INTERVIEWEE: ROBERT C. WEAVER (Tape #1)

INTERVIEWER: JOE B. FRANTZ

November 19, 1968

F: Let's start with your early career. You were born in Washington and took your degrees from Harvard. How did you happen to go to Harvard?

W: My grandfather had been interested in dentistry. He was born a freedman in Washington; thus the name Freeman was no coincidence. He looked around to find a dental school that would accept him in the 1860-s, and there were about four or five dental schools in the country at that time. And Harvard did accept him. So he graduated from Harvard in dentistry in the first dental class at Harvard in which there were six members in 1869. I was named Robert after him. Also, my brother had finished Williams and was doing graduate work and was going to be at Harvard and we were rather close, so that's why I went to Harvard.

F: Where did you grow up here in Washington?

W: I grew up in Brookland, which is in the northeast part of the city and the house in which I was born was where, incidentally, my parents moved as bride and groom; and they died there. We sold it only four or five years ago; it is two blocks from the Franciscan monastery.

F: Was it an integrated neighborhood?

W: Yes, there were about six Negro families in a community of about 2 or 3,000, and I had the distinct privilege of walking past a public school and a parochial school to get a street car to come into a segregated school from the second grade, where I started, through high school for eleven years.

F: You went through the whole system, then, by not busing but taking the street car.

W: And paying for the car fare.

F: Did you have any particular problems just on a day-to-day basis there in the neighborhood?

W: Well, yes, but they weren't peculiar. Most of them were the usual problems you have. We had some neighbors who were very friendly, we had other neighbors who didn't speak. My parents were very careful about this. We had a rule. We had a large yard--100 foot front and 250 feet deep, and I remember it because I used to cut the grass. That's why I've lived in apartments for the last twenty-five years. And my mother had the rule that we would play in our own yard, and if the other kids were to play, they played in our yard, we didn't play in theirs, so she was in control of the situation. We didn't go to their houses to eat, and we didn't feed them at our house.

F: What did your father do?

W: My father was a clerk in the post office department.

F: Did you encounter any particular problems in Harvard?

W: Not particularly. I had one or two unfortunate situations. The first was that I came up there at the time when the freshman dormitories were a controversy, and they did not admit Negro students to the freshman dormitories. That was changed when the houses came along. I had another experience also. I was on the debating team and some question came up as to whether or not Princeton would be a problem for us to visit. One of the eager beavers, who was the coach, sent a telegram saying that I was a Negro and would there be a problem. They got sort of a wishy-washy reply. And the great liberal, Mr. Abbott Lawrence Lowell, came up with the sophistry that since we were not the hosts but the guests, we would have to abide by their rules and I

was not permitted to go, though the team felt very strongly to the contrary. Those are about the only situations that I remember. I certainly did not encounter any discrimination as far as anything academically was concerned or any of the other extracurricular activities in which I engaged.

F: The upper-class dormitories were available?

W: Yes.

F: So you only had the freshman year off campus?

W: No. But I could have lived in the yard.

F: What became of your brother?

W: My brother finished, as I said, Williams--Phi Beta Kappa. Then he took his master's at Harvard and taught for a couple of years. He became ill when he was 23, in my senior year, and died.

F: What was his field?

W: His field was English literature.

F: What was your field at Harvard?

W: Economics, both undergraduate and graduate. I started out in engineering, but that interfered with my social life. I was going to go to MIT but they required German and I didn't have it so I took German in my freshman year, but I found out that undergraduates in those days in schools of engineering worked at the graduate level. This interfered with my courting and also it called for much more energy than I wanted to extend in intellectual pursuits at that time. So I shifted over to economics.

F: How did you get into government service?

W: I had finished my college work in '29 and stayed through for my residence requirement, took my generals in 1931. I then taught in North Carolina at a state school for a year, went back in '32-'33 and wrote my thesis. And I had gone back to North Carolina to teach when I was invited to come with Secretary--

F: Was that North Carolina State?

W: No, at A&T College in Greensboro, North Carolina--a Negro State College. I was the chairman of the department of economics and the department of economics. So I had no trouble with departmental meetings, always 100% attendence.

F: Easier then than now.

W: Absolutely. So in November of that year I was invited to come to Washington as an adviser to Secretary Ickes on Negro affairs and I came here and I stayed for ten years in Washington.

F: How did you get in touch with the Secretary?

W: Well, it was an interesting story. That was the time when the NRA Codes hearings were being conducted, and a classmate of mine, who had finished law school, and I established the National Committee on Industrial Recovery. We got the various civil rights organizations first to support us morally and finally to support us slightly financially. We developed hearings on the various codes because no one was speaking at that time for Negro labor. Many of the codes excluded those occupations in which Negroes were heavily concentrated, so they were getting no benefits from the codes. I did the research work, and he also worked on it, and he did most of the presentations of the briefs, although I presented some of them at the hearings. This, then, called us to the attention of many of the groups that were working in this field, including some that were close to Secretary Ickes, who had set up a racial advisory office under Clark Foreman--a white Georgian but had worked with the Roosevelt--

F: Is that F-o-r-e-m-a-n?

W: Yes. Clark Howell Foreman, so you get some idea of his ancestry. And he was being attacked because it seemed that there was no Negro involved in the activity. It was he who discovered me and it was he who proposed me

to the Secretary, and I came in as an associate adviser and in a few months became the adviser, and Clark moved up to another job.

F: What was your thesis research at Harvard?

W: It was in the field of money and banking and labor, and the title of it was "The High Wage Theory of Prosperity."

F: It didn't lead, then, directly into what became your life work?

W: Not at all, though I did do quite a bit of work in labor and research. I've written about twenty articles on labor and a book on labor. I ultimately went into labor during the war when I worked with Sidney Hillman.

F: Yes. Was official Washington still somewhat segregated when you came here?

W: Not somewhat, completely I think. William Hastie, who is now a federal judge in the Second Circuit Court of Appeals--the chief judge--had finished Harvard Law School and gone back and gotten his SJD and we had been room-mates the same year I got my Ph.D. He came down as assistant solicitor in the Department of the Interior. When we got in the department, there were two lunchrooms, one for "messengers" and the other for other people. And Bill, who is a Negro, and I had no intention of being segregated, so we went into the white lunchroom. To make a long story short, this led to a series of activities--the lady cashier asked me my name, and I asked her hers. She sort of forgot hers for about ten seconds and I wrote it down and I gave her mine. A group went to see Mr. Ickes and said, "Mr. Secretary, do you know what?"

He said, "If I knew what, you wouldn't be here. What?" "The Negroes are eating in the lunchroom." And he kept on signing his mail and one said, "What are you going to do about it?" He said, "Not a damn thing, ladies." And that was the first break in the cafeteria services in the federal establishments.

F: And this was possibly the first department to integrate lunchrooms?

W: Yes, although, of course, this had been not always true because my father used to tell me that when he was in the post office, the segregated facilities, both toilet and eating--apparently these tow things are very closely related--not only physiologically but phychologically--had been unsegregated until the Wilson Administration and then they became segregated and they kept being segregated until the Roosevelt Administration.

F: Did Mr. Ickes consciously set out to make the department a sort of a model of integration, or did he just sort of deal with the situations as they arose?

W: Well, a little bit of both. He had had a long interest in this field. He had been quite active in the Chicago branch of the NAACP. He was close to several of the civil rights leaders, particularly Walter White, who was then the executive director of the NAACP. And the idea of bringing Hastie and myself in and the subsequent recruitment that we made of Negro architects and engineers and lawyers was a conscious effort on his part, one which I spearheaded but spearheaded with his blessings and probably with his request, as I recall it. On the other hand, the things like the lunchroom situation was something that he was not involved in until the final decision had to be made, and he make it in a way that I have indicated. So I would say it was a little bit of both.

F: Was there anything resembling a sort of a Negro brain trust or a clubbiness among Negroes that were above the--?

W: The commentators of the day called it "The Black Cabinet," and this was made up of a loosely formed organization with Mrs. Mary McLeod Bethune as the titular head, and I was more or less the operating head of it. Its makeup varied from time to time, but primarily those Negroes who were in the top jobs in Washington, and there were sufficiently few number of them

for us not to have to have an assembly hall when we met. As a matter of fact, we very often met in my basement in the recreation room when we played a little poker. This was sort of a stimulation where we were able to have a bull session and a little relaxation and also devise some strategies.

F: Was Ralph Bunche a member of this group?

W: No. Ralph met with us not as a member of the group but because he and Bill and I had been friends at Harvard, and are still very close friends. He would come in if we would meet at my house or meet at Bill's or would meet with us otherwise, but not as a member because of his official capacity. At that time, he was teaching at Howard.

F: What work did you do at the Department of Interior?

W: Well, I started out as Adviser in Negro Affairs and also became a consultant to the Housing Division of PWA, which was the first part of government to get into low-rent public housing. In 1937 when the United States Housing Authority was established, I went with Nathan Strauss as special assistant, so I left the Department of Interior.

Now, my concern was sort of a catholic one (with a small "c"). I was involved in working on programs like the Subsistence Homesteads to see that it included Negroes, and I worked in the Public Housing field. I recruited, for example, all of the first Negro managers of the Public Housing projects because we operated them directly at first out of the Housing Division of the Public Works Administration. I was concerned with seeing that, in the Public Works programs like the loans and grants to colleges, the Negro institutions got their share. I worked on recruitment of technical and clerical people for the Department of the Interior and sort of across-the-board on its various programs.

F: Did you have some concern with the Tennessee Valley Authority?

W: Yes, in 1935, I think it was, I was asked by Floyd Reeves, who was then, I believe, in charge of the educational activities, to make a survey of

of the Tennessee Valley Authority vis-a-vis its relationship with and its performance towards Negroes, and I spent three or four weeks down there doing this.

F: You have been credited with having obtained high appointments for several Negroes, most particularly with General Benjamin Davis, Sr.

W: Well, that story has been recorded. I'll repeat it. One evening we were meeting at my house and playing poker and discussing the affairs of state--a small group of us--and I got a call from Jonathan Daniels, who was very upset. It seemed as though President Roosevelt had been campaigning in New York and the impetuous, southern born, Steve Early had kicked a Negro policeman in the groin. This had been played up quite a bit, and Jonathan suggested that I get the boys together, I told him that could be done with a little effort; he proposed that we write a stirring speech. I said, "Well, I'll call you back." So we decided that words would be inadequate and that we should propose a series of appointments. We did not, at that stage of it, get into the matter of the personalities because we had discovered that you were much more effective if you talked about appointing people of certain types and certain abilities in jobs rather than saying you wanted this person or that person appointed. We came up with somebody in Selective Service, somebody in the Department of Defense, a promotion in the Armed Services and one other. Three of the four that we had recommended to be.

F: That's where Davis came in? Had you known Daniels in North Carolina?

W: No, I had known him here ever since he came. I got to know him largely through Will Alexander, who was from Atlanta, who was at one time with the Farm Subsistence Homesteads in the Department of Agriculture, and then later worked with me with Hillman. But I had known Dr. Will, as he was affectionately called, for five years before, and he was very close to Jonathan Daniels. This is how I got to know Jonathan.

F: When you were with the U.S. Housing Authority, did it make any sort of effort to imporve the housing position of Negroes, or was it worked strictly on a low-income basis?

W: No, the Public Housing Program was perhaps one of the outstanding examples of equity of treatment as between white and black Americans. Myrdal, in his The American Dilemma, points this out with statistics which I must admit I had something to do with. But they were accurate statistics. I think it was unique as a construction program in that regard. Now, there had been other programs which had also done something of the same. I would think that the National Youth Administration--in fact I know, because I had worked with them, also--had an equally good record of sharing equitably program participation; but in construction it would have been very, very difficult to achieve a similar result since NYA did little building. In public housing we not only got approximately a third, as I recall, at one time of the units available to non-whites--most of them were Negroes--we also got Negro managers, which was unheard of in places like Atlanta and Memphis and Jacksonville and in Miami. We were able in the North to get projects which were open to both Negroes and whites. This required some doing as early as 1937 to '38. These were the exceptions rather than the rules but they did occur.

F: Of course, public housing has continued to be one of the basic issues now for thirty years, but at the time it was looked upon as quite left-wing by a lot of people, and I might say still is by some, but I think much more generally accepted. Did you run into much difficulty at that time?

