INTERVIEW I

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INTERVIEWEE: G. MENNEN WILLIAMS

INTERVIEWER: JOE B. FRANTZ

PLACE: Justice Williams' office in the Lafayette Building, Detroit, Michigan

Tape 1 of 1

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

M: I got acquainted with him in the early days of the New Deal. I went down to Washington in the fall of 1936, just at the time of the second election of President Roosevelt. I don't recall exactly when it was, but I did meet him. I think he was on some coal commission or something of that kind.

F: You were with the Attorney General's Department.

W: At that time I was with the Social Security Board, and all of us ran around, young fellows saving the world, and I met Lyndon at that time. As a matter of fact, I have a picture on the wall there that says, "My dear friend of many years." That refers back. He seemed to think that I was a part of the NYA, which he was for so long, but I never was and I never was able to disabuse him of that. But we met during those days.

F: Did you see him with some irregular regularity through the next couple of decades?

W: I was in and out of Washington, and I just saw him occasionally until I became governor in 1948. At that time we ran into each other in Washington from time to time, but we didn't have any special reason to bring us together.

F: It was a matter of your being down there on state business in the same place he was?

W: Yes, yes. So we never had any special projects together or anything.

F: Did he ever discuss with you the possibility of his running for president?

W: No, he never did. I think at most of that time that was pretty far away from both of us.

F: Let's talk a little bit then about that campaign and convention in 1960 and how you came to play a significant role in it.

W: In the 1960 convention the Democratic Party of Michigan had committed itself to two goals. First of all, we had a candidate, John Kennedy, whom we'd settled on after I decided that I was not going to be a favorite son candidate. Our second goal was to write a liberal platform. I had viewed the possibility of something more serious than a favorite son candidate and had worked myself somewhat throughout the country and had others working for me, so I was fairly familiar with what was going on. When I decided that my run would be an empty gesture, we decided to find a candidate who would bear the kind of credentials that we liked here in Michigan. In the winter, around the turn of the year 1959-1960, we had more or less decided that Jack Kennedy would be the man that we would support. Sometime after West Virginia, and maybe

before or right after Wisconsin, we committed ourselves. We had Kennedy here in Michigan, oh, it was in the early or late spring, and we told him that we would support him.

F: You were chairman of the delegation?

W: Yes, I was the chairman of the delegation.

F: Was it a unit vote?

W: I'm not sure whether we had a unit rule or not. I suspect we did have it. We didn't have quite unanimity, but it was pretty close. So I think a unit rule would fairly well express what we had in mind.

F: Now you got out to Los Angeles pretty confident that your man was going to take it.

W: Yes. We were sure that our man was going to take it, and we spent most of our energies working on the platform. We were successful in that, and then we of course were successful in nominating our man.

When it came to the vice presidency, I can't recall that we had any very fixed candidates in mind. But with respect to Lyndon, we were opposed to him, because we felt that he was ideologically wrong on civil rights. There wasn't any personal animosity of any kind, but we didn't think he represented our platform.

F: Did the fact that he came from an oil state and was branded as an oil senator play any role in this?

W: I don't think it did.

F: It was mainly the civil rights.

W: Yes, it was the civil rights thing. I imagine that many of us were not for the oil depletion allowance, at least in the size it was, although

we had a few oil people who were on the opposite side of that. But I don't think that played that much of a part in our thinking.

F: So you get Kennedy nominated, and then what happened?

W: Well, the morning of the day that the vice president was to be nominated I was invited up to Kennedy's suite. I arrived there and found a dozen other state leaders. I remember particularly David Lawrence of Pennsylvania.

F: That's the mayor?

W: Yes, the mayor.

F: Of Pittsburgh.

W: Governor. I always remember him as governor, although he was mayor.

F: I just wanted, for the record, for him not to get mixed up with U.S. News & World Report.

W: Yes. Not the U.S. News [Lawrence], no. It was the mayor and governor. I think that there were a number of other leaders more or less of the political complexion of David Lawrence. They seemed to have more to talk with each other about than I had with them, although I knew most of them. Kennedy apparently had called us up there to have individual talks, because, as I recall, he was working out of the bathroom, and from time to time one or another of us or several of us would be called in.

F: Tell me something about the technique of a bathroom vice presidential caucus. Does someone sit on the edge of the tub and does someone sit on the toilet, or what happened? Or do you stand?

W: I'm afraid I don't recall the protocol or the techniques; all I recall

is the discussions. Jack Kennedy asked me whether I had any aspirations to be vice president, and I told him that I had none. He asked me whether Michigan had any particular candidate, and we didn't have any particular candidate. But we were concerned that it not be Lyndon Johnson, because we felt that Lyndon Johnson would be the antithesis of the program that we had developed in the platform. When I left that meeting, I felt fairly well assured that it was not going to be Lyndon Johnson.

I went back to our hotel and saw some of the people and more or less passed on the word that the impression I'd gotten was that it wasn't going to be Lyndon, although I had no idea who it was going to be. The next significant event occurred, well, I would say about an hour before the convention was to be called, because many of the people from my delegation had already left for the convention hall. What happened was that Bobby Kennedy came in. He seemed somewhat crestfallen and woebegone, and he passed the information to me, as his brother's messenger, that the vice president that Kennedy favored was Lyndon Johnson. This was a great shock to me because, one, I didn't think it was going to happen; and, two, I knew our delegation, as well as myself, would have difficulty in stomaching this because of his civil rights position as we saw it.

