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GEORGE REEDY ORAL HISTORY, INTERVIEW II  
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By George Reedy

to the

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INTERVIEWEE: GEORGE REEDY (Tape #5)

INTERVIEWER: JOE B. FRANTZ

February 14, 1972

F: Let's talk, George, about the President and what you know about the Richard Russell situation.

R: I don't know too much of it directly, Joe. I do know that a number of months after I left the White House I had become, personally, rather concerned about a lot of the things that were going on, things that seemed to me politically--well, inept is the kindest word I can use.

And I ran into Dick Russell at a party one night. Now the relationship between Russell and Johnson in the Senate had been a very close one and an extremely important one. Russell's desk was right behind Johnson's. And Russell was a highly unusual man. Russell was capable of giving another senator advice which ran against Russell's own interests, and he would do that if he were approached properly. Also Russell had the most encyclopedic knowledge of the politics of the United States of any member of the Senate.

F: Even exceeding Johnson?

R: Oh, much exceeding Johnson. Russell had real insight into states as far away as Oregon, Michigan--sometimes even better insight than the senator from that state had. And he had been quite disinterested in the advice that he gave to Johnson when Johnson was the Majority Leader.

Now, I ran into Russell at a party one evening and had a long talk with him.

F: About when are we talking about?

R: I would say this would be in about '67. I said, "Senator, do things look as bad as I think they look?"

He said, "You don't have to say anything more, George. I know what you mean. They look worse."

I said, "Well, Senator, can't you go on down and have a talk with him? You used to be able to talk some sense into him."

And, Joe, I'll never forget his words. What he said, in effect was--and I think this is almost an exact quote--"George, I can't talk to a President the way I can talk to another senator." That was almost the beginning of my book on the presidency right there. I realized immediately that Russell was right, that you cannot talk to a President the way you can talk to a peer.

After that, all I really heard were rumors. Not that there was a break or anything of that nature. Russell visited the White House quite frequently to my own knowledge. The girls were very fond of him; he was "Uncle Dick."

But I did have one or two other conversations with him. They were all sort of undercurrent hints that he thought the President had gotten much too far away from the people, that there was a difference between leading the people and between forcing things down their throats.

Now you have to realize, of course, that this was a very popular theme of Dick Russell's. Russell, for many years, had held the concept that you don't have to do everything today. He was the first one that ever persuaded me that the statistical method of measuring Congress isn't worth a hoot in hell--to see how many bills get passed

in any one particular year. Russell said the best measure would be to see how many were not passed in a particular year, that what really mattered was the quality of the bills. And Russell didn't think that you got quality out of hasty action. He thought it was better to let some of these things simmer for awhile and let the rough edges rub off.

That's about all I know about it, Joe, aside from the rumors.

The only other thing, I do know that Russell had originally been opposed to any sort of intervention in Viet Nam, but here I'm going back to 1954 or '55, at the time of Dien Bien Phu. And sometimes in the late '60's--it must have been '66 or '67--I had another conversation with him in which we got on the topic. He said in the course of that conversation that while he had been against getting into it anyway, he thought that once we were in it there was no alternative other than to go ahead and win it. He was fully aware of what that meant, this was not just the average right winger talking, because he did not believe the American people could stand this continuous drain of the limited type of war.

F: You mean the economic drain or just the drain on the nerves?

R: The psychological drain. And he fully realized the risk--he was not a fool--but that he thought the risk was probably less than just letting the thing go on on a limited war basis.

Now all of those things, I think, played a part in a rift. It never came up publicly as far as I know. I doubt whether Russell would ever have opposed Lyndon Johnson in the normal sense of opposing.

F: Not in a Fulbright or a Proxmire sense.

R: No, he would not do that. But there was a coolness. There's no question

about it in my mind. That's all the direct information I have on it, Joe.

F: While we're on Russell, back in the old Senate days did Russell have a sort of moderating influence on Johnson insofar--well, I'm thinking of things like that civil rights act that they put through? Did Russell in a sense help Johnson map strategy, even though he himself was opposed to it?

