had arrived at the old State Department Building where the meeting was going on, and was still protesting. So they arranged for him to see the President. He came over to the President's office, and at that time I had come down from the bedroom with the President and stayed with him in the office and we were talking. When he set up the appointment for John, as you know, right outside of his office is the Cabinet Room and they had put me into the Cabinet Room to wait until the President and John Lindsay had a talk. There was a little fur flying in there, I guess. At some point they said, "Let's get Walter and see what he has to say."

B: For goodness sake.

W: In the meantime, Marvin Watson had moved me from the Cabinet Room to his office, which was just on the other side of the President's at the time. When they came in the Cabinet Room, I wasn't in there. The Security Council was meeting, and so they had moved me over to Marvin's office, and they didn't find me. John said, "You've hidden him away!" (Laughter)

B: This would be kidnapping.

W: They had told the President I was in there. The President said, "I don't do anything like that. I understood he was right here." Marvin

was someplace [else], so they started trying to find me. They were walking around, they went in the old Fish Room; then finally Marvin appeared and said, "Well, he's in here."

John wanted to have a private talk with me, and at that point we had a little talk and then went back in. This was still going on after they found me.

B: Mayor Lindsay tried to dissuade you there?

W: Oh, yes, he was very upset about it. I was doing pretty good up in New York at that time.

BW: I think you ought to say what the President told John.

W: He said, "Now, John, when you stole him away from me I didn't raise all this Cain, and I don't know why you're getting all upset now about this thing because this is where he belongs, and the President has asked him to come and do this thing. You came in here and stole him away from me and I didn't carry on."

B: After all that, it sounds like you're in a position where you can't say no.

W: He finally said he'd like for me to take it, he'd like for me to think about it. He said this was a great thing for me and a great thing for the race, and he thought I ought to do it. I stayed with him several hours just following him through his duties. We were talking. He was telling me what he saw in this.

B: Was the offer that was made then at least moving toward what you had suggested earlier?

W: I think that's safe to say. It was certainly a different format, but it had all the ingredients in it of at least localizing, pulling together

whatever power was in the local government into a repository so that you could begin to react. In hindsight, as you look back, with our going through a riot and serious demonstrations I just don't see how we would have been able to function without localizing, at some point, decision making, which is what really we were talking about.

B: Was a white man seriously considered for the job you were offered? There was speculation at the time.

W: I couldn't really answer that. There was something about [Theodore] McKeldin--that he had talked to him. I just don't know.

B: Pat Brown, there was speculation there.

W: There was speculation, there was a lot of speculation but how serious it was I can't react to.

On that day I left and went back to New York--

B: Did you have to fly back with John Lindsay?

W: No, we went back at different times, but I went right up to Gracie Mansion. We sat there with his wife for a number of hours, until early in the morning, two or three o'clock, talking about the situation. John said the belief was that this wasn't the best thing for me, particularly because of the momentum I had developed in New York.

B: Did Mayor Lindsay try to discourage you from working for Lyndon Johnson? Was that one of the factors of the thing?

W: No, I don't think that Lyndon Johnson per se was the issue. I think John's was another side. John was more interested in my working for him than he was for anybody else at that point of time because I was coming along pretty good. I think that was his approach. Mike [Mitchell] Sviridoff had just left two weeks before, resigned to go with the Ford

Foundation. Mike and I were very close, we were working very closely together. I had at this time been doing a number of things beyond just the housing work for John. I was working on the Criminal Justice Board. I was working on the summer programs. We had the best summer program I think they'd ever had. We were moving three or four hundred thousand kids. Mr. Rockefeller at that time--not the Governor, his brother.

B: Which one?

W: Laurance had been very helpful in opening up some of the parks and providing some funds for us to move kids. I was working with a number of people who had, for instance, worked with me here, like Mrs. Vincent Astor, Laurance Rockefeller, and others in New York, I think. It wasn't a question of Lyndon Johnson at all. It was a question of John wanting me to stay on there.

B: Did you have any doubts, Mrs. Washington, about it?

BW: Yes, I did. I moved to New York and right after Walter moved, the city was really looking for all the talent it could find in education and I had just accepted a position as the assistant president of City College of New York.

B: And you were going to work with the Harlem schools.

BW: There was a special grant. I was to be a full professor, and to work with two classes of doctoral candidates in the field of education who were working on research projects in urban planning and urban education; and also to have special monies for these studies to be carried out in Harlem where the offices of City College and the City University of New York were right in that area. It was one of the most fascinating offers I had ever had.