F: Did Bobby seem to take this as bad but accepted fact, or did he hold out some hope that you would pull a roll back?

W: No. He indicated that this was what the President wanted. He certainly didn't suggest that it might be changed. He didn't seem very happy

with it. We had no discussion as to whether or not it would be possible to change, although it was clear to me from the beginning that our delegation would fight it. Although we assumed it would be a battle against tremendous odds, and ninety-nine chances out of a hundred that it would be a losing battle.

F: Well now, the noticeable faces, and I saw this on TV, were you and Walter Reuther and Franklin Roosevelt, Jr. Was there any concert, or was this just each man standing up voicing his opinion when the nomination time came around for the vice president?

W: All right, let me fill it in a little and I'll answer that. When I got this word, I checked around the hotel to see whether I could pull together a caucus of our delegation, but almost all of them had gone out. I don't know whether our state chairman was there, but either he or the national committeewoman was not there, as I recall. In any event, after a brief passing of the word to those that we could reach at the hotel, we immediately went out to the convention hall. There we tried to caucus, so as to pass the word and devise whatever strategy we could. There wasn't a decent place to meet, and we ended up in a room that I don't think was any bigger than this room, thirty by thirty or something of that sort. The doors were not secure, and the press and radio and television were all trying to get in. It was a most uncomfortable operation.

In any event, at that time I passed the word as to what I've just recounted here. I think it was a practically universal reaction that we would fight this. So we broke up, and we tried to see what other

delegations would join us. I think our runners came back with the idea that there were just four or five states; the only one I'm very sure of is the District of Columbia. They joined us, and we did work together. I think there were some in California. I really would hesitate to try and name the other states because I don't recollect, but when it all boiled down the only one that, outside of ourself, was able to stand up was the District of Columbia.

F: Which again would be a civil rights proposition.

W: Yes, it was a civil rights proposition. Now, you mentioned personalities. I think Joe Rauh was the man there that we dealt with most and was strongest. I don't remember what connection if any we had with Franklin Roosevelt. I've known him for years, so if we had had a close connection, I think I would probably have recognized it. I would have to check the delegation roster, but I'm not even sure that Walter Reuther was there. The principal UAW person who was there was Leonard Woodcock. I think that most of the operation on the floor, in addition to myself, would have been Neil Staebler, maybe Margaret Price.

F: Woodcock was a bit milder in his opposition to Johnson than Reuther?

W: I really shouldn't try to answer that, but I'm sure that it would appear that way. Because whatever Reuther was against you could read it a lot more quickly than you could read it in Woodcock. In any event, as the television indicated, we voted no, and I don't even know whether the District of Columbia voted no. They said they were going to and they may have, but I guess we were the only dissenters.

That evening the leadership of our delegation felt that we'd

fought as hard as we could, and the next thing to do was to elect Kennedy. We couldn't do that too successfully if we were trying to fight his vice presidential candidate. I'm trying to recall. I don't know whether any of us saw Lyndon Johnson, or whether in his acceptance speech--I guess it was his acceptance speech--he said that he accepted the platform. He made it clear that whatever his personal feelings were that he was going to stand up for the platform on civil rights. In any event, the leadership decided that we ought to at least turn ourselves around, whether we came out publicly or not I don't recall.

But in any event we had a caucus that night, and we had a number of speakers, one of whom was Leonard Woodcock, who's a very effective speaker as well as the fact that there were a number of UAW people in the delegation. But he's a very logical fellow. He would tick off the reasons one, two, to ten or whatever it was, and we all exorcized whatever devils we had. We relied very heavily on the fact that we said, "We'll take Lyndon Johnson's word that he will change around." We said, "Assuming that, we will support him." Then it turned out that Lyndon--well, I don't know if it was two or three weeks or a month or a few days, but he made some statements I think very shortly after the convention, and I believe down South, supporting the civil rights idea. So we were reasonably happy with that.

F: You never got the feeling that when you left the bathroom thinking that Kennedy was not going to name Johnson that he misled you?

W: I don't think any of us thought he double-crossed us or anything, but we felt terribly let down. There was no question about that, because the picture that we had of Lyndon Johnson was that he would be weak on civil rights. Obviously it turned out differently, but we would have appreciated a candidate whose position was stronger on civil rights.

F: As far as Michigan was concerned, was he a handicap on the ticket in 1960?

W. He was to begin with. I suppose that there were some people in the state who were happy that Lyndon was on the ticket. In this state, particularly in Detroit, one out of every ten is from the South. Most of them are hillbillies from Kentucky and Tennessee and so on, although we have a great many people from Arkansas now. I imagine that these people might have felt differently. Then there had been originally a few people that favored Johnson before he went for Kennedy, and I suppose they must have been happy. But in any event, I think after a while everybody seemed to have confidence in the good faith of Johnson as far as civil rights, and so we had no difficulty. But among liberals and union people it was some load to bear.

F: Johnson had voted wrong back there, too, on the Taft-Hartley from the labor standpoint.