W: Oh yes. I ran into difficulty on several counts. One of the other things that I did which probably was the most significant was to develop a non-discrimination clause which was meaningful for the employment of Negro artisans. This was most difficult because we had problems with labor

unions without any real leverage, and we also had problems of a technological gap in the South, where most of them were concentrated then, had not been employed in multi-family construction but employed largely in samll family housing and very often in these multiple units they faced performance difficulties. What I did was to devise, with Bill Hastie unofficially doing the legal work, a prima facie formula. In other words, we said there would not be discrimination which had been said going back as far as when Ogden Mills was Secretary of the Treasury. But it didn't mean anything. We said that there should not be discrimination and "unless X percent of the skilled workers and Y percent of the unskilled workers are non-white, it's prima facie evidence that there is discrimination," so that we put a positive thing on it and were able to get many Negroes employed that would not otherwise have been employed, and also keep the skills of many who might have lost them during that period of low employment. This caused some resentment. Also, the fact that I continued to talk about the evils of ghettos and of ghetto living was not something that made me too popular in certain parts of the Congress. But we survived.

F: Were you one of the early ones to use the term "ghetto" with regard to Negroes?

W: Yes, I think that this term was used very infrequently before 1947 and '48, although W.E.B. DuBoise did so in the second decade of this century. In 1948 I published a book called "The Negro Ghetto," which I think was the first time that that term had been used in the literature in the way that I had used it. There had been some passing references to analogies between the traditional European ghettoes and the enforced racial residential segregation in America. But I don't think the term had been used in that capacity generally before, and I know it had not been used in the title of a book, nor had there been a whole treatise developed on it.

F: Now, the U.S. Housing Authority had as one of its principal beneficiaries the Negro. You erected formulae for the use of Negro labor, both skilled and unskilled, in this, and yet the building trades have been reputedly the slowest to integrate. How do you account for this?

W: Well, I think that it would take a whole treatise to answer that question; in fact, I wrote a book on it called Negro Labor: A National Problem in 1946. But Spiro and Harris, in their earlier book The Black Worker probably have the best account of this. I think that its roots lie in the fact that Negro labor was brought into the industrial North and West primarily in a strike-breaking capacity.

Secondly, as the unions began to evolve, the first and the earlier unions had a very, very democratic point of view as far as inclusiveness and non-discrimination were concenred. But with the rise of trade unions and the skilled trade unions, as contrasted to the industrial union form, a sort of elite in the labor movement developed; and the elite always has to find something that differentiates it from the masses. One of the things to be elite about, both in the general situation and in the economic competitive situation at that time, was the color situation, so that the craft labor unions developed primarily as excluding non-white.

Now, there is another part of that which is very interesting, and that is that up until probably the New Deal--with the exception of standard large construction, particularly public construction, government construction, which was rather infrequent--in the South practically all of the building trades workers were unorganized. And when they began to organize in the South, those that were organized were primarily those that worked with the larger contractors who had union contracts elsewhere, and they worked on large-scale public buildings. There wasn't any multiple housing, but public buildings for the most part. So then when public housing came in and used the same type of contractors, it ran into this union problem and this color

problem. The situation evolved in a sort of an accidental way; the thing evolved rather than by any design on anybody's part.

F: What work did you do here during World War II?

W: First, during the defense period and then during World War II, I worked with Sidney Hillman as an administrative assistant. Here my work was primarily concerned with training and employment for non-white in defense and war industries. And my job was to work first with getting non-whites into training, which was very difficult, because it was very hard to get people into training when there weren't any jobs, and then in opening up job opportunities, and also in working with unions. I did a lot of work where strikes were occurring or where there were problems getting Negroes into trade unions and the like.

F: Why did you leave the government?

W: I left in 1943 because by that time it seemed to be that we weren't moving forward. Waves of reaction had come in particularly in the areas in which I was concerned, and I didn't feel that I was making much progress but rather I was spending most of my time trying to hold the ground that I thought had already been achieved. And so I left at that point. And also because it was perfectly obvious--I think I was then making $6,500 and that was about as much money and as high a position as I was going to get--and everything that I did was restricted into the area of Negro relations. That didn't seem to me to be a street that had a very long direction without a turn in it.

F: Before we leave Sidney Hillman completely, there's plenty of material on one side, but I've never seen it from the inside. What was Hillman's reaction to the "Clear it with Sidney" statement? Was he amused?

W: He never articulated anything. I think that he was more amused than anything else. I will say, of all the men I have ever worked with, I have never seen a man who had the inherent shrewdness that this man had. If

there was any fault that I could lay to him it was the fact that sometimes he was so smart he outsmarted himself, and this didn't help in getting action on Negro training and employment. But in any situation I've never seen anybody get the better of him out of pure gut reaction and out of pure shrewdness.

F: By this time, you were making some notable gains in this matter of relationships between the races here. Where was your stand as far as the policy of gradualism was concerned?

W: I have never been a gradualist. I think that gradualism is really a nice way of saying, "Let's form a committee and let's talk about it and let's have our grandchildren decide."

F: By the time you got to New York in '43, had you begun that white flight to the suburbs?

W: I didn't go to New York, I went to Chicago in '43. As a matter of fact, I had been born in the suburbs and reared in the suburbs and then I moved to the central city and I haven't been back to the suburbs since. It may be the memory of that lawn, I don't know. But I am strictly a central city boy, and I like big cities and I like to be in the heart of the big city.

F: I received anonymously the other day, and I can't figure out from whom, a three-page piece of fantasy that somebody had scribbled across the top, "I wrote this rather than mow the lawn."

W: I would subscribe to that theory though I am a do-it-yourself man. I like to use my hands and I am an electrician by trade. I like to build things and, in fact, when I have time I find great relaxation in that.

F: This is possibly anticipating in our chronological sequence so far, but do you think that this flight to the suburbs is being stemmed, that the central city is being rediscovered?

W: I think that you are having two movements going on simultaneously. You are having a continued movement from the central city, and I think that most people tend to run away from problems that they find difficult to solve if they have any place to run, and this is continuing. It is continuing now, more I think in the lower middle class than the upper middle class as it started, and I think it will continue. At the same time you are having a trek back into the central city of many people of greater economic and social security and older people when their children are no longer in school, and some who are just a little bit tired of fighting that traffic or fighting that commuting, which can become a real burden as time goes on.

F: Was the principle of blockbusting centrally directed or was it pretty haphazard?

W: I think it was pretty haphazard. It was a practice that caught on rather quickly out of necessity, out of shere necessity for expansion required by population movement. It was engineered and increasingly became engineered by the real estate operators, but I must say they did this largely without discrimination because the black ones did it just the same as the white ones. And it was done for an obvious profit motive because, in the first place, the more turnover you get in property, the more income you get to the real estate people. But more important than that was the speculators' coming. They would frighten the pants off of whites saying, "Look, Negroes are coming into your neighborhood. You better sell. We'll give you ten thousand dollars for it." They think it's worth thirteen, and they turn around and sell it to a non-white family for fifteen. In other words, they'd cut off three thousand of what it was valued and add two thousand over what it was worth. Not only did they get the sales commission, but more important than that, they got a very, very quick profit.

F: Do you subscribe to the theory that if you have a white neighborhood and you begin to get a certain percentage of non-whites in it that you in effect have tipped the neighborhood in the direction of the non-white?

W: Well, the late Martin Grodzins, who was formly at the University of Pittsburgh and later at Harvard, got this notion called the tipping theory, and it read very, very, very impressive. The only trouble with it is, it's like the theory that there is a time when if your temperature gets to be a certain amount you will die. The only way you really know that is when you are dead. Well, the only way you will know about the tipping theory is after it's happened. So, the tipping theory is a very good historical concept to describe something, it's not worth a damn as a diagnostic thing because you don't know when it has tipped. And what will be a tipping point in one situation will not be a tipping point in another situation. This goes both for locality and for time. So I would say that it's a nice descriptive thing, and it's good to describe what happened, but it's not worth a damn to tell you what to do to make what you want to happen occur or to keep it from happening if you don't want it to happen.

F: When did you first begin to get the idea of open housing?

W: Oh, I was born with that. I was born in a racially mixed neighborhood. My people moved to the suburbs, which was then in "the country," on the idea that they were not going to voluntarily segregate themselves, and Washington at that time was really no problem. Interestingly enough it was no problem primarily because you could get financing. You could get financing because there two building and loan associations here which had long had Negro clients and the reason they had had them was because of the economics of the situation. Washington had, at that time and until very recently, the largest white-collar middle-class Negro group anywhere in the country, both numerically and proportinately. This was due to the fact that there were the government

jobs here and also the fact that Washington was one of the two cities, the other being St. Louis, in a segregated educational system where you had equal pay so that there were black people with steady incomes who were good risks for mortgage payment. And the result was, I think, it was the Equitable Building and Loan that my father took out a mortgage with in 1904, I guess it was. He paid that off, and then when my brother and I went to college, he took another mortgage and he paid that off. I bought a house through the same man at the same building and loan association. These mortgages were readily available. So this was a great help in being able to get into other neighborhoods which in many cities you could not get the financing to do. I was reared in that atmosphere. I always accepted it. I don't know when I got the notion--I just sort of, like Topsy, I "growed" with it.

F: Apart from you, when did open housing begin to become an objective that looked realizable?

W: I would say it was in the early '40's when this came to be a movement that got some credence. I remember when I went to New York in 1948 there was a national committee--I was president of it, the National Committee Against Discrimination in Housing. This was sort of a coalition of a large number of civil rights organizations supported largely by liberals and church groups like the Quakers and other denominations, the American Jewish Committee, labor unions, and civil rights organizations. It was at that time that the movement really began to develop a literature, began to get a following throughout the country and this thing became a matter of discussion.

F: We will come back to this when we get down to the Johnson Administration. Talking very briefly about riots, and housing relationships, one thing--you have two schools of thoughs, besides those who are totally against riots. One is, of course, that riots advance the cause of civil rights;

that is, give them an impetus and an acceleration that you wouldn't get if you didn't have them. And the other is, of course, that the one who really gets hurt in a riot in a predominately Negro neighborhood is the Negro.

W: I would agree with both points of view. I think that they are unfortunately true. The fear on the one hand, the drama on the other hand, and the concern of protest on the third hand, do call attention to problems which nice middle-class peoyle would prefer not to recognize, and this is what happens as far as the salutary effects of riots are concerned. And I might say. We are a little ahead of our story, because this is in the context of the mid-'60's rather than in the '40's.

On the other hand, I think that as far as riots are concerned and violence is concerned, insofar as it is concentrated in the ghetto, there is no question but that the ghetto residents are the people who suffer the most from this because they suffer the dislocation of their homes, the dislocation of the services that exist there, and a disorganization of an area which is already fairly disorganized.

But I think the real answer is that I suppose the group that suffers the most is the whole of society itself. It suffers psychologically because it gets a tremendous guilt feeling in some areas, and it suffers also in a democracy, it seems to me, because when you have this type of violence, it's a demonstration that the democratic system is not working. My idea of the gread advantage and the great attribute of the democratic system is the possibility for orderly change. As I have said repeatedly that had the American public been willing to listen to the people that they now glorify as the moderates when they were considered radicals--I remember my own confirmation when I was considered by some to be a Communist because I had been the chairman of the national board of NAACP--that if the requests and the demands which we had been making which were entirely within the democratic

process had been paid attention to you would not have had the Stokley Carmichaels and the Rap Browns of today.

F: You returned to the academic world for a while, didn't you?

W: Yes, I went to Chicago, first, as the director of the mayor's committee on race relations for a year. And then I went with the American Council on Race Relations, which was primarily a research organization. While with them, I lectured at Northwestern and continued to do quite a bit of writing--did two books in Chicago, one in '46 and ine in '48. Then when I went to New York, I went directly into the academic field.

F: What did you teach there?

W: I taught a course in sociology at Northwestern; and then I taught at Teachers' College at Columbia a course in housing, a course in planning, and one of the overall social science courses which was a matter of three professors lecturing jointly to a rather large group and then breaking up into smaller sections. And when I was at New York University, I taught planning and housing.

F: And then you went with the Whitney Foundation.

W: Yes.

F: In what capacity?

W: I went with the John Hay Whitney Foundation as Director of Opportunity Fellowships. These were graduate fellowships to groups which had not been able to participate fully in American society--Negroes, Puerto Ricans, Mexican-Americans, immigrants who came over to this country who had been persecuted under the Nazi situation in Europe, and Appalachian whites. And these were in academic fields for masters and doctorates and they were in the arts--writers, performers, musicians, composers, and painters, sculptors, and the like.