Tape 2 of 2

B: You were talking about the plans for the CCNY special project.

BW: I had had at least four job offers, one to take over the educational component in John Lindsay's office, and I had kind of thought that it wouldn't be wise for my husband and for me both to be working in the same situation. This offer at the City College of New York was just fascinating to me.

B: We haven't mentioned it here, but I'm sure anyone would find on the written record you had been in the District school system; you had been a principal at Cardozo.

BW: Cardozo High School was my last principalship. Prior to that I had been principal of the Boys Junior-Senior High School, which was an experimental program for emotionally disturbed behavior-problem boys. I opened that school. Prior to that I had been principal of the old Armstrong Technical High School, which closed down as a result of integration when they were pulling schools together. Those students all went to McKinley High School. I had also been a counselor in the public schools in Washington and had about a dozen years of teaching experience in the graduate school of New York University and counselling in psychology. So Buel Gallagher, who was the president of City College at that point, had been looking for two years for someone to head this program up. We both felt this was a marvelous opportunity. I was delighted to accept, and I said simply that I couldn't move until I cleared up things here, so he said, "I'll wait six months for you."

When Walter was called to come back, that very Saturday was to be my first meeting with the entire staff; it was the senate. They hadn't

had a woman full professor in this category. I must say we were all very much excited about the potential and the possibility. I had signed a contract, it had gone to the Higher Education Committee and had gone all through Albany and that sort of thing. All requests that I had made in terms of salary and retirement, as well as the total research aspect, everything had been cleared. I was to report to my first staff meeting.

I did say to the President that I had never broken a contract in my life, and he said, "Don't worry about this. You won't really be breaking a contract. We'll take care of that." I later learned from Buel Gallagher, the president, that he had had McGeorge Bundy, who is president of the Ford Foundation and with whom I had worked on the decentralization of schools, talk to him about the situation in Washington. Then Dr. Gallagher wrote and he told me that he felt he couldn't stand in the way of this kind of thing, and he would release me if I would come up and work with him on this particular situation and make some recommendations for possible successors. So I never really got into that new job.

B: Kind of a shame. That must have been an exciting opportunity.

BW: It was an exciting opportunity, but for the larger community I think the really exciting thing was exactly what Lyndon Johnson had said. It's kind of hard for a professional woman to accept this, but if you look at the total perspective it is very much more important at a time in history like this was, in terms of the problems, that you bring someone with the kind of background that Walter had. He just seemed a natural.

B: Did you have any qualms about your husband taking what just from the beginning must have been regarded as a very difficult job?

BW: My qualms were not over the fact that he couldn't do it. I had really utter faith that it really needed the kind of background [he had]. I felt, number one, it would be very difficult to find someone with the experience in public administration plus the actual experience with people in an affluent country who were living in this kind of poverty, the problems that were surrounding it, the discontent of people with their government and cities. Because here in these large cities of the country were the real problems. I'd seem them in New York, working with the black community, with the Puerto Rican community, I'd seen the responses of people from all of the minority communities in that city to him. For example, as the chairman of the board of the Housing Authority in New York--he had an open door, and I saw it work. For example, talking about that labor strike, he went to the union hall when the strike closed, and the people in the Housing Authority were aghast! They said, "No chairman comes down to the union hall." He went out to the people, and I felt that in Washington this was one of the things that was so needed--the feeling on the part of people that somebody really was concerned and somebody cared about them. But I also knew that that is not enough alone. I felt that his years of experience in public administration also would be needed at this time; that there was need for some kind of efficiency in organization to really see that this job got done. All around me in the poverty program I had seen so many people with a desire to bring about change in the quality of life, who really wanted to be in decision-making posts. And I felt the sad thing about the whole business was that people would let them get into these posts and not provide them with the proper kind of support so they could

really function. You can have all the desire in the world to bring about change and yet not have the techniques or the capability to do it.

I felt that somewhere here Walter had these two kinds of things, and that the Washington community needed it so badly that even though I had tremendous personal problems with not going into this current post, I felt I had to come back. I felt, as a mayor, he really deserved to have a wife.

B: I would imagine your job was about as big as his.

BW: Well, I've been working in these kinds of situations, as Walter, all of our lives. We have very much the same goals, only he put his to use through the avenue of housing and I, through education.

B: To back up a little in time, before you had moved to New York you had spent I think two and a half years as a director of the woman's division of the Job Corps.

BW: That's right.

B: Were you taken on in that post by Dr. Otis Singletary? He was the director?

BW: Yes, he was the director.