W: Yes.

F: That's a dozen years before, but it was still rankling.

W: I can't recall whether that was an issue with us or not, but certainly the labor people were not strong for him.

F: Yes. Did you have anything to do with him at all during the campaign?

W: I don't recall that I did. Except that for some reason or other I was in Iowa or Kansas, and there was a meeting there. I saw Lyndon there, and I felt very sorry for him. Because he was standing all by himself and all the other politicians were getting together talking about this, that or the other thing. Whether he'd run into a group of liberals who didn't like his civil rights or what [I don't know], but that's the only time that I can remember seeing him during the actual campaign.

F: Well now, once Kennedy is elected you are named an assistant secretary of state for African affairs. Johnson becomes vice president, of course. Among other things, he has a charge to run the Equal Opportunity Commission at the White House level. Did you have any dealings with him, or are you too tied up with your own?

W: I remember that he had that charge, and I am not sure that I ever had any connection with him in that. I have a feeling that he had some large meeting which I attended, and we may have been there together. But beyond that I had no significant connection with him.

F: When President Kennedy sent Johnson on that first kind of trial trip into Africa, did you go?

W: No, I was not with him at the time. I don't know whether I was

elsewhere in Africa or whether I was in Washington.

F: I presume the first reports would have come back to you though, wouldn't they?

W: Oh, yes. I saw the reports, and I knew of the trip. But as I think about it I wonder if I hadn't been in Africa, because I don't recall, now at least, having had anything to do with the preparations for that trip, and normally I would have if I had been back.

F: And with Johnson they would have been probably notable in number.

W: Yes, there would have been a lot to do. No. I saw reports and pictures of that trip. When we were talking earlier you said you didn't know whether it was a success or a fiasco, but from my point of view I thought it was a good trip. He had campaigned Senegal as he might have campaigned Texas, and I thought that the little homey touch of promising an outboard motor to one of the fishermen and all of that was very good. So I think by and large it was a very useful thing. As it turned out, after Kennedy died I had a very difficult mission, because the Africans fused, if I may use that term, with Kennedy. He was a part of them, and when he left, the Africans were afraid that the association that the United States had built up with the Africans and a feeling for them, a sympathetic feeling, was all over. So I had to visit most of the African leaders to sit down with them and talk over Johnson.

I remember, for example, going to see Sekou Toure, the president of Guinea, who some people think is slightly mad. But in any event he had been a very strong, dynamic leader against the French, a great nationalist. He said, "The only two people I have ever trusted were

you and Kennedy," that is myself and Kennedy. So he was interested to get my reaction about Johnson. We sat down for quite some time. Well, this all was provoked by the trip to Senegal. It was very useful to me to be able to refer to that trip to show that Johnson not only said he would adopt the policies of Kennedy, but that he had been in Africa, and more than that he had been able to associate himself with them in a kind of a free moving brotherhood. I think from that point of view the trip was very successful.

I think Johnson made a real effort to maintain this African relationship, and I know that when he set up this program of taking ambassadors out on the presidential yacht down the river that the Africans were the first to go. When he had these little luncheons that he arranged, where some of his staff would call in the African ambassadors to have lunch in the White House and then when they were at their dessert he would drop in and chat with the ambassadors, the Africans were among the first. I thought that he did everything he possibly could to give them a feeling that he was concerned.

F: That's one question that I think is a public misconception. Most people when you say Africa think of black Africa, and we know, of course, it goes from Capetown to Cairo. Was that all under your purview?

W: Everything except Egypt. Egypt was part of the Middle East, as it's pretty clear to understand.

F: Yes.

W: When I started out, Algeria was still part of the European jurisdiction

We worked out a condominium, and then as time went on it dropped into the lap of the African Bureau. We had white South Africa, that is, one-quarter white. We had the whole continent except Egypt.

F: This is skipping ahead, but did Johnson seem pretty well briefed? You got a cascading of new countries and new names from Central Africa. The geography is changing regularly. Was Johnson pretty well up on who people were? Did he take briefing well, and did he get briefed?

W: Yes. He seemed to understand the general layout of who was who and what was what.

F: You could take in the president of Upper Volta or Chad and he didn't pull any gaffes on you?

W: No. He didn't pull any. I guess he did his homework. Occasionally when I went in to see President Kennedy, in a very disarming fashion he would say, "Well, let's go over to the globe here and show me where your country is." He tried to use his ignorance as an asset. But President Johnson seemed to be pretty well at ease in that situation.

F: Did he put these people at ease? Did they sit on the edge of their chairs in a somewhat deferential situation, or was it one president talking to another?

W: No. I think they felt pretty well at ease. I know that when some of the ambassadors presented their credentials, and there were so many of them coming in he'd generally have two or three together, some black and some white, he'd sit down afterwards and chat with them. I think the Africans felt just as much at ease as any of the Europeans.

F: Was there a feeling in Africa that Johnson was part of a kind of

palace coup to get Kennedy out? I mean a significant feeling? We've got the plot theory throughout the world.

W: I never ran into that. There may have been, but I didn't see any reports of it and I didn't feel it myself. It was a very sad thing, the passing of Kennedy.

F: Yes.