F: Who brought you back into government service at the state level?

W: Well, when Harriman was elected Governor of New YORK, I was appointed as the Deputy Housing Commissioner where I served for a year, and then I became the State Rent Administrator in charge of rent control. New York was the only state that had rent control at that time, we had over two million units under rent control. And as head of that commission, I was a member of the Cabinet of the State of New York, and I stayed there until Harriman's defeat in 1958.

F: Newly-built units did not come under control, did they?

W: No. There were two limitations. There were units that had been built before the time that the law was enacted. And there was also a ceiling on the rentals finally. In fact, I was the first rent administrator ever to decontrol any units voluntarily, and I cut them off, as I recall, at about $500 a month. It seemed to me to be that people who were able to pay such rents didn't need quite that much protection, although with what's happened recently in New York, maybe I was wrong.

F: Particularly with your moving back there.

W: When I look at my rent, which is double what it was in Washington for about the same facility, I have some questions.

F: Then you went with the Ford Foundation.

W: Yes, then I went with Ford as a consultant for about eighteen months.

F: Consultant on what?

W: I was a consultant in the Division of Public Affairs. These were the activities that had to do with government and government's relations to people, and primarily, again, housing was my area of concentration, although I did a study of, and memorandum about Negro colleges.

F: In all of this period had you done any campaign work?

W: I campaigned for Harriman in his reelection and confirmed my suspicion that I was not a great politician as a result of that, but I had some allies to help me too who were probably much better--not probably, they were much better than I. In any event that was the only campaigning that I had done, save a few actions during the New Deal.

F: Did you take any active part at all in the campaign of 1960 on the national level?

W: No. I was covered by the Hatch Act.

F: How did you happen to come to the attention of John F. Kennedy?

W: I haven't the slightest idea. I have been told by no less than twenty people that they had seen President-elect Kennedy and told him of my great abilities, but it seems inconceivable that all twenty did it, so I don't know.

My contacts with President Kennedy were quite restricted. I had met him at a large cocktail party, and I'm sure he didn't remember me from Adam's uncle. And then between the time of his nomination and his election--I was then the chairman of the board of the NAACP, and Roy Wilkins was Executive Secretary--I spent an hour with him talking, however, not about housing but about problems of race relations and the status of Negroes in the country. And those are the only two contacts, and I'm sure the only one he remembered was the latter one. I am sure that some of the people that I had known and had worked with called me to his attention, as to which ones I couldn't tell you.

F: Were you at any time in there promised a Cabinet post?

W: Well, yes and no. On the 26th of December of 1960, I was then the Vice Chairman of the Housing and Redevelopment Board of New York, which is the board that has to do with its moderate income housing program which

was my particular concern and its urban renewal program which was some of my concern. Bob Wagner, who was Mayor of New York then, called me and said that he understood that Jack Kennedy wanted to see me; that he was interested in talking to me about either becoming the Commissioner of FHA or the Administrator of HHFA. Well, the Administrator of HHFA, Housing and Home Finance Agency, was the one who was the overall person in the field of housing. I said to the mayor that I would be interested in that. I would not be interested in FHA because I felt, and still feel, a person who is running FHA should be more of a technician in FHA procedures, than I am. And I might say that in the seven and three-quarters years I have been here, I have not read in full many of our regulations and I never intend to read most of them. I certainly don't know them all, and I never intend to learn them all.

But in any event, on the 29th of December--I remembered because it was my 53rd birthday--I went down to Palm Beach to talk with the President. I had a good idea of what he was going to talk to me about, and when I got there Ralph Dungan talked to me on the phone and told me what it was. I had only two questions to ask President-elect Kennedy. The first one was if he was prepared to issue an executive order banning discrimination in housing. And he indicated that he was. And the second one was if and when there was a department, would I be the secretary. And he gave a very sanguine reply. He said, "You would be a logical contender." I felt that was about all I could extract from him, so I acquiesced.

F: Was there any serious consideration for you as a successor to Abraham Ribicoff in HEW?

W: Well, there was a great deal of talk about it, and I had reason to believe that it would have been imminent. In fact, I had enough reason to believe it to talk to two of the Presidential assistants, indicating the fact that

I was interested in housing and not interested in getting in HEW. I might say in passing that this became more of a live possibility without an actual offer. It's like a girl who is being courted and she has a feeling that the question is going to be popped and she begins to figure about what her trousseau will be. I was in that position and I therefore did a little research. I found out about some of the problems of HEW and I decided that it was a hornet's nest, and that I would rather stay in a field where I had spent most of my adult life than to get into other fields which I was knowledgeable about to some degree. In other words, I knew something about education, I knew something about welfare, I knew nothing about health, but this did not seem to be the area in which I wished to go. I was interested in being Secretary of housing activities and urban development activities rather than just being a secretary.

So I went to talk with the President and indicated this to him. He never categorically said that he was about to appoint me to that other job, but I had very, very good reasons to believe that he was thinking seriously of doing it. But I could not honestly say that he had committed himself to it. Others who seemed to think they could speak for him had strongly indicated this, and I just withdrew.

The reason for this was that I was the recipient of the Spingarn Medal which is a medal given by the NAACP for outstanding performance by a Negro, and I was going to go to Atlanta to receive the award. I knew I would have to meet the press. What I said to the President was that I wanted to clear with him the fact that I intended to say that I was not interested in HEW and I wanted him to know that before I did say it. And he didn't object, so I said it.

F: How far did the move to elevate Housing and Home Finance to a Cabinet rank get?

W: Well, it got so far that there was a proposal submitted for reorganization by the President to the Congress. And it got into a very, very difficult and complex and peculiar situation. In the House it was perfectly obvious that we did not have the votes, and so there was a legislative shift to bring it up in the Senate first. In order to do this, they bypassed McClellan's committee, and McClellan then took the position indignation, which a chairman always takes when he wants to defeat something and get a lot of support without raising the substantive issue, and we lost in the Senate. Well, once we lost in the Senate, that was it. That killed it.

While I think the legislative footwork was probably a little too astute to be successful, I don't think if we had gone by any route we would have gotten it at that time. The opposition to it was too great, and it was opposition really on two basic issues. The first was the issue of concentration of federal government and impingement upon local government and so forth, which some people honestly felt and others didn't like it for other reasons. And, secondly, the fact that it seemed as though I might become Secretary was another element which was very much involved in the killing of it. I'm sure it was involved because I made that statement on a TV show with one of the senators, which rarely gets any play, and in the left-hand corner of the first page of the New York Times the following day it was reported that I had been asked whether or not I felt there was any racial elements in it, and I said, "Well, let me say this. I think that nine out of ten Negro Americans are convinced of that fact." I was attacked as being a bigot for saying that. I still think it was an accurate statement, and I still think that this was one of the elements in it, not the only element, of course.

But I think these were the two real problems that were involved; of course, there was a little bit of politics in it too.

F: Yes. When you were nominated as Housing Administrator, you had something of a round for confirmation.

W: Yes, it was one of the best things that ever happened to me. It really gave me a wonderful forum. It gave me an opportunity to establish an image, I think, of being able to handle myself when I was under pressure. And it also gave me a chance to get some exposure which, because of the inepitude of some of those who opposed me, turned out to be beneficial rather than detrimental.

F: Did you meet Senator William Blakeley of Texas personally in this?

W: Yes, I had my first encounter and I think my only encounter with him. He was a great help. He was being coached very avidly by five or six assistants--

F: You mean by members of his staff?

W: Yes. He was trying to establish the fact that I was left-wing, to put it charitably, or a Communist to put it bluntly, and he was doing this by guilt by association. I had written this book, The Negro Ghetto, and it had been reviewed in Mainstream and something else which was a left-wing publication by a left-wing writer--a Communist writer, as far as that's concerned. And the title of this was something about The Negro Ghetto by Jim Crow, or The Negro Ghetto and Jim Crow. Anyway, the two things were at the top of it and it was signed by the person who did the review at the end of the piece.

And so the senator gleefully picked this up and said, "I have the review of your book written in this Communist magazine. Do you know Jim Crow?"

I said, "Yes, I've encountered him very frequently. But, Senator, I didn't know he wrote book reviews." And Willis Robertson, who had not been one of my proponents and who had been attacking me but in a much more sophisticated manner and with a courtly southern gentleman's switch of a knife, almost fell off his chair in laughter, because he recognized Jim Crow. But the Senator from Texas doesn't to this day, or at least not during that day, recognize the fact of what he was saying and the implications of it. But this was a great help. It put a little humor in what had been a rather tight situation.

F: Did you ever have any doubt that you had the votes?

W: No. I was enough of a politician to be able to get a headcount ahead of time, and I knew that I had the votes.

F: These two reasons you gave a moment ago are the reasons you think that Kennedy failed to get a Department of Housing and Urban Development?

W: Yes. I think the first was the idea of creeping nationalism, too much large government and government getting into local affairs was one. The second one was the opposition of some to my being the secretary. A large part of this, I would say, was racial, and some of it was because some people felt that I was a little on the liberal side, shall I say.

F: When John F. Kennedy ran for President in 1960, he promised an end to discrimination in federal housing. It was 1962 before he issued this Executive Order No. 11063. Two things: Why the delay, and what was your role in finally bringing it to pass?

W: I think the delay was due to several factors. I think the first one was that as any President and as any administrator, you have a legislative goal and you want to get things through and you tend to put off the most controversial issues as long as possible. You rationalize this on the basis that it's more important to get this legislation through and then

do this than the other way around.

F: And maybe you'll gain some momentum.

W: Yes. The second reason for this was purely a technical and a legal reason. There were a lot of legal problems, and the great issue in this was what coverage should be, and whether or not it should be retroactive. The real big 64 dollar question was whether it should be restricted, as it was ultimately, to direct federally financed--federally insured under FHA and federally guaranteed under VA--or whether it should include the Home and Loan Bank Board and then include those institutions where the deposits are insured by the federal government. This was a very heated discussion, not acrimonious but heated, and there were very great differences. On that issue I was for maximum coverage, obviously.

On the retroactivity I had a little different feeling because I felt that there was great difficulty in administration on this retroactivity deal, where retroactivity depended upon an executive order rather than legislation. And also there were some very grave Constitutional questions at that time.

There was a third thing and that was the fact that whereas the President had control over the Home Loan Bank Board and over FHA and over VA, he did not have control over the regulatory agencies because they had a degree of semi-autonomy on the one hand and, secondly, he didn't have that many appointees to be able to control them. And these were the issues.

The final decision, I will never forget it. I was called one afternoon over to the Department of Justice. Bobby Kennedy gave me the bad news of the restricted coverage, and I remonstrated then as I had before--I had always taken a position contrary to that. However, I recognized the fact, as I said to Bobby, I had two choices. I either went along with

that or else I resigned. And I wasn't ready to resign, so I went along with it.

F: Aside from your personal feeling of tragedy and loss, what was your reaction to Kennedy's murder as far as your position, your programs, and so forth were concerned? Can you reconstruct that?

W: I was in Cleveland. I was going on to a TV show, a quiz show, when I heard the word and I couldn't continue. And I was really so shaken by this tragic thing--because this was a man of great personal charm, he was a man of great chrisma, and a man, I think, of really a sincere liberal orientation. I had seen him under pressures and I had seen him take the positions that I admired--that certainly not until after the funeral did I think about this. And by that time things had moved so quickly that I just didn't have time to think too much about this one way or the other; I think this was true of many of my colleagues. It was such a shock that it almost seemed immoral to begin thinking, "Well, what's going to happen to me!" after what happened to this young man.

Then, of course, when the new President came in--and by this time I had gotten to know Lyndon Johnson, which I hadn't done before, and had worked with him in many respects--when I got word that he wanted me to continue, it sort of just moved on from there. So I did not have these grave feelings.

F: There weren't any particular problems of transition from one administration to the other within your agency?

W: No.

F: Were there any problems with personnel as far as some looking backwards and some looking forward, any tensions there that caused any problems?

W: I don't think so, I don't recall any.

F: When did you first really get to know Johnson?

W: Well, I knew of him, interestingly enough, as I said before, when the National Youth Administration, NYA, was set up, John Corson--

F: That goes back almost a third of the century.