B: Do you recall how you got the job?

BW: I was principal of Cardozo High School here and we'd been doing a number of really interesting innovative projects in education. The first one that came to national attention was the Cardozo project in urban teaching, in which I brought the first Peace Corps returnees to this country into an educational program in conjunction with Howard University, the Justice Department, because at that time Robert Kennedy was the attorney general, and with the school system. The Commissioner of

Education was Francis Keppel, who had come down from Harvard. I developed a proposal and presented it to them and they were very much excited about it, because I was not able to develop this program within the public school budget. So I was given this project to bring these young people in, and it was an integrated group of young people. The only requirement I had was that they had lived in a disadvantaged or underprivileged country and worked with the people of that country, and with a liberal arts degree. We had youngsters from Harvard and Dartmouth and Yale, but we also went south and had youngsters from the black colleges like Fisk. They had all worked together and they were very much interested in doing something on the domestic level, sharing their real experiences here. So we were able to set up this project in urban education at Cardozo and it received some national attention.

They were looking for someone to head this project up, and I had had experience with Sargent Shriver, naturally, using the Peace Corps group. He sent someone up to Cardozo to talk with me about the possibilities and the opening. He said that Otis Singletary would like to have a conversation with me. I said, well, I would go and talk with him but I just had so much going at Cardozo that I really didn't see how I could possibly move into it. But I must say to you, I had been the summer before with Mrs. Johnson and with the President also when they had that task force developing some understanding of the women's task in the whole war on poverty. One of the basic things had been making recommendations for the Job Corps and for the entrance of women into this program. We were entertained at the White House where we worked very diligently. I was in New York at that time, as [were] a hundred

women, making recommendations for the total Job Corps. Therefore I was not unfamiliar with the program of the Job Corps when I was approached. I was saying that Sargent Shriver had a conversation with me. He said, "Now, I know you're hesitant, but how would you like to make twenty little Cardozos across the country?" I think that was the breaking point.

One of my problems, however, was to leave a high school that had come from great despair and had reached a real level of some hope for the youngsters in college placement, in work study programs, in the whole enrichment of their cultural life. You saw a school that was really humming and those youngsters had a tremendous amount of faith in me. To walk out on three thousand young people at this point, there had to be some way that they could believe that I was not just turning my back on them. So we did, when the decision was made, have a huge assembly. I had talked with a number of the student body, and I said to them that "I would never have come to the attention of the Office of Economic Opportunity if it had not been for the kind of program that you did." Consequently they felt they were all a part of me.

I also went to this job on a leave basis. I did not go permanently. I was just taking leave to head this program up.

It was very exciting because from the first day Mrs. Johnson was so interested in this kind of program, and I would also say [in] the Project Head Start. She was tremendously interested in the Head Start as one of the programs, and she had one hundred thousand young people in some three hundred communities that were really involved in this. She was terribly interested in what you did about women in this country in

poverty. I had not been in the job long before she had me at the White House for a luncheon. You know, she used to have those "Women Doers" luncheons, where she brought important women from all over the country in to listen and hear about programs. She had me come in and tell them about the Job Corps. There was always a constant kind of support that you felt you had on this program, and of course the Office of Economic Opportunity itself was a part of the executive branch of the government at that point in time, so you also had that kind of support.

B: I believe one of your big accomplishments was getting a sizable group of effective volunteers to help you in things like selection.

BW: Oh, yes. And Mrs. Johnson served as an honorary chairman of that group. They were women she had first met in the White House at the time of the civil rights bill passage. At that point they said, "What are some of the things that we can do in this country?" They represented the National Council of Jewish Women, Catholic Women, the Church Women United and the National Council of Negro Women. Since that time we have brought in the GI Forum, which is the Spanish-American, Mexican-American group. But these women really mobilized straight across the country. Many of these same women were on that one-hundred-woman task force, where that idea really grew up. What they did, and it's still effective today, was to recruit these young women they moved into the homes. With the men, they used the United States Employment Service, and mostly a bureaucratic kind of structure. With the women, these volunteers moved into the communities, both urban and rural, with a kind of outreach. They're the reason that the program was so integrated. The one common

denominator they wanted for these girls was that they were in poverty and this would open a door and some alternatives toward them.

B: I was wondering what criterion they used because surely there must have been more possible candidates than you had space for.

BW: Oh, the pipeline was so big! My first job when I went in was to open five centers by the end of the fiscal year. If you know what that means, it means finding sites, staff, working with contractors, because this was a contractual sort of thing, determining the capability of contractors.