R: There's no question about that in my mind, that he really helped Johnson. But it was one of those things where I don't believe you could ever nail it down. I think Russell realized that a civil rights bill was inevitable, and I think that he also thought it was better to get the thing over with. Now of course you know the bill of '57 which was the one that broke the ice. It was one that could not have passed the Senate in the form that the administration sent it to Congress. What happened, Russell came in with a shock attack, blasting the entire bill. In retrospect, the result of that shock attack was a modification of the bill in such a form that it could pass the Senate. And I'm wondering to this day whether that was not a question of deliberate design, that Russell was really not trying to kill the whole bill but at least to place the South, first of all, in the position where the Southern senators could live with the fact that they'd let the bill go through, but, secondly, really reshape the bill so that it could pass. You know, if Russell hadn't opened his attack so early, if Russell had waited a few more weeks until the bill was actually on the floor and then started to debate it, I think he might have killed the bill. He really opened the debate before the bill was on the floor.

F: So that people could almost feel a victory--

R: It was more than that. What happened, there was a strange provision in the bill, and I do not believe myself that anyone in the administration, was aware of that provision--how Russell ever found it, I don't know--but a provision which, in effect, could have resulted in martial law throughout the South. It was a very difficult thing to find, because it depended upon a peculiar codification of the laws. You had two laws involved that had already been passed. One law referred to the other, but the other law did not refer to the first law. This was the famous Title III. And it wasn't apparent from reading the bill, or from going back to the references within the bill itself to the original act, that this really gave the President fantastic powers to declare martial law in the South. And everyone, myself included, was startled and somewhat shocked when Russell made a speech on the Senate floor bringing that fact out.

Now, my point is that I think if he had waited until the bill actually got on the floor and the debate had started and he had then uncorked that one, the confusion might have been sufficient to have killed the bill. But by uncorking this fact well in advance of the debate it gave people time to think and to regroup and to reshape the bill so that it became something that could be passed.

F: How does someone like Senate Majority Leader Johnson who is, we know, as busy as all get-out keep hidden jokers from getting through on him? He can't read these things with much time for analysis. You can send him little precis of them and so forth, but even you, you know, might get fooled here and there. How do you protect yourself?

R: He would do it pretty much the same way I did it as staff director



of the policy committee, Joe. You learn, sooner or later, that there are a group of senators who are really specialists and who also are relatively honest in discussing a measure with you. Really, what you do is to discuss the bill thoroughly with those specialists.

Now sometimes even then something will get through. I'm still wondering how Russell dug up the peculiar cross reference that, in effect, gave Title III a martial law tinge to it. Incidentally, that was because of some old Reconstruction acts. One of the early things that happened was that they repealed those Reconstruction acts as soon as the bill got on the floor. But there's no other way of doing it. No one senator could possibly study all of those bills with sufficient care. And occasionally, even with these experts, some things will slip through.

F: Does someone like John Williams of Delaware really sit down and pore over them, or does he have enough watchdogs?

R: He doesn't pay too much attention to bills. That's not his specialty. John Williams' specialty is ferreting out wrong-doing, and really the way he does it is that he just reads all of his mail very carefully. Once you get a reputation as a man who has exposed something, then everybody that has something he believes should be exposed writes to you.

F: If I wanted to skewer you, I would write him.

R: Right. That's exactly what happens with Williams. Williams started because he became interested in a letter that he got from somebody saying that there was an awful lot of fraud and chicanery in some post office or--I forget what it was. He personally went up and investigated it and found out it was accurate. Well, once he got the reputation as the man with the can opener who could open these cans

of worms so everybody could look at it, then stuff just poured in on him.

F: I want to talk a little bit, as you feel able, about Johnson's relationship with Wayne Morse, because of course, Morse was all over the map, rather consistent in some ways but not altogether consistent politically.

R: That was a strange relationship, Joe. He really liked Morse. I'm absolutely convinced that there was genuine affection between those two men. And yet Morse would do the most outrageous things. Morse would deliberately save his roughest anti-Johnson speeches for Austin, Texas or for Dallas, or for places like that. But there were certain clinches where Morse would always come through for him.

I can recall when Joe McCarthy came in with some very mischievous resolution, and, again, I've forgotten what it was. But it was something involving--my memory plays tricks on me, I'd have to look it up. But it was an extremely demagogic resolution, and Joe wanted it passed right away without reference to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, without even sending it to committee. I can still recall a little strategy meeting in which Wayne Morse said, "Well, my God, I'll take this one on myself," and he went right down to the Senate floor. And really with what was considerable courage, he just lambasted Joe and the resolution from hell to breakfast. And Wayne would come through on occasions like that.

But this was a strange relationship because Wayne would constantly implant his foot right in Johnson's groin, and yet a few days later they would be bosom buddies.

F: Did Johnson understand his sort of quirk in the Morse character?