W: That goes back to '33 or '34. John Corson, whom I had met in Richmond, Virginia, when he was the head of the local housing authority or doing something there where we had some business with the PWA with him. He came in and set NYA up, he didn't stay, but he set it up. Corson had been then with the Social Security Administration I believe. He called me in and I worked very closely with them on setting up some of their-- I guess it was '35. And I soon heard about this guy down in Texas who was running the National Youth Administration and he was shocking some people up on the Hill because he thought that the National Youth Administration benefits ought to go to poor folks. And it seems as though a lot of nice middle-class people, who thought maybe this would be a nice free train for them to get on, were outraged by this, and apparently some of their congressmen reflected this. To make bad matters worse, he was giving a hell of a lot of this money to Mexican-Americans and Negroes. And then Frank Horne, who later became my assistant in the United States Housing Authority, and whom I recruited for NYA, worked in NYA and got to know Lyndon Johnson very well. He used to speak about this guy from Texas. Even then, he was sort of an enigma to many people, but Frank was very high on him.

So then, of course, I knew of him, as all of us did during the Eisenhower Administration when he was in the Senate.

When I first came here in '61, during the time of my confirmation, Lyndon Johnson was one of those whom I went to see and went to talk to and he gave me some very helpful advice. And then later, when he began

working on the equal opportunity of employment, I was at the sessions of that committee, and I got to know him there. And then he began to pull in individuals on certain problems and I met with him on those. So I had gotten to know him, not intimately, but know him well enough so that he recognized me and knew me, and I think he was on first name terms with me. And I had been thrown into contact with him on several specific things so that I knew something about his mode of operation. I also had seen him take some pretty strong positions as far as equal opportunity in employment was concerned and so forth, and had had the temerity in one or two instances of making some suggestions to him. It happened also that some of his friends, one in particular--a woman lawyer, Marjorie Lawson, who was rather close to him--had involved me with him in some problems that he had. So I had worked with him briefly, let's put it that way.

F: May I ask what kind of problems?

W: These were problems in connection with the equal opportunity in employment and something about training and employment of Negroes, I've forgotten the details.

F: Did you have any involvement with him at all in his Senate Majority days when the Civil Rights Act went through in the latter '50's?

W: No.

F: Did you feel, in this period of his Vice Presidency, as some have charged, that his approach to civil rights was pragmatic politics and perhaps contrived, or did you feel that his commitment was emotional? This is subjective, but I would be interested in your answer.

W: Well, my original reaction was one of doubt; was one that this was a pragmatic politician doing what came natural and what ought to be done as a matter of politics. And then I didn't think any more because I have

been in this business long enough not to go around and try to find out people's motives but to find out what they do. And I discovered that the people who do the least for you are those who can cry their heart out on how bad your position is, but then they don't do a damned thing for you. So I take my blessings where I get them and don't try to psychoanalyze the sources.

F: You've probably had the experience we have had of dealing with a few purists, you know, who won't get on with it.

W: Yes. They can always tell you, you know, they just die, they bleed, but they don't do a damned thing.

F: Now then, Johnson is President of the United States. What happens to your relationship with him at this time?

W: At first it was like any other change. There was a shock. I think one of the things that happens in a case like this--I know it happens because it happened when I came here, some of the fellows told me about it afterwards--the first thing you do is you begin to compare and contrast the old with the new. And the style of these two men was so different that it was very, very hard to judge this new man and this new approach. I was somewhat fortunate, however, very fortunate, in that I've been dealing with very, very busy people for the greater part of my adult life, and I have long since discovered that if you want to get things done, you don't get them done by being a prima donna and by insisting upon seeing the boss every time there is a problem. Remember I had my apprenticeship under Ickes. In the first place, you catch him when he is made and tired. In the second place, you make a pain out of yourself.

So, as I say, it had been my technique, because I realize how time consuming these jobs are, to try to get as much done through the staff as possible. I had worked out an excellent relationship with Lee White,

who was the man in the White House who handled this area, and he stayed on. So this made my own transition very easy because I did not have problems that were handled differently from the way they had been before. I didn't have to adjust to new personalities and so forth. And then as I got to meet and work with the new President, it came in things where I could choose my shots. I soon found out that here was a man, like most busy people, who liked a concise presentation, and I learned what to do. I also used a little judgment about going to him first with those things that I thought I would get a favorable response to, and then sort of build up to the more controversial ones. So I had no great difficulty with this.

On the other hand, I was soon impressed by the fact that he was ready to go ahead on big programs in this area, he was quite knowledgeable about the field of housing and very much concerned about the people aspect of it, as I was. So that we were able to move, largely because of his background in public housing--as you know, the first public housing project, I think, was built in his district, in Austin as I recall, or Johnson City, I've forgotten which, and this made it a little easier than it would have been otherwise. So that I had no great difficulty at that time. I had a little problem a little later, but we will get to that a little later.

F: Did you ever get the feeling that he may have resented inheriting you and would like to have named his own man?

W: No, I didn't. I got the feeling, as far as I personally was concerned, that he accepted me as his man as well as his predecessor's man; that I was working for the Office of the Presidency and that I was able to transfer my loyalty from one to the other without too much difficulty. At least I felt that way, and I think he felt that way.

F: What was your role in the urban task forces in 1964 and 1965?

W: In the 1964 task force, my special assistant for program policy was the dominant person. I worked very closely with him, and I had a very, very large role in the '64 task force through this. The '65 task force, which operated after the new department had been established and I had not been named as Secretary--no secretary had been named--my involvement in that was very little. On the '67-'68 one, I was the chairman and an effective participant.

F: Where did you first get acquainted with Robert Wood?

W: I knew Bob Wood since the early '60's. I set up a task force in 1961 or '62, I've forgotten which now, made up of Bob Wood, Victor Fisher, and Louis Whetmore, all three of whom are planners, in order to get a new approach to planning in the agency (HHFA). We had a program of comprehensive planning, but it had not been too effective, it had been sort of a gesture. And I wanted to make this real. They came out with a very hard-hitting report. In fact, it was so hard-hitting that I suppressed it because if it had ever gotten abroad, it would have ruined us. But I did hire Victor Fisher, who is now teaching at the University of Alaska, to come in as my top planning man. Over the next three years, as long as he stayed here, he left about three years ago, he had carried out most of the things that were in that task force report. As I recall, Bob Wood was the chairman of that task force. Then when we had the task force of '63 or '64--I've forgotten which, one or the other--he was a member of that task force. And he would come in and we would talk quite frequently. Of course, in the '65 task force, while I was not a part of it, we did talk quite frequently, but not about the substance of the task force's work. So I got to know him very well.

F: Did you feel competitive with Wood in the way the department was developing?

W: No.

F: Did you consider Wood as a possible Secretary of HUD?

W: No.

F: Did you consider anybody besides Robert Weaver?

W: Yes. I felt that if they were going to get a Secretary, and if I were not the person, that they would not get a person with a background similar to mine, and Wood's background was somewhat similar to mine, though I had had more experience. Both of us had been in the research end, both of us had a touch of the academic; I had a touch of it and he had immersion in it. But we were both eggheads and I didn't think they would get rid of one egghead and get another one.

F: All right. Would you want to describe your role in the formation of HUD?

W: Yes. I think I ought to go back a little. After the department was established by act of Congress, and we worked very hard, I and my associates, to get that legislation through as well as did others, I had assumed that it might be possible that I would become the Secretary. I immediately began to set up machinery for organizing a new department in the event that I would be. I got the most experienced people we had here in administration, and I then began to indicate to them the structure and the objectives and so forth that I would want to have--that I would suggest would be done. So we had developed, by the time the appointment was made, pretty much of an outline as to the direction which the department would go.

In the meantime, in that period after the bill was signed, there was, up until I think from about sixty or ninety days, an interim period, and after that time the law became operative and there had to be a Secretary. In that period, nothing happened as far as appointment was

concerned. And when the time came, when those ninety days expired, I then went to the White House where both Lee White and Joe Califano were--Joe beginning to phase into some of the responsibilities that Lee had and other responsibilities--and indicated that I felt that since the time was coming that I was going to resign because I did not want to be in the unfortunate position of being sort of a hanger-on on the one hand. And secondly, I did not think that anybody who would be the Acting Secretary would be able to get the sort of cooperation that one needed, and the department would not really get going. People would decide, and this actually did happen, that I was sort of a lame duck and those that had been responsive would become less responsive. I remember one of my close associates whom I had brought in had decided that and his little boy, nine years old, said to somebody, "Robert Weaver thinks he is going to be Secretary, but he ain't going to be Secretary." I wonder where he got that from? But anyway, his father had assumed that, too, so he quit and had gone someplace else. I indicated very strongly my attitude. After a great deal of discussion, I did not resign although I had indicated that I would and told some of my friends on the outside. I had been urged not to do it, but this waiting had become a very, very difficult thing. It was one of the times when I must say that my feelings toward President Johnson were less than warm. In fact, I still have a copy of the letter that I had prepared to send to him.

F: It was never sent?

W: I didn't send the letter, but I indicated to Lee White and Joe Califano that I was going to quit, and to the staff, and set up an appointment to see the President and tell him that, with the letter that I was going to have in my hand. I was dissuaded from doing that by Lee and Joe and by people on the outside--three or four that I had discussed it with and

with whom I was intimate.

So then when the final decision was made, the President asked me how did I feel about Bob Wood as the Under Secretary, and I said I was enthusiastic about it, which I was. But I had had no indication and no hint of this up to that time. I was pleasantly surprised.

F: You mean you became Secretary by being asked about your thoughts for Under Secretary?

W: No. I was told that the President was going to appoint me as Secretary, and then he asked me about my reaction to Bob Wood.

F: A going department can go for some time without a top administrator just on the sheer momentum and organization. What do you do with a new department when you don't have one coming out of the chute?

W: It's a very difficult situation. What you try to do and what I tried to do was to hold all of the good people that I would have wanted had I been elected the secretary on the staff, and with the exception of two or three, I was able to do this. But you find your authority eroding very rapidly under that situation. You also find--I think the worst thing that happens in that situation is that you get an image of lack of impetus and the press just preys on this and they decide that the President has no confidence in you.

F: You don't even have the forum of a person who has been fired.

W: That's right. And you also have the situation where you also don't have the opportunity of saying too much. I committed, apparently, the thing that was supposed to be a faux pas. I was asked in a press conference--as I recall it, it was something like the 9th of November when the time came when a Secretary had to be appointed--and I was asked to become the Acting Secretary. Just before that--somebody asked me did I want to be the Secretary, and I said, "Yes." Well, you aren't supposed to do that,

apparently. But, hell, I wasn't going to stand up there and say, "No." Nobody would have ever believed me anyway, because if I didn't want to be, I would have quit before that. So these are the types of difficulties you run into. And also, you do run into a lowering of morale, and I think the morale in the department was lower in that period from the 9th until the 18th of January than it has ever been since I have been around here.

F: Why do you think he waited so long?

W: Well, I don't know. That's the inscrutable--I frankly don't know.

F: Had your position on rent supplements anything to do with perhaps this impasse?

W: I don't think so, primarily. The rent supplement situation was very interesting. What happened was that the rent supplement program as originally conceived, and this was conceived out of a finding of a task force in which I had been a part, and the Bureau of the Budget and other people's idea, was that this was going to be a substitute not for low income housing that was done by public housing, but for moderate income housing, and it was with that objective that we had presented it to the Congress. We ran into some problems up on the Hill, and it was obvious the only way it would get through would be to cut it down, because the congressmen didn't like to go back home and say that a family making $8,000 a year would get some sort of help, you see, because $8,000 in New York was about comparable to about $4,000 in his district as far as costs were concerned.

F: But it's still $8,000 in the public press.

W: So we had to change it. And then in order to get the thing going because it was so new, the FHA sent out a bulletin which set forth the requirements, and in that bulletin they set up income limits and also set up

asset limits. The asset limits were pretty high for elderly people because there are many elderly people who may have 10,000 bucks, but if they are going to have to get into that 10,000 bucks, that just takes all of their security away from them. I was in favor of the limits but they hadn't been decided upon.

Well, the Republicans hopped on that and tried to defeat the program with that, and the press interpreted it as a faux pas that I had made. What actually had happened had been that this was a tentative regulation and it so said in the inside but it didn't say it on the outside. And the faux pas was not mine, the faux pas was FHA's. But when you are in a job like this, you know, when something happens, you don't go around saying, "He done it," or "They done it," you just take it. I would think that this may have been a part of it, but I really believe that certainly the President and those around him knew what was happening, and I think they knew that this was a matter of a political attack really on him and on this program. But it didn't help.