B: You mean by contractors, the people who would operate the facilities?

BW: The people who would operate the centers. I must say the women were determined they would not all just be large business corporate groups. We wanted to use those groups, and we did, but we also wanted to use women's groups across the country, so we had a center run in Los Angeles, California right away, taken on by the YWCA of Los Angeles; we had a center in Cleveland, Ohio, run predominantly by a black woman's sorority. This of course was unheard of. They had never had a government contract in life. Then we had university operating centers. Also the Texas Education Foundation, if you can recall, had a men's center and they opened up, not with the first five, but eventually with our center in Texas. And so we had a variety of contractors, all of whom had to learn the whole business of government contracting but had to keep in mind their goal for improving the opportunities for women in poverty.

B: And in the meantime you must have been having to publicly defend the whole concept.

BW: Yes, but that was not new to me. In education, I had had to do this in terms of schools, the most recent of course was the Cardozo program. I had been called before the House Education Committee to testify on that. I had written innumerable articles, and part of my job at this period of time was going across the country and talking to women's groups, getting them interested, getting them to understand what it meant. Our first center opened in St. Petersburg, Florida. It was the one and only center that we did have some problems in maintaining the total racial situation in terms of tolerance and understanding. Many of these communities wanted the money that a program like this would bring in, but had real difficulty in accepting young women who are at this age from sixteen to twenty-one, who cannot be isolated, who are all volunteers. Even the enrollees came in on a voluntary basis, so we were not trying to put them in a closed prison kind of situation.

B: Yes, I recall some of the controversy that surrounded the St. Petersburg school. Did you have to go down there and deal with the [situation]?

BW: Oh, yes, innumerable times I had to go down. But fortunately we were able to even resolve that one so that all the young women there were able to finish their program or be placed in other centers around the country. That's the only center we ever had a situation of just feeling that the climate of the community was such that really we should not have brought younger people into that community.

B: Did you make the decision to close out that center yourself?

BW: I made the recommendation. On the basis of the report from the community, my own personal visits to the community, visits of other staff and

consultants, I made the recommendation directly to Sargent Shriver who had to go through with the closing of that.

B: Were there any other places where something like that might have happened and did not because it was prevented beforehand?

BW: There were and are places still. This problem of community relations certainly is one that you must face, particularly if you're going into communities all across the country. We went into places like Iowa, a small place in Missouri--Excelsior Springs. In the beginning we went into hotels, old hotels, because that was all that was available for women. But as the veterans hospitals and things became open, facilities that could be opened, the same kinds of problems arise in these other communities, except that I think we had a greater capability of handling them and dealing with them. I don't think they've gone away today really.

B: How did you choose those communities?

BW: The government puts out bids for proposals. You may make proposals. I had a staff that was there and set up to evaluate the facilities, evaluate the community, evaluate the kind of program that was being offered, and all of this, plus the technical staff of the Office of Economic Opportunity that went out and looked at these facilities and looked at these communities. Any number of things that happened, pre-negotiation, and then the defense of the actual contract in its negotiation stage, and the final sign-off of the whole thing which always of course went to the White House.

(Interruption: direction of interview now returns to Mr. Washington)

B: How's it going?

W: Touch and go.

B: To get back [to where] we were, after you were appointed as the new mayor, did you have the freedom to choose the other major figures? Thomas Fletcher, for example, the deputy mayor?

W: I don't think that you could say it quite that way. The President had his staff looking for someone that he thought would make a good team. I think the concept was basically that I knew the community, I knew the outside activities, I had the major area of dealing with the White House and the Congress and the projection of community and political matters. It was sort of like a Mr. Inside-Mr. Outside that he was looking for. We were trying to find *the* guy. They conducted a national search and found Tom, who was at that time deputy assistant in Urban Renewal. We'd looked at a number of other names and finally Tom seemed to fit the bill. The President made sure that it was someone I could work with and felt comfortable with. Then they sent out for him.

B: On the hiring of Patrick Murphy--I don't know of any subtle way to phrase this--was there something of an attempt in there to sidestep Chief John Layton?

W: I don't think so. I think really what we were trying to do was to package something akin to public safety and get those units together, something that I believed in, something that he believed in. Pat fit the bill across the board. There were some observations and some statements made along that line by people, but I think we were looking to coordinate many of the elements of the criminal justice system, which is amazing. As you see it now, you even see the need for it to a

greater degree than ever when you get all the components together. I think he was forecasting.

B: Were you getting pressure from Mr. Johnson to do something about the crime rate in the District?