R: I think so. They were both kind of rough-and-tumble brawlers in a way.

I can recall one night, when I was home and in bed and I always corrected the Record for Johnson. Johnson told me to go home early that evening. The Senate was still meeting, but he wasn't going to take the floor anymore, and there was just a long speech being made by Wayne Morse. So about midnight he called me, said: "George, I wandered on the Senate floor, Wayne was making a speech, and I complimented him and he complimented me. Really, it got a little bit outrageous. Maybe you'd better come down and take a look at that record."

I did, Joe. Boy, had they complimented each other! Wayne Morse had been making some kind of a speech approving what a great man he'd been, and Johnson got up and said, "Yes, and they did not listen to the senior senator from Oregon in those days, and now their chickens are coming home to roost."

Wayne Morse said, "Yes, those chickens are coming home to roost, and it's the scandal of the country." They had those Goddamned chickens coming home to roost at least 335 times in about fifteen pages of copy.

I really had no alternative. I just took a blue pencil. I think I must have chopped about five or six thousands words out.

F: Did Johnson second-guess you when you corrected such copy?

R: No.

F: Did the Morse attitude on the war in Viet Nam tend to sour Johnson on him?

R: No. Because even after Morse's attitude was quite clear, he called

upon Morse to help him out with the airline strike in 1966, and Morse did an excellent job for him.

You know, Johnson really put his foot in that one. If I have to trace the decline of the Johnson Administration, you can time it precisely by that incident.

F: Why so?

R: I don't think it was the cause, but I think it was the first time that Johnson as President in public made a rather major boner that showed up immediately. The thing was minor and trivial and has been forgotten now, but it was still the first time he fell on his face publicly.

As you recall, the machinists were on strike against the airlines. Johnson called them into the White House, and there was a big dramatic announcement on Friday that they'd reached an agreement. On Sunday out came the next announcement that the machinists had voted down the agreement, really leaving the Administration with egg on its face.

After that he called Wayne Morse in and Morse took them a few blocks down the street and hammered out a negotiation--at which he was damned good.

F: Did Johnson ever express his displeasure with Morse's attitudes?

R: No, for some reason he never did. He never complained about Morse, and Morse never really complained about him in private. In public of course Johnson just didn't say anything about Wayne Morse. Again, it was a strange sort of thing because Morse was absolutely savage where Johnson was concerned at times. And yet the men would be bosom buddies a few days later. I never understood the relationship, Joe

F: I don't want to get into any two-bit psychology between you and me, but did you get the feeling that maybe Morse had a compulsion to prove his independence from time to time?

R: Oh, there's no question about that. But also Morse was a battler. Morse carried on some of the strangest battles. When Abe Fortas was Under Secretary of the Interior, he made Abe's life absolutely miserable on some issue that I've never been able to fathom. I haven't the faintest idea what it was about. He got in this fantastic fight with poor Dick Neuberger and nearly drove Dick Neuberger frantic trying to find out what it was all about. Dick would write him a nice letter, and, wham, back would come this sizzling denunciation.

There was some basic combative instinct to Wayne Morse. There is some basic combative instinct. I saw him a few months ago and he was getting set to run again. And, I don't know, somehow Johnson seemed to enjoy it. I don't know what it was.

F: Appealed to him.

R: Yes, it really appealed to him. Of course, Morse had a terrific mind, which happened to appeal to Johnson. Morse had one of the best minds in the Senate.

F: In one of your interviews you just mentioned in passing Robert Hill, who was Ambassador to Mexico, and I wonder if we could explore a little bit the relations with him. I had a feeling that they went a little deeper.

R: Of course they would. You see, Bob had been very close to Styles Bridges, and Styles Bridges was one of the closest and firmest friends that Lyndon Johnson had in the United States Senate, and Bob was well aware of this.

F: Johnson's friends, incidentally, in the Senate were intra-party, they were not confined to Democrats.

R: No question about that. He was quite fond of Bill Knowland; he was very fond of Bob Taft. He was very fond of Styles Bridges. I'd say his relationship was the closest with Bridges. He was very fond of Leverett Saltonstall. It was on both sides of the aisle. These were people that in my judgment he genuinely liked, genuinely felt affection for. And I think some of the Bridges' relationship rubbed off on Bob.

We were down in Mexico when Bob was ambassador, and you could see immediately the closeness of the relationship in the fact that he paid a great deal of attention to some of Bob's concepts of Mexico.

F: Did you see any sort of political results of this friendship?