W: And it was mostly shock rather than--

F: Were you in Washington when it happened?

W: No, I was here in Detroit.

F: What were you doing, at that moment I mean?

W: At that moment? I was having lunch with my lawyer and my CPA over here at the Detroit Club. The waiter came in and sidled up to me and told me that, and I didn't believe it. As I walked downstairs we went by the barber shop, and I could hear the radio and that confirmed it.

F: What were people doing in Detroit? Were they going out on the streets and talking, or were they all inside listening to their radios and watching TV?

W: Well, I think that most of them were just sort of shocked and stunned and were sort of stumbling through their daily routine.

F: Did you break your routine then, or did you go on back to Washington?

W: I went back to Washington.

F: What were things like at the State Department? Sure shot that day to hell, didn't it?

W: Yes. The preparations were [going on] for the funeral, and of course

all the heads of state were coming in. I recall at that time that Johnson greeted all of these people. I remember, I think it was Haile Selassie and some of the others particularly wanted to be among the first to talk to the new President, and he very graciously saw a number of them right away.

F: On something like that are you mother's shepherd, or does protocol take over at that point?

W: Protocol stands there, but generally, because I naturally had a better rapport with the Africans, I would handle it. I think the assistant secretary for the area, whether it was Africa or Europe, generally was there. I'm thinking of the receiving line. The protocol man was there, too. But we would pass down the line with our officials, presidents or ambassadors, whatever they might be.

F: Not just then, but down through his presidency, you took lots of Africans by to see the President, ambassadorial and other levels. Now Johnson could be, as we know, charming; he could be terribly blunt and almost overpowering. Did he ever get rough with any of the visitors, or did he always play that cool?

W: I don't recall him getting rough with any of the visitors, no.

F: So he was impeccable, more or less, as those things go?

W: Yes, no situations of any kind there.

F: Did any of them take out after him?

W: No. I didn't detect any feeling of animosity or disappointment.

F: You remained correct, in other words?

W: Right.

F: Did you feel that any particular policy of Johnson's was responsible for the sort of deterioration of some of our relationships with--particularly I'm thinking of North Africa? Or was that just one of those two worlds, three worlds dividing?

W: The big problem with Libya occurred after I left. It was just beginning. The problem there apparently was that the old King wasn't really as interested in ruling that country as in some of his religious and other problems, and also he wasn't as impeccable as we thought. So the situation there wasn't as strong as we'd hoped for. But the other thing, of course, was that the British were in there, and while we had a major air base, Wheelus, the British Army was in there. I think the King, and I'm afraid we, were relying on the British to maintain the stability of the situation, which of course collapsed.

With respect to the other areas, Algiers was always a spiny nettle. But the President had such--that is, Kennedy when he was president--a mystique that that papered over a lot of the difficulties. Then we had sort of been helpful to them in getting their independence from the French, and I think they were grateful to us for that. Morocco we had generally good relations [with] and still do, and I don't think the deterioration showed there so much. I think our biggest problem in deteriorating situations was with the Chinese building the railroad in Tanzania. This was a very difficult problem. I of course had very strongly urged that we undertake that project, but it was a very expensive one and we couldn't get the British to go along. I guess the fainted hearts won out on that one. While I didn't

agree with the position, it wasn't an easy one for the President to make.

F: Do the oil concessionaires and the military somewhat make independent policy from the State Department? I know all these things are supposed to be coordinated, but do they kind of go off on their own?

W: There was no question but what the military had their own feelings, and of course the biggest problem was vis-a-vis Portugal because the Azores was a vitally important stopping point. It's not quite halfway, but being able to stop to refuel meant that our planes could carry twice the payload. And about, I don't know, 75 per cent fly the southern route, because the northern route, while shorter, the weather is bad. This was mostly when Kennedy was in, but we had a very stiff fight with the military. By and large we won out, because it wasn't until the Republicans came in that the military were able to renew the base leases in the Azores. We'd recommended the policy of not doing it, because I was sure that the Portuguese were not going to throw us out and that we could stay. But in any event, that had been a sticking point with the military.

The other was when it came to South Africa, some of the missile sites, so to speak, or missile tracking. We had to go to the top many times in order to maintain. Some of them we won, some of them we lost. But I would say one place that I think is of vital importance today is the Congo. Everything seemed to be lost for a while there, and that that was going to go downhill and the communists were going to take over. We had excellent cooperation from the military and all of the agencies,

and we had a many-part committee working on that. The State Department at the President's insistence had a strong leadership there, and the others followed along very well.

F: Did Johnson ever lean on South Africa to try to get it to mitigate a little bit its anti-black position?

W: I don't recall that he did personally, but Dean Rusk certainly did. I assume that he must be doing it with approval, or at least not against the President.

F: Did most of the Rhodesia problem come after you left?

W: No, we had the first part while I was there.

F: What was your role in that, just to stay alert?

W: No. We recommended that we close our embassy there, which we did, but we maintained some of the lower staff there to have an idea of what was going on. We recommended joining with the world boycott, so to speak, and I think that the administration stayed strong. It was the Congress that weakened there, because I guess the industrial interests got after them to break the boycott on chrome.