W: I think that had already developed as a problem in the spin-off period particularly. I think he was concerned about it, I don't know that you call it pressure.

B: Did he ever speak to you directly about it?

W: Yes, I think he did and the staff of the White House did in terms of what can we begin to do and put together that will address itself to this problem, which was not only a local problem but had become quite a national problem.

B: When you were on the point of taking the job, did you have an understanding with Mr. Johnson that if necessary you would have direct access to him? Or, to phrase it another way, was it understood from the beginning that the President's Adviser on National Capital Affairs would be phased out?

W: It's a little hazy, but there was already talk that under the new framework they would not need this type of mechanism, but that there would be closer direct contact with me, the President, and the White House.

B: Did it really work that way? I know Steve Pollak left to go to Justice and the title fell into disuse, but did you really have direct access to the President?

W: Oh, yes. I think the President picked up the phone and called, I think Joe Califano had a very active role in this. Even though you didn't

have it in the same framework where people looked to sort of a liaison, you had some need for contact points. Obviously, the President on many matters that were being taken up would not have to be contacted directly, but on major matters I always felt that I had access.

B: Other than the President, was Joe Califano the usual White House contact?

W: Yes.

B: What were some of the subjects of those early-morning phone calls you mentioned earlier?

W: Joe was the principal contact and Joe's office was the principal contact point.

B: What was the kind of thing that Mr. Johnson would call you about at seven in the morning, that you mentioned?

W: It would vary. It would be something that would come up in the newspaper that he'd see or somebody would call his attention to something. It was a variety of subjects, the things that were on his mind.

B: Did he offer you any advice and help on congressional relations?

W: Oh, yes. What I'd say about that is that I regarded him as a past master on this. From the very day we took office, he advised us on how he thought we ought to proceed, even to begin to know the members of Congress. His advice always was personal contact.

B: I can practically just hear him telling you, "Well, if you want to get on the good side of Congressman X, this is his special interest." Is that the kind of thing that happened?

W: He even went beyond that. He wanted us--and I say us, those that he appointed in that first instance--to know the members and have the

members get to know us, so that we could utilize a personal relationship. And when we wanted to go back, it wasn't at that time that we got to know a particular congressman, around an issue. His kind of format was that you began to develop a relationship with people, an ongoing relationship, and if an issue arises that's a part of an ongoing relationship. You just don't start meeting a guy when you get an issue. He wanted us to start that from the very word go.

B: Did he ever give you direct help, that is, a phone call from the President to a member of one of the District committees when it was necessary?

W: Well, it was dependent on the issue. You probably know that he maintained a very close relationship with the working Congress. And he was usually out in front of you. Where he saw a problem or somebody called his attention to it, or if you called his attention to it, he was certainly willing at any point to make something happen. And he did it in his own way. You wouldn't know how. That's one thing: he's not going to tell you exactly how he goes about it.

B: I gather it worked more often than not.

W: Yes. The interesting thing about that kind of strategy, I use it myself.

BW: He taught it to you.

W: Yes. He was very much concerned about my relationship with the Congress and with certain men particularly, and whether or not I'd be received.

B: Would you care to mention names, sir?

W: Not particularly.

B: It would be a dirty trick for me to start listing names. I mean, obvious ones come up, they're all in the newspapers--Joe Broyhill, for example.

W: Joe had made some statements and that didn't disturb him much, but he really wasn't as disturbed so much about that as he was about whether or not on issues I could get the hearing. I listened to him and the strategies that he used were very helpful to me, and I think my relationships on the Hill have had a great deal to do with the kind of strategies that he used. I used some of the same. It was just getting to know people. If you don't know people and you don't sit and talk with them--and I put a lot of time in that, going up and talking to the men and trying to get them to see where I was going, where the city was going. I've had many of them, some of those that he had some concern about, who are my strongest supporters now, and some that have come to be strong supporters of the city. I think this is borne out by the fact that we have had some good relations. He always, for instance, made it clear that by virtue of the Constitution and the situation that the members of Congress were partners whether they wanted to be or not. I used that approach. I don't [strike out at them], and I get criticized for this from time to time, for not striking out against certain congressmen. But that's a pretty luxurious kind of a process when you have to turn around the next day and go up and ask them for help.

B: Did you and Mr. Johnson ever discuss the possibility of self-government? That is the next step, a true elected mayor and council.

W: He was for home rule and for representation. We discussed it in different frames of reference, basically around his messages, as we were

preparing for his messages. I would say that that was the area of the discussion. We just didn't sit and talk about it.