F: Did you have some contention with Senator Mike Mansfield on this?

W: No, not on this. I was told that Mike Mansfield was mad with me because of something that happened as far as answering some letter and some inquiry that he had made. I had never been conscious of this. It had never come to my attention. He certainly had never indicated anything to me of displeasure.

F: What was your role with the idea and the formation of the Model Cities Program?

W: The Model Cities Program primarily came out from the 1965-66 task force; I would say the task force of '66, though it started meeting in December of '65. This was a task force that was chaired by Bob Wood, and I had nothing to do with the development of that task force's finding. I'll

I'll come back--I did have something to do with the model cities.

Interestingly enough, however, in January of '66, I developed a program for eight cities in which we would do exactly what the model cities does except instead of having HUD and other programs, it would have been only HUD programs. And when I was just about to announce it and I sent it over to the White House, as you do on big announcements, I got a call, "Don't do this because it will conflict." And it was a parallel program but not as extensive as the Model Cities Program, and it was all ready to go. So we were both thinking in the same directions, but I had nothing to do with the development of what came to be Model Cities.

I did have a great deal to do with its final presentation because one of the problems with the Model Cities Program financially was it was dependent largely upon urban renewal funds and there would have not been enough urban renewal funds to have launched it, so I added to the legislation authorization for $600 million dollars of supplemental urban renewal funds so as to make it financially viable. But this is not my program, from the sense of conception. I had one somewhat similar, but not the model cities.

F: There is some belief that you balked at the formation of the Model Cities Program at the outset because it was one more burden than you could handle in a new arrangement.

W: That is absolutely untrue. That has been bantered around and Bob Wood can attest to this; I was extremely receptive to the model cities. Obviously I would have been receptive to it because it was along the line that I was already thinking anyhow. And, secondly, what I tried to do was to make it more viable, and there was absolutely no truth to the assertion that I opposed the program. As a matter of fact, I think that this came out in an article which reflected an interview with Joe Califano,

and I sent the President a very, very hot letter on this, objecting strenuously. In that same interview it was said that I had opposed the rat control legislation and that this had come from the geniuses in the White House. In fact, nobody in the White House had heard about a rat control program until I suggested it, and they had nothing to do with it. Joe denies having said this. But in any event, both of these are made out of whole cloth by whoever may have said them. I did not object to model cities; in fact, I pushed model cities from the very inception and I thought it was an excellent idea.

F: The formula for the financing of these cities was changed at the last moment. Why?

W: The first part of the change was the introduction of this additional money. The second part of the change came from cutting down on the number of years, not on the volume of the program, but the number of years of the program. That was done by Senator Muskie. Joe Califano went up to get Ed Muskie to sponsor this bill, and Ed insisted upon this. I then insisted upon and got the White House to go along with it and that we would cut back on the years but not the volume. In other words, instead of doing five years at a given rate, we'd do three years at the same rate--the same thing I did on cutting back that 1968 housing bill--but we got three years instead of five.

The reason that Ed had to be involved in it was this. This was the year '66, when Sparkman was running in Alabama, and the model cities was not something that he could champion--al albatross that he could not put around his neck that year. Senator Douglas, who would have been the next person, was running in Chicago in a very tough fight and he didn't have time, he felt, to take it on. And so then somebody thought, I think it was Joe, thought of Muskie, and Joe and Larry O'Brien, I think, but I

know Joe went up to Maine and got Muskie to do it, and then we worked very closely with Muskie on it. But the cutting it back was purely a means of getting it palatable to the Congress. So that instead of having something like $5 billion, you had something like $3.2 billion.

F: Getting back to the setting up of HUD, why in your opinion could you get HUD through in the Johnson Administration and not in the Kennedy Administration?

W: I think several reasons. In the first place, and I hope I don't sound immodest in saying this--somebody asked me the other day, he had been hearing this thing, "What part has race played in it?" I think that by this time I was able to get the people up on the Hill for the most part to recognize that I was not a dragon or something to be feared, and I think that many of them felt that I knew something about what I was doing, and I think that I had a great deal more acceptance. This was proved by the fact that when my nomination for Secretary came up in the Senate, it was passed unanimously by the Housing Subcommittee and also by the full committee.

F: You didn't have a repetition of that first--?

W: No. So, I think I had become a little less of an unknown quantity and a little more of a person and an administrator rather than a professional Negro. And I think, too, that the times have changed a great deal since 1961. And that people were more receptive to, first, the problems of the city and, secondly, they were reconciled to the fact that if there was a department and that if I had been named for it, that there would be much less opposition. The Republicans were sort of behind the eight-ball on this because when the department was first turned down and I was an element in it, the Republican Senators said, "Well, it wasn't because of Mr. Weaver. Why, we'd be delighted to have him head up HEW," and so forth.

They couldn't very well oppose it, and the Southern opposition had, to some degree, dried up, so I think this has a great deal to do with it. But I think it was mainly the times and the fact that people recognized that the urban problems required a more concentrated and a more effective approach than they had before. And in addition to that, of course, it came, unless I am mistaken, after the President had a resounding victory and when he had great support in the newly-elected Congress, much of which had come in on his coattails.

F: You've had an experience that in 175 years of Constitutional government in this country less than a score of men have had, and that is establishing a new department. What were your problems, what went easily? In other words, let's talk just a little bit about that. What did you do about personnel? Where did you get them?

W: The first thing I tried to do was look at the structure. I had a unique problem, which I suppose any--well, HEW had it and Alan Boyd has had it in Transportation--and that is that we had five little fiefdoms over here, and each one was pretty damned autonomous and had not only its own autonomy, but had something of its own lobby in the Congress and its own congressional support. Well, the first thing that was obvious to me was that if we were going to have a department, it didn't mean a tinker's damn if you didn't pull this thing together.

So the first thing I decided to do was I was going to scramble it up. I couldn't scramble FHA because the law required FHA to remain autonomous, as it were. I had already gotten myself an FHA Commissioner who was cooperative and was willing to really pull the thing on the team, so I was all right with him. The problem with him was to get him through the White House, which is a story down the road. I decided I would abolish the autonomy of urban renewal and reduce its position in the

organizational pattern. Then I decided that I would take the other programs and just mix them up, and I had to have a rationale to do this. So I hit on the rationale which was those programs which had to do primarily with the inner city would be put under one assistant secretary; those that had to do with the metropolitan area would be put under another assistant secretary--one assistant secretary primarily for urban renewal and public housing, and the other one for metropolitan development. Then I would get an assistant secretary to handle the model cities. But since we didn't have the model cities at that time, I had to give him something else, so I put interdepartmental relations under him. Then the FHA, with itself, had to be there, and Fannie Mae with itself, and then an assistant secretary for administration.

Well, this ran into no end of difficulty because a section of Bob Wood's task force under Heineman had come up with their idea of how this was going to be and it was entirely different. There was a very, very fine chart, all the little boxes fit in neatly but it wasn't worth a damn, in my opinion, to run this department. And the Bureau of the Budget had its idea. Then we had a question of what we were going to do about staff and line. The Heineman subcommittee, as I recall, wanted all the assistant secretaries to be staff completely. Well, I decided they were going to be both. They were going to be staff insofar as they are the top advisory group and they got together on policies and so forth; but line in the sense that they are responsible for the administration of particular programs which fall under their jurisdiction, because otherwise you are going to have a bottleneck if everything is going to come through the Secretary's office.

And we got over that hurdle, making a few enemies on the way, and I lost or got rid of most of the top people who had been commissioners and

administrators (some resigned because of the new organization), and then we had to find the people for the new jobs. I will say this--that under both President Kennedy and under President Johnson, I have been able to choose my top staff.

F: I was going to ask you--you had quite a number of Presidential appointments here.

W: Every one of those I chose.

F: And you made the recommendation, and the recommendation was followed.

W: I did the recruiting; I made the recommendation. I had a little problem with Kennedy on one that he wanted. He had made a promise to a certain gentleman, whom there's no reason to identify, early in his Administration to appoint him as commissioner of urban renewal. I did not want this gentleman because I had some very good valid reasons for not wanting him, among those would have been his image wouldn't have been too good. I wanted Slayton. So for months, every time I would see the President, he would say, "What about so-and-so for renewal?" I would say, "I got problems." Well, I outwaited him, and he gave this guy another job and then I got Slayton through, so that any mistakes that were made in those selections were mine, and any of the goodies were mine. On the whole, it was a pretty good staff, I think.

F: Did you try to follow any racial formula?

W: No. Then, when I got to the assistant secretaries, this was kind of a hard thing. Remember, this hit in 1966 in which there were only two years left for the Administration, and anybody that you wanted had a pretty good position and so forth, so recruitment wasn't easy. But I was able to select, and I want to say this. I involved Bob Wood in things like major policy decisions and personnel--we worked together jointly and we interviewed people together and so forth. The final decision was mine,

but it was something in which he participated all of the way through. The only trouble with Bob Wood and me is that we are too damn much alike. We don't complement each other; we simply perpetuate our sins and maybe our virtues. But in any event, we were able to do this and I was able to recruit the people. I think the way you recruit people for this sort of job is to try to make it an exciting experience, and I think--in fact I know--all of the people that are here have felt an excitement about it. At least, all the Presidential appointees stayed throughout the Administration. One of the things I did--.

M: Excuse me, gentlemen. The tape is about to run off.

F: Now, that brings us up to a moment of truth. Do you want us to come back? Do you want us to continue? What do you want us to do?

W: I've got a meeting at the Budget Bureau. I might as well keep on while you're here.

F: All right.

W: You've ruined my afternoon. I might as well let you do it completely.

F: All right. We'll do that.

(end of first tape)

INTERVIEWEE: ROBERT C. WEAVER (Tape #2)

INTERVIEWER: JOE B. FRANTZ

November 19, 1968

W: Well, you asked me about raiding other departments. For the presidential appointees, there was only one instance where I raided another department--in the instance of the Assistant Secretary for Administration. That was almost inevitable because I'd either had to promote a man from within or take one from another department since I needed a person who had had experience in this particualr sort of administrative work before. I took Dwight Ink who came from the Atomic Energy Commission. The reason I took him was that when we had the Alaskan Earthquakes, there was a commission set up under Senator Anderson, and as a member of that commission I worked very closely with it because urban renewal put more money in it than any other agency. The Executive Director of the Commission was Dwight Ink, and I got to know him and appreciate his abilities.

We had had a situation under HHFA in which the office of the chief administrative officer was sort of the place where everybody resented the activities of the staff. They didn't like the office of the director of administration to begin with, but they particularly resented the staff which was the instrumentality by which he attempted to coordinate, without having really the powers to coordinate. So that each of the constituent agencies more or less had its own administrative officer, as well as its own legal staff, I might add. And it was perfectly clear to me that if I selected the man who was my chief administrative officer, who was a capable man, but who also had developed over the years a large number of personal relationships and attachments, as an administrative officer does,

that this would have caused real conflict. So I decided that I would not. I talked with him (he had about three or four more years to go before retirement) and gave him a grade increase. Then I talked to Dwight and he wanted him because he was very valuable because of his knowledge and made him the deputy. But I brought in the new face, the new image, which I think was a very very necessary thing to do. Mr. Ink became Assistant Secretary for Administration.

Similarly, in the legal department--we had four general counsels' offices in HHFA. In the department, we put them all in one, (that doesn't mean they are all physically there, but they are all part of one legal division), and then they assigned people, back from the legal division to the programs and to the assistant secretaries.

In order to carry out this activity, once I had decided the general plan for it, we had task forces which Dwight Ink set up, pulling in people from outside as well as people from inside, and bringing in our regional people, too. We didn't always follow the task force recommendations, but very often we did. It kept us from being parochial in that we just weren't feeding on ourselves, but we always kept it so we were the majority. (We, here, refers to the Under Secretary, my staff assistants, and most assistant secretaries.) We didn't have the outsiders come in and tell us what to do. I find when you get consultants in these government agencies, usually by the time they learn enough to be any good to you, they have picked all your brains and they really are talking what you people could have told you in the first place. You have just wasted a lot of money in most instances, not all.