R: No. There may have been some that I wouldn't know about, Joe, because Hill--well, Hill did have something to do with setting up this meeting between Johnson and Lopez-Mateos down in Acapulco, which took place in 1958, I guess. He wasn't the prime mover or anything like that, but he had quite a bit to do with it.

F: Did you go?

R: Oh, yes, I was down there.

F: What happened?

R: You mean at the meeting?

F: Yes.

R: The thing had started on a rather peculiar basis, Joe. Early in the spring of '58 we had gotten word through friends on the border --and I'm not sure who now but I suspect it was the Kazens--that Lopez-Mateos wanted to have a meeting with Lyndon Johnson, who was

then Majority Leader. Johnson checked it out with the State Department, and the general reaction of the State Department, which I think was correct, was that this would not be a very politic thing to do. The election had not taken place in Mexico as yet. It was absolutely certain that Lopez-Mateos was going to be elected because he was the candidate of the PRI. Still formally, he hadn't been. So the thing sort of lapsed.

But after the election, and before the inauguration, the contacts to Lopez-Mateos were renewed, and it was finally agreed that he and Johnson would meet at Acapulco. We didn't have the faintest idea what it was about, and neither did the State Department. This was one of those strange things. Johnson couldn't meet him in Mexico City because that was too close to the heart attack, and it was felt that it wouldn't be very wise to have him at that altitude.

I went down to Acapulco a few days in advance to help set things up. And after the thing was over Johnson told me to go to Mexico City and just sort of nose around and be there at the inauguration. So I was down there a couple of weeks.

F: Why does a President want to see a senator?

R: We still don't know for sure. Johnson has the impression that Lopez-Mateos had somewhere along the line picked up a biography of Johnson--you know Booth Mooney had written one by that point--and that Lopez-Mateos had been struck by a number of resemblances between his life and Johnson's life because in this meeting, at which there was absolutely no one except Johnson, Lopez-Mateos, and Justo-Sierra who was very close to Lopez-Mateos. Justo-Sierra handled the translation.

At that particular meeting, quite a bit of the time was spent just in discussing the fact that when they were kids they both rode a donkey or a burro to school; they had to go some distance to school; they had both started out as teachers; they had both started out in poor rural sections of the country. And I know what Johnson told me was that he had a rather strong feeling that Lopez-Mateos just wanted to meet someone in the American government whose career paralleled his own so thoroughly.

Now, there may have been a lot of other things involved. As I remember a rather harmless communique was put out on the thing. They met in the De las Americas down at Acapulco. As nearly as I can make out, aside from this discussion of childhood, about the only thing of note was that in the middle they stopped and had breakfast of enchiladas. Then after that Johnson spent a day or two on the presidential yacht, went on back to Texas, and I went up to Mexico City and got myself lost and had one wonderful time.

F: It was pretty much sociable, in a way, except of course as it worked out--

R: It worked out very well because out of that grew a friendship between Johnson and Lopez-Mateos which I think ultimately resulted in the Chamizal Treaty and in a number of other things. In my judgment it was a very useful meeting.

F: How big a role do you think Johnson had in the Chamizal?

R: Very big. You know, Johnson, even when he was in the Senate, had introduced a couple of resolutions leading to a settlement of Chamizal.

One thing that did develop out of this meeting was that there



were only two or three issues in which there really was a strong disagreement between the United States and Mexico. I mean by that, two or three issues aside from the general one--Mexicans disliking gringos and that sort of thing. Chamizal was one. Another was the division of the waters of the upper Colorado.

And then, the Mexican had been a little unhappy with some of the things that we had done in regard to the screwworm fly.

You know, Johnson really played a part in trying to resolve all of those issues.

F: Did Johnson feel particularly about the bracero question?

R: It's hard to tell. He much preferred the Bracero Treaty to wetbacks. Of course in his part of Texas that really wasn't the major issue. In the central hill country they don't care much about braceros. Johnson had a few Mexicans working at his ranch. I don't believe he felt too strongly about it, Joe, except, again, it was preferable to wetbacks.

F: How much of a role did Johnson play in the McCarthy put-down? His role, if there, was not obvious.

R: He was all-important in the McCarthy thing, Joe, all-important! It was Johnson that set up the committee. You remember the committee headed by Watkins--

F: I thought Watkins was the world's most inspired choice.

R: Oh he was. It was Johnson who set up the committee, Johnson who basically devised the strategy. There were a number of events that led up to it which he did not inspire, but--

F: Before we get as far as the committee, did Johnson sort of adopt a "give him rope" strategy?