B: Is it just a matter that was not politically right?

W: You can express your view, and of course he knew I was a strong advocate of home rule, but I think a President determines how and what the cloth is that he wants to cut from for his reasons. I think he did follow that same process in relation to this, maintaining a strong interest and a strong advocacy for it, but the extent to which he put it together is really left to him.

B: In a sense you were introduced into the mayorship, I guess, in the worst possible way. You had not been mayor very long before the riots that followed Dr. King's death. Had you had any information before the assassination that such a thing was possible, and had there been any contingency plans made?

W: When I got back, the first day I took over the office we had a march of some youngsters down 15th Street and to Lafayette Park, threatening. That was my first day. Of course, I had had a chance for a few weeks to look at the situation and there were some very ominous signs, *very* ominous signs. The distance between the government and the people had grown to a point where it suggested that you had to really put some time in trying to get them back together again and get some lines. I did a lot of walking in the streets and talking to people. The President called me once and I was in the street, and he was amazed--

BW: Calling from Texas.

W: --that I didn't have a telephone in the car. Within ten or fifteen hours after that a phone was put in the car.

B: Just out of curiosity, did you teach John Lindsay how to be a walking mayor or did he teach you?

W: We did it together.

B: Came with the idea simultaneously.

W: Yes. John kept the practice up a little more than I did, because I found that after you do that a certain period of time the people are looking for delivery, and I had to come in and try to start working with delivery of services because there were things on the inside and on the outside. But this was a vital process at that time because no one had been doing this sort of thing and relating to the people in the sense to just let the relationship develop. This was a bridge which I had to develop fairly instantly, and I did that, did a lot of it. Yet you could see that there were problems that were developing. I started establishing a number of sort of interim organizations that would deal with this below my level to begin to get the people involved again in the process.

B: Did that include contingency plans for actual violence?

W: We always had those. In the Military District they worked on them; we have a small civilian defense office. But I don't think that the contingency plans definitely anticipated the development of anything as violent as we subsequently had.

B: Can you describe what happened after Dr. King's assassination, from your point of view?

W: I'd have to think about that. It was such a--

B: Let me ask you a more specific question. As violence began to develop, was there any serious question about who was going to be in charge?

W: I don't think that there ever was really any question about that in terms of the President. He was concerned and he wanted every available resource put together for this town to maintain it. He also had on his hands 110 other cities that were having the same difficulty in different dimensions. This is one of the reasons I think Cy Vance was so helpful to us, Because it wasn't probably known to a lot of people, but the formats that we were putting together here, particularly by using Cy, who had had some experience in this in other places, were helpful to Baltimore and to some of the other cities that were having the same problems about the same time.

B: What exactly was Mr. Vance's position during the week or so of the riot?

W: He was named as my adviser.

B: Did he specifically handle the relations with the President or the military?

W: He handled basically military relations. Of course, all of us made reports directly to the President, or directly to the White House, or directly to some other unit. Basically I'd say that the greatest thrust on my part was in the civilian area, and Cy's analyses were going more to military needs in terms of what strength and where that strength was and where you'd move it. He was not only moving here, he was moving in other places.

B: But you were still the man in charge here in Washington?

W: Oh, yes.

B: How about the Justice Department? Did they work along with you?

W: They worked with us. The Attorney General, Warren Christopher, was very close. Warren, for instance, out of our format, went to Baltimore, went

to several other places. You see, the problem was not just a local one, although locally we had to deal with it. From the lessons and from the developments that were evolved in what we were doing, they were transmitting those on to other places that were being confronted with the same problem. The President was being very, very much involved in looking at the city as well as the nation. I can recall I went with him in the car the morning that our disturbance spread. That Friday morning we had been up to the Cathedral for a memorial service for Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Secretary of Defense was in the car with us and Bob Weaver. We came back and got word that our situation was spreading and I went right into the White House with the Secretary of Defense and the President. We discussed it for a period of time, about an hour. This was the kind of concern that he had, and his basic concern was to make sure that we had what we needed to meet the situation.

B: Did you discuss right there the question of immediately calling in federal troops?

W: No, that wasn't discussed right at that point. I think that had already been discussed the Thursday before.

B: As I recall, they were marshaled and made available--

W: Yes, prior to that time.

B: Who made the decision--this may be the wrong phraseology--to in effect tolerate looting rather than shoot looters?

W: I don't know that it was a toleration. The guy in charge of operations in the street was Pat Murphy. These were tactical operations. He was on the streets and had to make decisions.