But in any event, we then had another very, very important problem and that was that we decided out in front, and both Bob and I felt very strongly about it, that we wanted to have strong regional offices and we wanted to decentralize up to the point where you could decentralize without losing control. By that I mean, for example, we let the regional office process an urban renewal project. But when that urban renewal project is announced, it has to come through here so that the congressional liaison can announce it. We can't have ten different people all courting around for congressional reactions, because then when I need to get some support for something, they didn't get it from me. So this type of thing we were able to do, and I think we probably have more decentralizations in this department than in any other department. Our regional offices, I am sure, are stronger than any of the others, and we've also gotten them higher paid than any of the other regional offices. We have got very good people in them. So these are some of the things that I think were done and were done effectively.

F: Now, you have an initial housing problem of your own since they didn't build the building before they established you.

W: Before we get to that, let me add another thing I was about to say before we got cut off. Apropos of the idea of the staff and line responsibilities, I resurrected something I've done in other jobs. And that is on the first Tuesday of every month all of the presidential appointees get together at one of their houses at eight o'clock with no agenda, and we sit there and talk with no phone calls or anything for two or three hours.

F: This is eight o'clock in the evening?

W: In the evening. And everybody, unless it's something very, very important, is there on that Tuesday because that's scheduled before, and we just go around from house to house. We don't do it in the office and we don't do it with anybody else around, and there are no minutes or any records taken. This has, I think, one of the most salutary effects of getting a group to work together, because they get to know each other and they are not on an agenda or they're not on a memorandum or something of that sort. And we don't talk about nit-picking things. We talk about general problems and directions. Now, you were asking about--

F: I was asking about your housing, your own housing.

W: Well, this is an interesting story. I've forgotten which year it was--it was at least three years ago, maybe four years ago--I went, as all my predecessors had gone, to Albert Thomas who was the chairman of the Independent Offices Appropriations Subcommittee in the House and said that I wanted a new building. I got up the proposal and so forth. To make a long story short, he asked me several questions, among them was how much money was this going to save the government. I told him I didn't think it was going to save them anything, but it would certainly add to efficiency because it would bring people closer together, it would help morale. I said, "Now, I've got a big justification here to show you that will save $450,000 a year, but frankly, Mr. Chairman, I don't believe that." He said, "I don't believe it, either." He said, "Young man, you've got your building. You're the first so-and-so that has talked about a new building that didn't come in here with a pack of lies about how much it is going to save the taxpayers. Hell, it's going to

cost them a mint of money. But it's worth it." So that was how I got the building. But then we had to go through all of the problems of getting it built and delays and so forth. But I think we've got a very attractive building, and certainly it has done wonders for morale.

F: Initially, were you scattered through several buildings?

W: About twenty-one to twenty-two, it varied from twenty-one to twenty-two.

F: Does this physical division make a problem in coordination?

W: It makes a horrible problem. In the first place, when you want to assemble one of your top people, he or she has to get in the car, leave the office, put on a coat, and come over. It's like being assembled up to the throne, you know, whereas now they just get on the elevator and come up a couple of floors. We've got an executive dining room, we all eat down there together, we see each other practically every day anyhow. Then if you've got a problem and one of your assistant secretaries has got to get a person in his office, he can call up and the person can get here in three minutes. And then just being together was a very salutary effect.

F: With a new department, don't you get a feeling on the part of some of the established departments that you are intruding on certain prerogatives?

W: Yes, but we had this before. I mean, I had more jurisdictional problems before we became a department than after we became a department. We still have them. This is inevitable in a bureaucracy. I don't think that the new department per se does this because there were no reallocation of functions or no delegation of new programs from other departments to this department. I'm sure in the minds of some people that a new department is always a threat because it may get into their area of activity and this depends entirely, too, upon the personality of the

secretaries. Some are empire-builders and others aren't, and some are very easy to get along with and others are not. But when you go further down, you do get into these problems because there is a great deal of fear of losing one's perogative.

F: You mentioned awhile ago the earthquake in Alaska. On something like that, would you work closely with, say, the Department of the Interior?

W: Yes. What happened was the President set up this emergency commission with Seantor Anderson as the chairman; there was Secretary Udall and myself and then there was somebody from the Army Engineers Corps and others. I personally went to almost all of the meetings because we had more money involved, and if you don't go to those meetings, people very blithely latch onto your funds of which you haven't got enough. So I was protecting my rear flank. This was why I was there.

F: Do you have some regular system for cooperating with the other departments?

W: There is a convener order in the legislation setting up the department which permits me to convene other departments for area-wide and program-wide and cross-program coordination. I have used this very sparingly. I used it first in connection with neighborhood centers which were to be multi-purpose, and really I did this as an exercise involving HEW, OEO, and Labor primarily because these were the people who have to be involved in the model cities program. We've never really developed techniques for this type of cooperation where it comes to earmarking ahead of time funds and making sure that funds will be diverted into a particular area.

We learned a great deal from the neighborhood things--we had thirteen of them and it ended up by my having to put it in my office and having my executive assistant run it. And we learned also that it is

very difficult to do and we are having difficulties with it in model cities--but the success or failure of model cities will depend upon how effectively this is done.

We've got two real problems in model cities. The first is a very difficult matter of citizen participation. I think we are learning how to do that. We still will have details but I think we've got the formula. And this is different from the CAP organizations, because the CAP organizations are outside of city government. I take the position that in model cities we've got to work <u>through</u> city governments. So we've got to say to the city governments, "You've got to involve the people with <u>you</u> in this planning. Now, we set up performance standards, and you do it any damned way you please, but you've got to observe these performance standards." And I think we've gotten over that pretty well. It has delayed us some months.

On the other hand we have not gotten over and we have not solved--and this is why I take it this will be held up for some time--we have not solved the problem of how we get the funds from the other departments which are involved. This falls in two categories. One of the problems is that this is a sparce year on appropriations, so the other departments don't have too much money. Secondly, a department like HEW has got its funds in rather categorical areas which have identified clients, professional groups, and often lobbies. This is what I have avoided in this department, I avoided it in the HHFA and we had a fight. I will not have either the trade groups or the professional groups reviewing everything we do and more or less running the program. They try to extract this as their compensation for being the lobby for you. But God, you don't run the department, they run it. And this I've refused

to do. But when I examined HEW I discovered that it has some programs that were in that predicament. They don't have enough left over to do what needs to be done for the model cities. In addition to that, where they do have money that can be used, it's not free money; or, as in the Department of Labor, the grants go to the States and not the cities. They may, for example, be for a certain type of training which the localities don't want and need. So where you can get this money for training, it isn't money responsive to the model cities program. This is the problem of the model cities which hasn't been solved and which is really going to harass the program. What I intend to do, and Bob Wood is in agreement because he'll be here after I leave, is that we hope that by the end of this year, certainly by the 20th of January, we will have at least six model cities where the plans have been approved and where the programs are actually in execution. So we will have come face-to-face with this and see if we can adjust it on a few case-by-case methods. There is a big problem here. And this is what we are fighting with in this program.

F: Before we leave organization completely, you said awhile ago that you had an interesting story about one appointment at the assistant secretary level.

W: Yes. You know, one of the interesting things in public administration, like everything else, is there are two types of operators. There are the operators who are the very dynamic and dramatic type who get awfully good press and they impress people as being great innovators and world-movers; and then there are the quieter types who do their jobs who don't hit the headlines and probably, like myself, are not really good at public relations. They get an image of being flub-dubs and cautious and

so forth. Well, the biggest and the most important job I saw here was to bring FHA, in the first place, back into the government and, secondly, get it involved in social programs and get it cooperating with the rest of the department. In order to do this it was necessary to get a man in there who had the knowledge and the experience and who was one of the in-boys, as it were in the sense that he was an operator, and who still accepted the ideology that we had, and was loyal to the Administration and loyal to the Secretary. And I got such a man about five years ago in Philip Brownstein, but Phil was not the flamboyant type. And all of the builders were always criticizing FHA, of course, because they didn't get as much mortgage money as they thought they should and so forth. So Phil had the reputation of being just a rather run-of-the-mill bureaucrat and the Administration wanted a dynamic person in FHA. Well, I have seen these dynamic people who have come in and never quite understand what the job is all about while they are being dynamic. They got awfully good press for themselves, but they didn't get anything done. So, in this appointment I had a little waiting to do and a little pressure to put, but finally I got it through and got Phil appointed from the commissioner to the assistant secretary and it has worked out extremely well.

Together we have turned FHA around. We have got it into the mainstream, we've got it out of the suburbs exclusively, we've got it into the ghettos, we've got it into low-income housing, we've got it into moderate-income housing.

F: You have shifted emphasis from slum clearance to slum rehabilitation. What's the difference? Why?

W: What happened was when the urban renewal program first got started an area like southwest Washington, which was a horrible slum. The approach

was to go in and plan the whole thing, tear the whole thing down, and start building, slowly. But when you are usually going from one user group to another, particularly when you are going from a slum to housing for moderate and middle income people (this is not moderate and middle income), you have to wipe out the image of the old in order to establish the image of the new, which means you have to go in and clear it all out because no re-developer is going to come in if that old stays. He wants to be assured that the new is going to surround him. So that was what we had was an anomaly of, in a housing shortage, tearing down housing for poor folks and rebuilding houses for rich folks to solve the housing problems of poor folks. Well, it didn't take too much ingenuity to recognize that this was not exactly a logical approach.

In the interim the poor people who began to be pushed around by this were beginning to be restive but they didn't get organized for about ten years. By the time I got in they were getting awfully mad. It didn't seem to be equitable anyhow. So what I have tried to do, and what I think I have accomplished doing, is to say, "Look, you can have some bulldozers, but you've got first to mix this up with a lot of rehabilitation." Rehabilitation is taking what exists and upgrading it. You will tear down the impossible but you will keep some of the possible. And, secondly, we have a system of priorities in which we emphasize that you have got to build houses for low and moderate income people, and you can't just build houses for rich folks or for commerical development. In both instances what I've tried to do is not to say, "You can't do any of what you were doing before, but that you have to have a balanced program," and I've also insisted on upgrading relocation and providing more low and moderate income housing elsewhere, as well as in urban

renewal sites. So this is what has been done. It's a balanced program rather than one which I think was highly imbalanced, and imbalanced people, poor people.

F: Did you run into some difficulty with Mayor Richard Daley on this?

W: No, I ran into difficulty with him on the Civil Rights Law of 1964 Title VI requirements for public housing sites in insisting that he not only build within the ghetto but build outside of the ghetto. But now we are getting along fine and I just got word that he is coming in with a program--.

F: Well, what was the problem, if you don't mind a little expatiation?

W: The problem was that in Chicago--this has been true since the days I was out there--where a site for public housing is involved, it has to get approval by the City Council, and all of the City Councilmen want public housing everywhere but in their district. So if you want to build public housing outside of the existing non-white areas, there is tremendous resistance. Under Title VI with the regulations that we put out a couple of years ago, we say that you cannot continue just to build in the ghetto; you've got to build outside of it as well as inside of it, and his local housing authority didn't want to get projects and sites outside. And they were hard to come by.

F: How did you get them to move?

W: Well, we kept after him, number one, and we held up his program, number two, and we threatened to hold up some other things, number three.

F: Did the President get involved in this?

W: The President got involved in the first instance when Daley appealed to the President about what I was doing. The White House called me and said, "Well, Dick Daley is raising hell, and he's close to the President," And

I said, "Well, on this one I just can't move. I will try to work with it," and we did work out a compromise originally. This last time if he went to the White House they didn't come to me.

F: How did you resolve your rent supplements problem?

W: What do you mean?

F: What has become of it?

W: Oh, it's going strong.

F: Well, originally you ran into fair opposition on this.

W: Oh, yes.

F: How did you dissipate that?

W: We ran into opposition on it largely from two sources and both extremes. We ran into opposition first from the people who didn't feel that you ought to subsidize housing for poor people, and that this was an expensive way to do it, and they were just against this type of program purely on an economic and ideological ground. Then we ran into opposition because many of the Public Housing people felt this was a threat to them, that rent supplements would replace public housing and they would be out of business, and that only they knew how to do this, and that you just couldn't do it this way--it was immoral to do it this way. Well, the only thing we did was to keep on pushing and keep on pushing and getting enough political flack to get the thing out of the Congress and then getting sponsors and getting it going and getting it moving; we've got a large number of churches, we've got a large number of labor unions, and it's becoming rather respectable. We're getting very good responses from the people who rent it. So I think that there's no question that it will continue. We're always going to have problems in getting it funded adequately. But I think it's here to stay.