F: Did you get involved in the sending of cultural groups all the way from Louis Armstrong to the professors to Africa, or was that mainly Charles Frankel's job?

W: That was mainly Frankel's job. I was just collaterally involved, but he was directly involved.

F: So you didn't have to cover with that thing?

W: No, no.

F: Did Johnson make any attempt among these new nations to try to raise a kind of an establishment that was at least conservative to the point that it would maybe endure as against those who were more impatient?

W: The only thing I could answer on that is just about the time that I was leaving, unbeknownst to me, Johnson and I suppose somebody else in the State Department had leant their ears to Ed Korry, who was the ambassador to Ethiopia and subsequently went down to Chile, I guess it was.

F: Right.

W: And he, contrary to what we had all discussed over a period of time--and I say all, I mean all the African ambassadors, that is American ambassadors in Africa and all of our staff--had come up with a general program of development. Korry advocated the concentration, particularly of aid programs, in a few countries. Apparently the administration bought that. It was about the time I was going out, so I didn't really have the time to try and buck that. But I thought that was wrong.

F: When Detroit exploded and Jerry Cavanagh and George Romney were very deeply involved, did the President spare you that, or did he use you as a resource person on Michigan?

W: No, he didn't. I happened to be up in Mackinaw Island when that came off. It was a couple of days before I really had any feel of what was going on, and by that time it was too late for me to have done anything. It would have been difficult for me to have found a

handle to go in, because--

F: It would have left you in an awfully exposed position, to say the least.

W: Yes. Well, I don't know. When those things fly off, they're pretty hard to handle.

F: Yes.

W: Some people thought that maybe if I'd been there at the time, we could have done it. I don't really think so. But in any event, nobody concerned seemed to think of me, and I didn't want to intrude, especially because by the time I really realized the gravity of the situation, it would have been rather late.

F: When Kennedy went out and Johnson came in, was there a continuity in the two administrations as far as general African policy was concerned?

W: As far as the general African policy there was. President Johnson made it clear to me that he was going to follow that same policy and was going to try and do the same things, and that is the message I took the Africans. Except at the very end when somebody fell off the boat and filed that Korry plan I think that was true. I think we did follow it, and as I pointed out, he personally made an effort to show his concern. I might just repeat the story I told you earlier about the personal relationships.

F: Yes.

W: That is, that very early in his administration President Johnson called me over to the White House and he said, "Now, Mennen, I want you to know that you're going to be as welcome and as effective in the

White House as you had been with Kennedy, if not more so." And we did have a good relationship.

F: I've got about three pages here of visits to the Oval Office, state dinners and so forth, you know. I mean, evidently you saw the man with some frequency.

W: Yes. I did see him, and of course he retained Walt Rostow who was working in that area. Then Bill Moyers and I became pretty good friends. So it was a fruitful relationship. While obviously with Kennedy I had the closer prior relationships, I didn't feel that I had really lost much in effectiveness when Johnson came in.

F: Did he twit you about 1960?

W: No. Well, just before he mentioned that I'd be as welcome as before he referred to it, but I think that was the only time. He more generally referred to our having been old friends.

F: In the old NYA days.

W: Yes. Although he painted it a little strong.

F: Did you ever get any insights on his relationship with Averell Harriman?

W: I don't know. I think I did, but I can't remember it now.

F: How did Johnson seem to get on with Bourguiba? Or was there enough contact to measure?

W: I don't recall.

F: Was there any difference in protocol as far as state visitors were concerned with the sort of size and importance of the countries that

came to the White House, the leaders of some countries, or did the President pretty well treat them all the same?

W: Oh, a difference in protocol between large countries and small countries by President Johnson?

F: Yes.

W: I don't recall of any, no.

F: Did he feel a particular empathy with William Tubman? Liberia has always, I think, to some people, been looked upon as kind [of an]--I don't mean it in a demeaning sense--extension of the United States because of its background.

W: I don't recall that I had any opportunity to observe what the relationships between Johnson and [Tubman were].

F: You rode the Sequoia on occasion.

W: Yes.

F: How was that run? I know what Johnson did with staff and Washington people, but when you took the African ambassadors along, did he pretty well stay in sight at all times?

W: No, he sometimes was aft, which is outdoors. As I recall, he went topside, too, and chatted around there. He generally got to see just about everyone.

F: Did he make any concessions to special taste, or did they eat his food? Of course, he had special tastes.

W: Yes. No, as far as I know they ate his food.

F: When the President came over to the Department of State, as he did in the summer of 1965, to eat with the assistant secretaries, was that a

business session or was it just kind of a perfunctory call?

W: I don't recall that. I may not have been around, but I don't recall that. That is, I may have been in Africa.

F: Yes. When you wound up at the State Department, the President . . . . Or at least you came over to the Oval Office and to the Fish Room for a sort of a good-bye ceremony.

W: Yes. He wrote me a very nice letter, and he was very genial in signing me off. I appreciated our relationship.

F: How did you happen to get pointed toward the Philippines?

W: I don't know. I haven't the slightest idea. My wife and I had pretty much decided that we weren't going to do anything outside the state of Michigan, and certainly not abroad, and I suddenly had a call from Dean Rusk saying that they had an urgent job that he wanted me to take. My wife said I said yes right away, but I didn't. I told him that we hadn't thought about going abroad, and that we would talk it over and call him back. And we did. I'm glad we did. It was a beautiful experience.