B: I mention it because there was some criticism in the aftermath.

W: It has been less and less, without blood flowing. There was this, but I think that along with Pat you had military liaison, appraisals were made. The difficulty here, if you've got a chief or if you've got a public safety director leader, these really become tactical operations and you've got to depend on them. You can't sit in an office and decide what you do at fifteen places, and this is what we were having when the spread came.

B: And there were comparatively few deaths. Nine?

W: Yes. But those weren't violent ones. Most of those resulted from buildings caving in. I mean they weren't the sniping things between citizens and officials. These were accidents for the most part.

B: There was also a good deal of discussion at the time about the role played by outsiders or agitators or some combination thereof, Stokely Carmichael, for example. Could you tell then or have you been able to determine since how much of the rioting was truly spontaneous and how much of it may have been [agitated]?

W: Well, it's inargumentive. We knew we had some agitation, outside agitation. We weren't able to determine the exact amount of it, the exact effect of it, because there had been a number of people moving in and out of the city I think any more than any other city [can determine that]. This is always something, the question of whether it comes before or after, or whether it caused it to mount, or whether there were some people that agitated the students at Howard University, and that involved some agitation in the city. But the nature, for instance, of the greatest part of ours, as you will recall, was just citizens out

there in the process and in the streets. At one point it appeared to be like a carnival atmosphere.

B: Stokely Carmichael got an awful lot of publicity. Was he really that much involved?

W: I don't think so. A lot of people do. I don't think he was as involved as publicity indicated. But exactly how much--I think we do have in some of our reports, obviously from Justice and others, the exact nature of the involvement.

B: After the assassination of Robert Kennedy, there was only minor trouble. What made the difference? To phrase it better, was it anything that the city government had done?

W: I would think that by that time, you had a different set of dynamics, first of all. A number of cities like this were living under the syndrome that things like this couldn't happen. I think that for whatever reason that dynamics had developed, you had a lot of people who were frustrated, and some breakdowns that were serious in terms of government people. I think a lot of things that happened between that time, and I think that the misery that came after Dr. King's assassination was in itself a deterring factor because the very people that were the most frustrated were the greatest sufferers, the very neighborhood.

B: Did you anticipate difficulties that didn't arise? For example, after Robert Kennedy's assassination, the funeral was held here with large crowds and other potentialities.

W: The funeral wasn't really held here. It was just a memorial service. The funeral was actually in Atlanta, and I attended the funeral.

B: I meant after Bob Kennedy's [funeral].

W: The funeral was in New York.

B: But then the burial service was here.

BW: That's right.

W: I don't know what your question is.

B: I was asking if you were expecting any trouble that didn't develop, but if it slipped your mind then that means there probably was nothing.

W: There really wasn't any trouble.

BW: But you were much more capable at that point of handling things, weren't you

W: Well, I hope so.

BW: You know, after you go through that one experience, his whole communication center developed and, you know--

B: Yes, I was reading the little pamphlet there on your communication center. I'll file a copy of that in your suspense file.

W: Fine. I think you had a different set of shocks and a different set of dynamics. I think, too, at that point the city was in tighter shape by that time. I don't think you had, so far as the eruptive capability, it at all at that time even though it wasn't many months.

B: Then that summer was Resurrection City. Did you try to talk the Southern Christian Leadership Conference out of having Resurrection City?

W: I think we had some talks with the leadership. Of course, they were pretty much bent on having it. I don't think it was a matter of talking them out of anything. It was a matter of trying to rationalize the problems, particularly after the riot. Whether or not this was something that was going to do anything that was positive, or whether it was

going to further bring fear into the community, which to a great degree it did, particularly in the metropolitan areas, the suburban areas. Far beyond the fact was the spin-off of the riot period that left the situation psychologically in the minds of people and they were very fearful of it. I had to deal with that as a serious problem.

B: Was Walter Fauntroy one of your main contacts with Ralph Abernathy and the Southern Christian Leadership group?

W: Yes, he was very helpful.

B: While Resurrection City was here, again, were you still in control as opposed to Justice?

W: No. You see, the problem here was of broader area. I can't say that I was in control in that sense. As far as the city was concerned, I was, but you see we were then on federal property. The Park Service and Interior had jurisdiction along with Justice insofar as the location was concerned, so I was never in a position to control that. But I involved myself in the situation so far as the total city was concerned to a great degree, even to the degree of going down there with frequency to make sure that human needs were being met. I called upon a broad cross section of citizens, the religious community, the business community to assist, once the decision was made that they would grant them a permit.