F: Am I correct in sensing a fundamental conflict within particularly the building contractors' groups and their allies in lobbying against the public expenditures of monies, and at the same time seeking contracts from the government for such projects once they are approved?

W: Well, not now. For example, the home builders have been vehement opponents of public housing. Once we got the turnkey project where they could come in and build them, they often became proponents of public housing.

F: What is the turnkey project?

W: The turnkey project is very simple. Under the conventional public housing, the local housing authority, which is a public agency, goes out, acquires the land, plans the project, gets the architect to draw up the plans, puts it out to bid, supervises the construction, and then runs and operates it. Under the turnkey, a private builder will come to a local authority and say, "I've got a site over here. Is that site satisfactory?" "Yes." "How many units do you need?" "Two hundred." "All right. I'll build them. What are the specifications?" "They've got to have this, that, and the other." "All right." He hires his architect. He builds it, he doesn't put it out to bid, he builds it for an upset price, then he turns the key over to the local authority. So that you've got the private developer doing the development. It's a little cheaper and it's a hell of a lot quicker than the conventional method. This cuts developers into it and enables public housing to get sites we couldn't get it we went the other way. We do this and the conventional both at the same time.

F: There is a sometimes criticism that urban renewal has neglected low-cost housing, benefits only downtown sections.

W: Well, we have now a system of priorities whereby we give special preference to projects which, if they are residential, provide for low and moderate income families. Unless it is a new project, in the sense that it's in a new city which hasn't had any urban renewal, if it's done downtown--central business--if it is done--renewal--for higher income families, it cannot get any more renewal until it does a compensatory amount for low and moderate income families. If it's got an ongoing program, it's got to go in low and moderate income. If it comes in for the first time, we'll let it do its CBD, but it's got to do something for low and moderate income housing, too; so that we've turned this program around and made it more people-oriented.

F: Okay. Now one of your pilot low-cost projects is Austin Oaks down in Texas. Sorry I mentioned it? One--why did you pick that particular area to try it?

W: For obvious reasons.

F: All right. How is it working?

W: The President was very anxious to have in Austin a demonstration of what could be done, first to get housing within the rent paying and the purchase paying ability of low-income families. He asked what we could do, and we said that we thought we could develop a prototype of some eight or ten different types of dwellings which would be from $5,000 to $7,000. You add $500 for the lot, so it is $5,500 to $7,500. Two and three bedroom units. We then got a piece of land which was federal and, very nice land, I might add, and we arbitrarily assigned a value of $500 a lot to it. We then got ten different types of developments, some of them are prefabricated, some are partially prefabricated, most are prefabricated in one way, although one is built by a conventional method--

what we call a mini-house, which was developed in Phoenix, Arizona and is a conventional FHA concrete block structure.

What we are attempting to do there is to bring together a series of prototypes which, by utilizing our new Section 235 in the Housing Act of 1968, which provides for an interest subsidy for home purchase, we can get these monthly payments down to where really low-income people can afford to buy a house. And by putting them there together with the various different types, we will have sort of a showplace where other districts and other localities can come and find out what could be done in their localities to do the same thing. Now, these are not all universally applicable because some of them would not go well in largely congested large cities. Some of them might have some problems in areas of extreme cold climate. But by and large they are generally applicable to most urban areas in the United States. And this is what we are trying to do there.

F: Let's go back to something we passed over rather quickly awhile ago. The rat control program had a bad press, here, and Congress, and so on. What's the situation in this case?

W: I think the rat control bill really ended in being a political plus for the Administration of great proportions. The way that developed was when we had the Ribicoff hearings, which was not one of my better presentations, and largely due to the fact that I had too damn many cooks in it and responded too much to suggestions from the White House. But that was my fault for being that naive and also because Ribicoff tricked me--he told me that the hearings were going to be from eleven until one. When they didn't go like he wanted them he cut them off at twelve arbitrarily and without giving any advance notice.

But what happened was that he began to talk about rats, and it was perfectly obvious that he had a point and that we weren't doing anything about it. So I set up a task force under one of my men here; I got the people from HEW and they came up with a proposed bit of legislation which would put the program in HUD. I had never even thought of this as being our thing, but the reason it is is that this is really tied up with more than just getting rid of rats or getting rid of trash. It's getting good services in the community, and this is what the task force indicated; so I then proposed rat control as the only bit of major new housing legislation in 1967. And the President bought it.

We then presented it and, as you recall, the Republicans and some of the reactionary Democrats, but mostly the Republicans attempted to ridicule it, and they defeated it. Well, it boomeranged on them, because after they ridiculed it the press gave them holy hell for being so heartless because really this involves children's being bitten and diseases being carried. Their opposition was a great mistake, and they eased their way out of it by then putting it in HEW. As far as I was concerned I was never worried about where it went, and I think that actually it was a victory to get it, and it was a political asset for us because of the mismanagement that they had made.

F: There was a charge that HUD gave it low priority, wasn't really interested.

W: There's no truth to that. HUD proposed it, number one. Nobody had thought of it in the Administration until we set up this task force, and I must say it wasn't my original idea, it came from the Ribicoff hearings. But we took the bit and went with it. We then drew up the legislation. We submitted it to the White House and the White House approved it. And this was the only legislation that we went after in

'67. I think the record will show that my testimony was certainly not half-hearted, and that we were completely committed to it.

F: What's your problem with urban mass transit and the Department of Transportation?

W: Well, the question there was a jurisdictional question. The question was whether or not it should remain in HUD where it had been originated--it got originally here simply by a fluke, and that was in 1961 nobody intended to have urban mass transportation. But Pete Williams--Senate Harrison Williams of New Jersey--almost single-handedly got that bill into the White House and got it up before the Congress. The question then was who would run it. And the question was whether it should be in Commerce, which had an office of transportation, or whether it should be in HUD. I got it largely because the man who would have gotten it in Commerce was not high on the list of people to run things, and this is how I accidented into it in the first place.

Then the issue came up, when the Department of Transportation was created, whether or not mass transit was to be looked at as a part of the planning in the urban development process or a part of transportation. A case could be made either way. We had a task force and Alan Boyd and I worked on it, but the White House and the Bureau of the Budget decided in favor of Transportation rather than HUD, so the grant program went over there. We are still in the planning and some of the research, but by and large it is a program that has gone from the department to transportation.

F: Pretty well settled by the White House. Why is Fannie Mae being removed from HUD?

W: Well, it isn't quite removed. It's being made a government-sponsored

private organization. There are two reasons for this. In the first place, as long as it was a government corporation, it was in the budget. Every time that you increased the secondary market operations, it had budgetary impact so that it was limited by budgetary considerations. Now that it is out, it is not limited and it can do more. Also it has access to larger amounts of money than it would have otherwise.

F: Do you think this is a wise step?

W: Yes, but it still is under the supervision--the Secretary still has it in the transitional period and when it finally is private, he will still have some control over it to see that it does concentrate on low and moderate income housing, for example.

F: Has HUD had any trouble selling its financial paper?

W: No.

F: Have you used Mr. McNamara's cost benefit and analyses programs over here?

W: Well, we're trying to, but it's a hell of a lot different between deciding in matters of housing and urban development and a defense program. In the force you've got one single objective and that is to wipe out the enemy as quickly as possible with the lowest possible cost. It's a hell of a lot different from deciding how you are going to reconstitute and regenerate and recreate your cities. Some of these goals even are difficult to quantify, and others are almost impossible to do so. In addition to that, you have such a complexity of counter-currents. In other words, if you get one thing done in this field, you're liable to create another problem over here. So you have to have a complete systems analysis. And systems analysis is a wonderful thing--the only trouble is we haven't got programmers wise enough to devise the

system or data sufficiently comprehensive or accurate. So while we are in the process of doing this, we haven't perfected it, and I think it's going to be quite a little time before it is perfected.

F: You mentioned awhile ago, and I think I can interpolate a little bit here in the case of rat control, that you listened to the White House. Do you have problems with the White House staff? Do they interfere?

W: Well, they will tend to. And I think that one has to do as I do and that is, when the situation gets to the point where it's something that I don't go along with I will just simply say, "Well, I'll have to see the President on this."

F: Can you work with the President on this?

W: Yes.

F: You don't find him unusually difficult to work with?

W: Oh, he's difficult, of course. Anybody that has all the responsibility he's got is difficult. But I don't see him that often, so that usually I don't represent a hell of a lot of problems to him. But when I do go, I usually get support. Right now, I'm having a final meeting of my last appearance with the Bureau of the Budget. We've got about ten items, and I'm sure I am going to have to go to the President on four or five of them. And I'll probably win on three and lose on two. I can almost tell you which ones I am going to win and lose on, but I don't like to say which ones in advance.

F: We won't make a predicter out of you.

W: But I would say this. The great problem in dealing with the White House staff, and this is a problem that is indigenous to power, is that one never knows how much the President wants is what the staff wants, and how much the President is said to want is what the President wants. So

that one has to devise every now and then, and divine every now and then. You pick the things that you are very much opposed to and you are willing to have a knockdown dragout fight on and concentrate on them, because the staff has more access to the President than you have, and therefore they can condition him to their point of view much more easily than you can. They are working with him every day, and you are coming in cold. So where there is something that I feel extremely strongly about, I'll just simply say, "No, I won't do it. If the President wants me to do it, he'll have to tell me he wants to do it. I'm not going to do it."

F: And then at that point you can present your brief.

W: And then if the staff says, "The President still wants it," then, I say, "I want to talk to the President about it." If it is a complicated matter, I will prepare a memorandum and ask for an appointment. If it isn't, I'll just ask to see him. Here again, you have to use judgment--you can't see him on everything. So the little ones you tend to give in on, on the big ones you tend to, at least I do, to make an issue out of them. I will say this--that the President does not arbitrarily on these issues side with the staff when you go to see him about them. The only problem is that sometimes the President himself will make the initial contact and then it's awfully hard to talk him out of something, although that has occurred, but it doesn't occur too frequently. If it comes directly from him, you're pretty sure you are going to have a tough time. If it comes from the staff, you have to use your judgment to sort of guess how much he is committed to it and how much of a fight you want to make on it. This is a matter of judgment. I don't know how the other departments handle it.

INTERVIEWEE: ROBERT C. WEAVER (Tape #3)

INTERVIEWER: JOE B. FRANTZ

DATE: November 19, 1968

W: My first basic contacts with the President occurred when he was Vice President, and he was in charge of the program to get equal opportunity in employment, and I was one of those who served on the advisory committee and on the council itself. It was a federal government council. Among his advisers were several people whom I had known very well--one in particular, Marjorie Lawson, who had worked with him before. I worked with that committee officially and then on several occasions met with the President (who was then the Vice President) informally at his request and members of his staff on specific issues. Our relationships were quite friendly. Prior to that, as I think I said earlier when I first was appointed, the question of my confirmation came up, at the request of then President Kennedy. I talked to President Johnson who interceded and gave me some advice and some assistance and some help, some introductions to some of the members of the Senate. We had not been intimate friends, but we had gotten to know each other and had talked primarily at that time in matters of employment and matters of the Negro-White relationships.

F: Do you know whether the President spoke specifically to some of the ultraconservative Senators, like Senator Eastland, Senator Stennis, and so on?

W: No, I do know that he did speak to Senator Russell, and at his behest, I went to see the Senator and had a very cordial meeting with him. He was a gentleman and didn't vote for any of my appropriations or any of my bills, but he was very gracious. He didn't go out of his way to vote against any either. So that was it.

Until the assassination of President Kennedy, my relations, as I said before, with the then Vice President Johnson had been rather parochial, but cordial. And I had worked with certain members of his staff. When the assassination occurred, he asked me, as others, to stay on without any commitment as to how long or for what; obviously, I did so.

I think the first real exposure that I had to him was in late December when I went down to the ranch in connection with the housing message and with the proposed 1964 Housing Bill. At that time I went over to Austin and met with the press there and briefed them on our proposals and got an enthusiastic response from him on that briefing. I think from then on I established some degree of confidence on his part as to what I was doing here.

F: He wasn't with you at the briefing?

W: No, he was not. I had been at the ranch first and talked with him about it and we had made some final decisions which were then not completely decided upon until that meeting at the ranch. After that our relationships were very good.