F: No particular reason, though, for the Philippines?

W: I have no idea whatsoever. I mean, as I pointed out--

F: It was sensitive, of course.

W: --I didn't have anything to do with getting the job, and I never was told why they picked me.

F: Had you been particularly close to any of the Filipino leaders?

W: Well, Michigan has had a long tradition of Philippine relations. When the Americans first went into the Philippines, there were a lot

of Michiganders, and the University of Michigan had always been close. I think their judicial setup was set up by a Michigan lawyer, and of course my friend Frank Murphy had been the last governor general. When he was attorney general a lot of the Filipinos came to see him, and I saw them. Somewhere or another I think I had run into Carlos Romulo. But I have no idea why they picked me.

F: Did you have any particular instructions, any more than ordinary ambassadorial instructions?

W: No, I don't think I had anything very special. My predecessor, Bill Blair, had had a very unfortunate experience in connection with some murder that had taken place at Clark Airfield. He just started off under a cloud, and he'd never been able to turn it around. Then the other problem he had was that his wife didn't care for it. Between the two, he really had a rough time, although he himself was interested in it and I think worked hard and mechanically did a good job. I was advised of all of this, and they were very anxious that I get out there in a hurry. So I don't remember spending too much time in Washington. They had a first-rate deputy chief of mission, Jim Wilson. He really was a crackerjack, so that as far as the general administration, why, he did a beautiful job.

F: I don't recall, was there a gap between Blair leaving and your coming?

W: Yes, about eight months. This was . . .

F: Wilson more or less acted as charge during that time?

W: Yes. One thing they did--I guess it must have been a month or so before I went out--Dean Rusk told me they had the best embassy and the

worst residence, and the DCM, Jim Wilson, insisted that they add a big reception room. They built that for me.

F: At your house? At the embassy?

W: At the residence.

F: At the residence.

W: The embassy was a great big place, and they had no problem there at all. I had a big office. It was about as large as this one. Then there was an enclosed porch, and there was a big outdoor area which looked right on Manila Bay. There was all sorts of room for everybody else, so there was no problem there. In the house the dining room was just adequate but the living room was inadequate, and in order to do diplomatic entertaining, you did need the extra room. It proved to be very useful.

F: So that really had been neglected prior to your getting there?

W: Yes, yes.

F: The physical conditions.

W: Yes, yes. There had been that discussion, but as far as any specific briefing I don't remember it, outside of letting me know what the problems were. Like a political campaign I had the first three or four weeks planned out, and so I lit running.

F: What did you do?

W: I figured that what I'd better do would be to get out in the provinces and see the country, in addition to the normal duties of calling on everybody. Incidentally, I called on all the Filipinos before I called on any of the ambassadors. That was sort of hard on my

relationship with them, but that worked out. Then they really were most appreciative that I visited in the provinces as much as I did. You could feel the waves coming back all the time, because most of the people in Manila felt that they had some home someplace else.

F: Did you make all the provinces?

W: No. They had about eighty of them, and I wasn't there long enough. I made about two-thirds of them.

F: You made places like Leyte and Mindanao?

W: Oh, yes. I got to Jolo, which is about as far southwest as you could go, and I even got up in Batangas, which is halfway up into Formosa.

F: But when you say you made the provinces, what did you do? Did you fly in, or did you come in by boat?

W: No, I flew in. That's one thing that you're well equipped with in the Philippines, because you have such a large American military establishment there. I would call up in advance, call up the mayor or the governor, or generally both, and they were always delighted. If it was the mayor, he'd be there and most of his city council and a few other people. They'd generally declare a school holiday, and the kids would be lined up going in. Then you'd walk into town, or drive in, and I'd always get out and walk down about two or three hundred yards of kids. Then they'd have a banquet, and then you'd speak someplace and go around and see some of the principal things. Occasionally there'd be conferences, that is, local conferences, and I'd go up there. I went up to Tarlac, which is the center of their rice growing, and of course

we went out into the rice paddies. There were things of that nature that we did. It was very interesting and very instructive and very helpful.

F: To get back for a moment, you would have been named at the time that the, you might say, backbiting between Senator Fulbright and the President was at its peak over Vietnam and our policy. Did the Senator give you any problem on confirmation?

W: No, I didn't have any. Being such a good friend of our own Senator Phil Hart, it was more or less an easy trot, and so we had no problems at all. I of course had known Bill, and we'd had some degree of friendship. I had quite a talk with him because, now that you mention it--which is nothing about Vietnam--Bill Fulbright had a feeling that we hadn't done right by the Philippines, that it had been sort of an imperialistic intrusion.

(Interruption)

F: Go back to the start of that sentence on Fulbright.

W: As I was saying, now that you mention it I remember that I had quite a talk with Fulbright, because he had some definite feelings that the United States had not treated the Filipinos as well as we should have. I think he talked about Aguinaldo and all of that. But he talked in sort of a very friendly way that I might be understanding of this and might be helpful in giving the Filipinos a square deal.

F: What kind of an actual situation did you find, insofar as what has happened to Filipino interests in enlistment with the United States?