B: Did you walk through Resurrection City?

W: Oh, yes.

BW: We all did. I think maybe that was one of the periods when that alienation that you said you felt when you came back from New York obviously bridged the gap, because there were so many people who found

actual things they could do in terms of bringing food, in terms of assisting medical doctors.

W: I'm afraid I have to break in a little bit.

B: I have taken more of your time than we need, sir. Let me just ask you a couple more questions.

W: That was a very interesting period. I'd hoped to refresh myself in that period particularly because there are some things where the President was very active and very obvious which I'd like to refresh myself on.

B: I can come back almost anytime.

On a broader level did you find in these years, and do you still find, any difficulty in really getting with the more militant black community?

W: I've never found any difficulty. I think that Resurrection City was not necessarily an indication of militancy--

B: I didn't mean Resurrection City generally; I meant on a sort of continuing basis in the District here.

W: It's a question of whether getting with and maintaining contact with militancy--it varies. Its dimensions are varied. My effort, and this is what the President always liked to see, is to try to maintain contact with every element of the community, conservative, militant, what have you, many things, or most things even, frequently. But that does not mean that you can't maintain contacts. You must be in a position to try to hear and try to listen to what they're saying, even to be able to handle yourself in some kind of perspective. Many of them of the more militant are not happy with me or my projections. They believe I'm more moderate and they have names for it, but my position has been to work in

the interest of all people and keep that foremost in my mind, which is what the President always said. And it's no different than a presidency. Whether he listens or whether he maintains contacts or is received isn't as important as that he understands and tries to maintain a course, as I've tried to do in the interest of everybody.

B: During these years did you give the President advice and counsel on his relationship with the blacks generally?

W: He had many people giving him advice in this area, as in other areas. I've been in numerous meetings on that subject and other subjects, not always with him but in the White House where the material gets to him.

B: I was asking because there seems to be a certain disarray in the administration's civil rights stance after about 1965 or so.

W: I'm not sure who he turned to, entirely. I think for the most part, with what I had on me, he was looking to me to try to keep this city in front of me and to really begin to rebuild it as the nation's capital. I had my hands full.

Again, we started to have the fragments of different kinds of groups, and the spin-off after the riot period we had demonstration after demonstration. We had formations of new groups, they had Vietnam groups, the black militant group, the white rightist groups, and what have you. So you're dealing with all fragments and all phases of this thing, not just one group that you might call militant in one sense and referring to it as a black militant group, but you've got the whole spread of situations that were upon us. What I had to do in all of this, with a city, for instance, the nation's capital being fragmented by a major fracture such as the 1968 riot, was try to begin to mold all

of the people back. I had to try to bring all elements back into a working whole, to begin not only to stabilize the city but begin to move it again into some kind of progress, and deliver programs, get the city back into a working whole. I spent a great deal of time in the streets and with groups in doing just that thing because these fractures leave a city pretty raw in terms of problems.

The one thing that I think the President and I agreed on is that we kept this city open. There was no place that a white or a black couldn't go and feel that he could move freely. The ability to move in a city, wherever it is, is a very important factor in beginning to reestablish lines. During the riot period for a few days there were stonings at certain places. We had to break that up, and the basic thing is to try to keep the city open. The President saw that and I did and we worked very hard at doing just that.

B: I know you've got to go, sir. Is there anything that you need added to this?

W: Not right now.

BW: When he talked about that whole civil rights bit, and you know how closely the President worked with Phil Randolph and Dorothy Height and Martin Luther King and--

W: Roy Wilkins and Whitney Young.

BW: And Roy Wilkins, and Whitney. I would say those were the outstanding ones. They were in touch with Walter, and he was in touch with all of them. Keeping the lines of communication open with the President was terribly important at that period of time.

W: The Resurrection City period, leadership from all over the country came in here, mayors came in here, Lindsay, Carl Stokes, Reverend Abernathy--they were all in and out of the city. You had to maintain relationships with ongoing working groups.

B: Mrs. Washington, if the Mayor has to leave, if you have more on the Job Corps and all, I am at your disposal all day, although I don't want to tire you.

BW: You're not tiring me, but I've run way past my appointment. I just have a feeling that we probably ought to be available to you at another time.

B: I realize it is a busy time for you.

[End of Tape 2 of 2 and Interview I]

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Mrs. Washington is deceased. Mayor Washington who was her sole heir said to approve this.
Mary B. Nichols
(I have Mayor Washington's power of attorney) 2/23/94

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