I functioned in both administrations primarily as a person in the field of housing and urban development. I did not function as a person in race relations. I was sometimes asked to give advice, but this was not my primary purpose. I don't think in either the Kennedy or the Johnson Administration I was exploited in any way. I was invited to the White House on occasion. Sometimes there would be African statesmen there, sometimes there would be European statesmen, sometimes Asian, but I think it sort of went in sequence rather than by my pigmentation. As to whether this was typical or whether it was peculiar in my case is another matter.

I did meet on several occasions when the President, now I'm speaking of President Johnson, had the leaders of the civil rights groups in, and this was primarily because of my own civil rights background, because I knew many of them personally. Very often I would talk with them on some problems that he might have. But, again, this was, I think, largely personal rather than racial, although the racial aspect obviously was there because the personal was related to the racial.

F: It is also difficult to dissociate your professional interest from civil rights.

W: Surely. And this was an interest which I had and which I certainly did not try to hide after I came into the administration, but I soon knew that I could not do both things effectively, and I stuck to the knitting which I had been called in to do rather than to try to cover the waterfront. So that I don't think there was any degree of exploitation.

As far as my contacts with the President were concerned, I soon discovered that he, like all of us, had his peculiarities, and that he was a man who was very intense, very devoted to what he was doing, and also had perhaps a frailty in that when he brought people in to talk about something, he would spend an inordinate amount of time talking about these things and get his schedule way back. Also, sometimes when you went to see him, he would talk about other things, but this was a technique I had encountered before. FDR had it to a great degree, much greater degree than did Lyndon Johnson. I think with Lyndon Johnson it was a matter that his mind just went across-the-board and whatever was on his mind when you came in was where you started, and you got to where <u>you</u> wanted to go about half an hour

later. Also, I felt, from my own experience, having been associated since I was in my early twenties with men with grave responsibilities, I knew that when I went in to see the President cold on a matter, I would maybe get ten minutes to talk about it. And I knew, too, that nothing could be more difficult for a busy man than people who had to see him every week whether they had anything to see him about or not. So I was very careful only to go to see him when I felt I absolutely had to do it. I worked through his staff for the most part much more so than I tried to work through him. And when there were decisions that I didn't like, I would appeal them to him. But by and large, 90 percent of the situations at the White House were done, as far as I was concerned, at the staff level. I was fortunate in this, as I said earlier, because during the transition period I was working through an old friend, Lee White, who had been in the Kennedy Administration and with whom I got along extremely well, and with whom I had a very close personal relationship, and where I could get a great deal more of his time. And then when Joe Califano took over, this sort of procedure continued. I would have done this anyhow, if it were humanly possible, because I think that it's the only smart thing to do and it is the only thing that shows any degree of appreciation for the pressures of a high office, and I know the pressures on him were immense. So, our relationship was always friendly; it was not a warm, personal relationship because I didn't see the President that much. But whenever we were together, there was a cordiality there and usually a relaxed feeling so that I felt that my job, as I once said to him, was to involve him as little as possible and take as little of his time as possible. The one advantage and the one fringe benefit that came from that was that whenever I did want to see him, I could do so within a

24 hour span of time, or shorter if there was an emergency, provided he was in the city. He knew I wasn't coming in on something frivolous, and therefore he was much more available than he might have been otherwise.

F: Did you feel you had any impact on his thinking in anything other than your strictly departmental business?

W: Yes, on one thing. I remember at one time when he was meeting quite frequently with the Negro leaders, I voluntarily went to see and suggested to him that I thought that maybe he was overdoing it and that two things were happening. First, that some of the leaders themselves were being considered in the community as sort of Johnson men, secondly, that it seemed to me that he could be embarrassing some of them, though none had said it to me, and that they might find it a little difficult to respond when he needed them. He must have taken it well because a week later I got an inscribed photograph from him, "To Bob Weaver, a wise man." I don't know whether he continued that belief or not, but at least he had it for a fleeting moment.

F: Why have you resigned?

W: For three reasons: The first is that I think that any person who is in a job with the pressures and the responsibilities that this job has had, both as the Administrator and the Secretary, sort of runs out of gas after a period of time. I began to feel some degree of fatigue. I got that one indication that is almost foolproof, and that was I found myself becoming very defensive. I found myself becoming very sensitive to criticism, and as soon as anyone criticized anything I was doing, immediately trying to hit back in my own mind. And I think when that happens, you are beginning to lose some degree of your objectivity.

F: It's a smart man who can recognize that symptom.

W: The second thing was that the greatest difficulty, and I think Shakespeare once said this on one of his plays, to the effect that life is a drama and each one of us comes on the stage and does his part and then gets off. The difficulty is to know when to exit. And this seemed to me was a good time to exit. As you know, I had told President Johnson of my desire to leave in March, about two weeks before he had said he was not going to run. And I wanted to relieve him of the worry about what he was going to do about Weaver on the one hand, and I wanted to relieve myself of the position of not knowing whether or not I was going to be asked to stay and then finding myself in a very difficult position because I knew I was not going to stay since I, as I think the President had made a commitment to my wife that I would not stay.

And then, finally, I felt that this was a fairly good terminal period. I thought that we would go up for the Civil Rights Act of '68 with its fair housing. Whether we got it or not, at least we would have put it in. That was one of the objectives I had. Secondly, we were working on the Omnibus Housing Bill which fell in the same category. If it didn't go through, at least it would have set a pattern of achievement in this field. And I felt that the new department was being initiated and getting off to a good start. So it seemed to me to be a logical time to leave. And I decided that I would do this. I used to play poker and one of the first principles of poker is always quit while you are ahead, and I thought I was ahead.

F: Tell me about the President's commitment to your wife.

W: No, I meant I made a commitment to my wife that I was going to leave, as I think the President made a commitment to Mrs. Johnson.

F: Oh, I see.

W: That he was not going to run.

F: In wrapping up, Mr. Secretary, let's talk a little bit about this matter of prejudice which cuts across your whole departmental activities, and just what you think causes it.

W: I suppose there are several things that cause it. It's awfully difficult to answer this categorically; it's like settling the chicken and the egg controversy. I would think that insecurity is probably one of the great causes of prejudice, and insecurity can be in many categories. I used to be an economist so I will start with economic insecurity because I think that this is quite basic. I think that up until the great depression, and during the great depression, probably the greatest cause of prejudice in this country was the rivalry between the insecure white worker who was competing with the insecure black worker, be that either in the South where the Negro was the labor reserve or in the North where he was brought in as a labor reserve, a strike breaker, etc.

And then there was the competition for housing, the competition for too little goods. Now that we are becoming a more affluent society, this is not quite as great as it has been in the past, but it lingers in the background. Now it begins to operate more in the field of the more important types of jobs which are scarce and a feeling that if a black person gets in the market and is competitive, there will be less available for the white and vice versa.

The crudest manifestation of that is, I think, the rather befuddled to some degree, in my opinion, notion that the black community is going to be owned entirely by black entrepreneurs and the black entrepreneurs are going to be philanthropists, whereas the white entrepreneurs were devils. An entrepreneur is an entrepreneur no matter what

his color and they pretty well behave the same. Some of them are quite generous, others are not. And I don't think pigmentation has a hell of a lot to do with that. It may have something to do with the crudeness with which it is manifested, but the basic situation, I don't think, is really affected by that. And I think that what is involved here is the nature of the entrepreneurship, the marginal nature of these small outlets and these small businesses which is of necessity a very, very tenuous sort of thing and I think creates many of their problems.

And then, of course, there is the whole area of personality and insecurity in the psychological sense. And this, of course, goes back to the sex origins, of the competition, of the certain degree of guilt on the part of the Southern white, and I guess the Northern white too, as far as the relationships with Negro women, a resentment on the part of the Negro man of their role and lack of role in all of this. And I think, too, the fact that everybody who isn't able to have real expression and real dignity always needs to have somebody beneath him, and if this somebody is a group, it makes it even better because there is more involved than if it is just a single individual. So, therefore, you get the group idea.

Finally, the fact that in all of our literature and all of our culture and all of our manifestations, there is a tremendous amount of chauvinism of trying to believe that because you belong to a group that that group is better than another group and also a feeling on the part of the submerged group unconsciously of resentment of an inferior status which they assume has been, and usually with a great degree of accuracy, has been assigned to them rather arbitrarily. I think all of these things go into it.

This is where the Black Power Movement has, I think, some of its real sound manifestations; that is, I know in my own case, for example, that I had never known anything much of really the basic, African traditions of the Negro, in fact I don't even know what part of Africa my Negro antecedents came from, despite the fact that I have read extensively in the literature of the Negroes. I think there was a feeling of shame and a lack of pride in one's antecedents insofar as they came from a slave background. And there was a tendency of those of us whose antecedents had gotten out of slavery a little earlier than others of sort of feeling that was a great achievement, and something like the American myth of getting ahead and that you did this all by yourself and only because of your great, great innate ability were you able to rise up above the masses. Well, hell, success in my book is in large part luck, about one-half of the remainder hard work, and the rest of it, ability. Because there are so many people who are more able than those of us who feel we are successful who have never been able to succeed, not due to any lack of ability, but due to a lack of timing, a lack of fortuitous circumstances, and sometimes a lack of contacts. So that all of these things, I think, contribute to the situation.

I don't know whether or not we can ever get to a world where we will not have prejudices, where we will not have group feelings. I think the challenge is to try to get this group feeling so secure and so sure in the sense, not that it is better, but it's something that you can live with and something that you don't have to think about all the time. It seems to me chauvinism is a case of protesting a little bit too much because if you were that good, you wouldn't have to assert it, it would be innate and you would just know it and everybody else would

know it. And we see in the decadence of some of the established groups the fact that they soon get to the point where all they have is this so-called superiority, and all they think about is maintaining it rather than of participating fully in society. I suppose also that--and here I put my whole fate in the sort of things that we have been trying to do in the Great Society--that when you have a society in which all people have access to education, all people have access to health facilities, all people have access to employment, where you wipe out basic poverty, this, I think, would at least set a social and economic milieu in which we can then have a positive educational program for trying to get rid of bigotry. But getting rid of it is going to be very difficult--we can mitigate it, we can reduce it, and as to whether or not we will ever be able to wipe it out, I don't know. And I might add that I feel that black chauvinism is just about as bad as white chauvinism. Chauvinism is chauvinism. And I have a feeling that we in this society, despite our unfavorable background and despite our historical antecedents and precedents, and despite the degree of racist attitude that there is here, have both the social and the economic and, other than the racist tradition, the traditional attitudes and the traditional values which should make it possible for us to do a great deal about this. And I think this is the real challenge and, really, one of the great domestic problems. We're going to go through a period, where we're now, of transition, of maybe another decade. It's going to be very difficult. And out of it will either come shambles or will come, I think, a new enlightenment. I'm hoping that it will be the latter.

F: You have set HUD on the road. Where do you think it is going?

W: Well, I don't know.

F: Consolidation or broadening, or what?

W: My guess would be that there will not be any great expansion or broadening immediately. I think what any new administration would do, particularly one with a more conservative bent than the last, would be to attempt to make administrative reforms and attempt to get the housekeeping running a little better. And since it won't have the problems of establishing new programs, it ought to have a greater opportunity for doing that. Now there is always a danger of sort of sitting back on your oars and just saying, "We are going to polish a little bit," and forgetting that you have to have a dynamic growing thing to have some real movement to it. I would think that really the $64 dollar question is what sort of financial support will these programs be given, and that I think is in the realm of the future; I don't think anybody can prognosticate what's it's going to be now. A lot of it depends upon forces outside of the administration per se no matter what the administration is, and world events and domestic events. But I don't believe that we will lose many of the existing programs. I don't believe that we will expand many of them, either.

F: Do you foresee that you might get, in the process of urban development, into helping with planning the sizes of families, parenthood, and so on?

W: Well, my own feeling on this is that people certainly ought to be exposed to information on planned parenthood. I think you get into a political difficulty here because it gets a class connotation to the effect that you are planning to control the size of the families of the poor and the disadvantaged and therefore you are suspect. I think if it could be done scientifically--

F: Abroad this has been used rather well on us, you know, that we want to keep down the Latin population--

W: Very much so. And I have a feeling that we are going to have some difficulty with it. I certainly, as a rational man, believe that planned parenthood is a very desirable circumstance. I happen to be the result of a planned family; and if it hadn't been planned, I would not have had the advantages that I have had.

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By Robert C. Weaver

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