W: Well, it's sort of a mixed bag. On the long run situation, the United

States had done an outstanding job when it came to giving the Filipinos an education. Even Carlos Romulo, when he was attacking the United States as it became popular toward the end, nonetheless emphasized that the Filipinos owed their good educational system to the United States.

We had two difficult situations when we were out there, which unfortunately came pretty closely together. One was that a young marine guard unfortunately violated the regulations and shot a young Filipino punk who was trying to steal a bicycle. He tried to shoot his legs, but just at that moment the fellow was ducking to go under a gate and he killed him. By our own rules, I think that we should have turned him over to the Philippine courts for action, and I'm sure the Filipinos would have been very understanding. But the military were very obdurate, and the Congress was of the same mind. They were not about to give up our jurisdiction. So that caused a lot of hard feelings. We had demonstrations on [that]. We never had any bitterness between myself and the various people, but in the government they didn't understand it. Actually, some of their congressional leadership couldn't understand why I wouldn't make a deal with them. Because they agreed that they would save him harmless, but they wanted the appearance of our trusting their jurisdiction. That was the one thing.

The other thing was that our State Department spokesman, McCloskey, put his foot in his mouth and indicated that Sabah, which is in North Borneo, was a part of Malaysia, although the Filipinos had claimed it through a very strange personal relationship to one of the same rulers.

Malaysia probably had a better claim, but McCloskey had no reason to say this. Well, that raised unshirted hell for some time. As I say, the two of them came together.

F: Any particular reason why he would have made a statement like that?

W: He didn't come right out and say that "This belongs to Malaysia," but in a sentence he uttered it could be interpreted that he was including Sabah within it. Of course, this was interpreted the worst way. No, he had no intention of doing this, but it was just sloppy language and it caused a lot of trouble.

F: What did you do, just let that kind of wear out, ease off?

W: We got retractions from our government that we didn't mean this at all.

F: Kind of like "Quebec Libre"?

W: Well, yes. It was at a time when Marcos was having some problems, particularly with the students, and this was a great rallying cry and could take their mind off of their other problems, so they pushed it pretty hard.

The only other--well, we had a problem relative to import duties. We claimed for the military that they weren't subject ot it. This was not bitterness but determination on both sides, and we had about three months of sitting down negotiating across the table about these things. Some of their shipments were carried on our vessels, and normally the vessels would off load in Manilla, so they'd have the stuff where they wanted. But instead we off loaded up at Subic Bay, where there was no question about any impost, because this was our territorial

area. But we argued it out on a legal basis. After I left Jim Wilson came to a successful conclusion. Those were the sort of problems and nettles we had.

Overall what we were trying to do was to help them build up their economy, in particular their agriculture. Involved in that was an effort to get them to do what Marcos is talking about doing now, and that is land reform. But in the Senate all the big landowners held sway, and as a consequence, they talked a great game but we really couldn't get much going. However the miracle rice, which was a Rockefeller development, that really made a great difference in the life of the average Filipino. Because for the first time in their lives, they were self-sufficient, and they even got to the point where they could export. Also, the rice farmer was able to hold on to some of the increased return; it didn't all go to the middleman or to the landowner. So that's what we were working on. Well, there was a constant problem about the military.

F: Is it a real feeling that it's time for the American to get scarce in the Philippines, or is that just something for me to talk about on some day I'm disgruntled?

W: I think more the latter. Under the Laurel-Langley act, of course, I mean treaty, we have special rights which give American business an advantage over the other businesses, and this rankles a little. But first of all, the wages the Americans pay are higher than anybody else, so that the average Filipino gets a better break. Next to the Philippine government the U.S. government

is the biggest employer because particularly in our naval bases we have great machine shops and everything. We have trained thousands, just literally tens of thousands of Filipinos, who not only have therefore learned a trade and have been able to go out and earn a good living--if they leave, [but] most of them don't like to leave because they get better wages with us--but all throughout the Pacific, in Vietnam and everything, the best laborers are the Filipinos because they're the best trained. While I was out there we completed the unionization of all of the people in the military branch who are in that kind of work.

So I think, going back to an appreciation of what we did in education, a kind of traditional friendship at the upper class level and what we've been able to do for the working people, that there was a pretty good relationship. Toward the end of my months there there was a sort of a radical build up. There were just a very small percentage of the unionists who were radical, and part of their business was to talk against the Americans. The other unionists were all associated with American unions in one way or another. Just a few of the university people in Manila were sort of pseudo-communist oriented, and they made a lot more noise than their real merits.

F: The Huks have just about disappeared as an element, haven't they? They've been kind of neutralized?

W: Well, they disappeared as an ideological group. Magsaysáy [former president] beat them back. They really got within about twenty miles

of Manila at one time, but they were pretty much crushed. But if you go up into Tarlac province or around there, they still have guards, because there are people who are--oh, they're more thugs and brigands than they are any ideological group.

F: I would presume that if I for whatever reason were against Marcos I'd just automatically, as a part of the litany, call him an American tool, et cetera, whether it fit or not, I mean.

W: I think there's some degree of ambivalence, because some of them run boasting about their American ties. Now that may become less popular than it used to be, but my next door neighbor, Osmena I think, was thinking of running against Marcos, and he made no bones about going to the United States to try to raise funds and so on. So with a certain element and in a particular time of the year you might say being anti-American is great, but on other occasion being pro-American isn't being too bad. Of course, that may have changed drastically since I left.

F: Did Vietnam give you much trouble?

W: Just towards the end. The Filipinos at President Johnson's urging had sent some engineering troops into Tay Ninh in Vietnam. I know it was a very interesting operation. They had established a community where they helped them build roads. They also went around from village to village, and they had nurses and doctors. They'd bring all the kids in and the old people. I saw them pulling teeth, and all the kids, they'd take all their clothes off and scrub them up and clean them up if they needed any help and so on. They were doing that kind of a

job. Well, the problem of course was that somebody in the Congress eventually found out that the United States was supporting that by paying the combat bonus. The Filipinos were paying for the rest. I suppose the United States was arming them, but they would have done that anyway. So there wasn't too much trouble between us and the Filipinos until this thing came out, and then of course some of the Filipinos were hitting Marcos over the head with this, as well as Americans hitting our administration over the head about it.

F: I wonder what the Philippine attitude is, that, "We're sort of hired mercenaries?"

W: I went over and visited them in Tay Ninh, and they were very proud of themselves and what they were doing. Some of the students and some of these radical labor people kept saying they had no business being over there, but I think the military and most of the Filipinos thought it was all right. I should add one thing: toward the end some of the papers--and the Manila papers are just unbelievable, the Filipinos don't have liberty they have license, and they really are scandalous--started saying that, "We shouldn't be over there with our troops because the Chinese want to take over Vietnam. So they will send their bombs to us, and we don't want to be bombed." But I think that until toward the end, when this thing got a little hot, most of the Filipinos didn't know that they had anybody in Vietnam.

F: Did they have a real fear of the Chinese?

W: Apparently there must have been enough fear so that the newspapers were trying to play this bombs thing. I don't think there was that much

fear. The Chinese have been in the Philippines for a thousand years, and they say that the Filipinos are one-tenth Chinese. Marcos kept talking about Maoists, and there had been a time when not the Chinese but the communists in Indonesia had supported the Huks and the other. There was something about that.

I think primarily, by and large, the Filipinos were more against the Japanese than worried about the Chinese. They had the war memories. We would go and sit down with some dowager, and the subject would come up and she had been up in the hills running away from the Japanese. So that this is a personal thing to just about everybody. They were concerned about their economic penetration; they had some laws about that. When I was up in the Batangas I noticed particularly that you would go into shops and they had lots of Japanese stuff. As I was leaving, I saw that they were penetrating the markets. They passed a law that they couldn't come in without a Filipino partner, and so they had a lot of fronts that were moving in somehow.

F: A couple of questions to round off: was it a fairly widespread feeling among some Filipinos that this was a kind of Johnsonian reversion to racism in fighting the Vietnamese? This is a white man coming after the brown or yellow?

W: I don't think I've ever heard of that, no. I mean, I'm familiar with that argument, but I never heard any of the Filipinos [voice it]. I don't remember reading it either. I certainly never saw it directed at Johnson.

F: Were you in a kind of a crossroads position there because of Vietnam?

W: You mean people going through?

F: As far as lots of so-called VIP's coming back and forth from various countries?

W: Not so much.

F: They came through Hong Kong.

W: There was some, but not too many.

F: It wasn't a kind of Lisbon sort of situation?

W: No. No, it wasn't that. Time-Life had a group of high executives that went through to the Far East, and they stopped off. Oh, we had a few, but we didn't really have a lot. I think many of them were coming out on military planes, and they came to Clark Field and maybe slept overnight and went on the next day without ever coming to Manila.

F: You didn't have to put up with a lot of people you didn't want to?

W: No.

F: Is there anything else we ought to cover? Did you ever go on a trip with the President or get down to the Ranch?

W: No. I never got down to the Ranch, until the--I guess I've never actually been in the Ranch. We were right next to the Ranch. Who's our friend from New York who is with the. . .?

F: I know who you're talking about.

W: Krim.

F: Yes. Arthur Krim.

W: We were with Arthur Krim. No, I have nothing, except to express my admiration for Lady Bird. When I was active in politics, I always thought that she was a great ornament to the Democratic Party. On at least one occasion she came up and visited with us in Mackinaw Island and was very gracious and made a big hit. I think she is great.

F: You had one peculiar position. As a governor of a heavily industrialized state working closely with union people, you understood the needs of labor and the desires like a lot of governors don't. Could you use your Michigan people to help with the labor situation out there, or did you pretty much sort of let them do it on their own?

W: No, they'd already pretty much established it. The UAW had a particular link with a labor organization down there in the central Philippines, and some of the other unions had relationships with the West Coast unions. But the UAW had asked me to go look up their associates. I think the Filipinos must be pretty wide readers, because they knew all of my labor background, they knew my civil rights background.

F: You didn't have to educate them?

W: No. I had very good relationships with their unions. We got along fine.

F: Thank you, Mr. Justice.

W: Okay, it's been a pleasure. I hope you have what you want.

[End of Tape 1 of 1 and Interview I]

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