R: Oh yes, very early. Johnson realized quite early that the Senate, at a certain point, was really quite helpless to do anything about McCarthy. This was one of the places where the liberals went wrong. The liberals really didn't fully understand the Senate and its working.

F: Now, are you talking about Senate liberals or all liberals?

R: All liberals, it was general. Generally they think of the Senate as sort of a "Gentlemen's Club" where you should have a committee that can expel members who disobey the rules of the club. Well, that's not the basic thesis of the Senate. The Senate's basic thesis is, "My God, a man has been sent there by a state," and that as long as the people of the state knew what they were doing when they elected him, it takes something extremely serious to justify unseating him or censuring him or taking any action against him whatsoever. And the Senate was not going to take action against McCarthy for the sort of thing that he was doing. Not because the Senate approved of it, but because the Senate in a way felt it was none of its business. Joe had to actually attack the Senate itself before the Senate would act.

There's no sense in saying the Senate should have acted earlier. You know, that's one of those "if wishes were horses, beggars would ride." And this was something that Johnson understood, and understood thoroughly, that up to a certain point action that McCarthy took was not going to bring about Senate retaliation--that he had to attack the Senate itself.

And of course Joe finally did. I think he did it by inadvertence. But he finally did. And once Joe attacked the Senate itself, then the Senate closed in.

But that basic strategy which led to the censuring of McCarthy, that was Lyndon Johnson's strategy. I can even recall the time when Bill Knowland suddenly backed away from his own Republican appointees of the committee and said he was going to vote against the censure of McCarthy. Johnson got wind of it, and Johnson was all set with a statement that followed Knowland immediately, saying he was going to back the committee.

F: You know, Johnson has a reputation for impatience, but at a time like that I presume he can be enormously deliberate and patient.

R: Right. You see, I think this again is one of the differences between the Senate and the White House. In the Senate you live in an atmosphere where you discover very quickly that you can't do a damned thing unless you can get fifty-one votes, and in some cases sixty-seven votes. This is just obvious, that an individual senator can't order anything, an individual senator can make speeches or hold investigations, but again those are rather limited things. And when you are aware of the actual workings of the Senate, you soon get away from this concept, that somebody speaks for the Senate, which nobody does. The only thing that speaks for the Senate is fifty-one or sixty-seven votes.

Your problem in the White House is there are so many things you can do just by giving an order. Now most of those things, of course, are rather trivial things. But if a man can immediately order a helicopter so that it winds up with him down in Texas two hours later, or if a man can immediately order toast and coffee, or a message, or a rubdown, or any television program that he wants, or any movie that he wants, or all that sort of thing, he soon loses his concept of persuasion. This is the basic problem of the White House.

It's too easy to give orders there, Joe.

After awhile you forget that the President in relationship to his constituents, in relationship to the country, is fundamentally in the same position that a senator is in relationship to his ninety-nine colleagues. You see, in the Senate you're never allowed to forget for one minute that you're just one of a hundred men. Even if you're the leader, you're still one of a hundred men. And if those ninety-nine men think you're stupid, boy, they'll let you know awful quick.

F: It reminds me a little bit of a career surgeon, a military surgeon I knew who finally quit to go into private practice, and said that he had an awful problem with redeveloping finesse in this because he was used to telling a soldier, "Have that appendix out, boy!" or "take this", and they did it, whereas, when he got hold of some housewife and he said, "Let's have that out," she'd say: "Well, it's not convenient next week or next week," and so forth. And he had to learn all over again that that you use all kinds of pressures, wheedle, entreat, beat over the head, and so forth, and even then you may not get it.

R: In the Senate you'll develop patience, if you have any sense, Joe. So what you have to do is count the votes. You've got thirty-three votes. That means that you've got eighteen you've got to pry loose somewhere, and so you go to work, one at a time. Each vote is a victory. You don't really move until you have your fifty-one. So in a sense it's almost not a question of developing patience. In a sense it's a question of doing things the only way they can be done.

F: Did Johnson ever talk to his staff about the strengths and weaknesses or the foibles of his colleagues in the Senate?

R: Oh, yes, certainly--all the time. Well, when I say talked to his staff, he certainly talked to me about it. He would talk to the staff of the Democratic Policy Committee about them more than he would the Texas staff, simply because we were involved in the day-to-day operations on the floor.

F: Did you always find him to be rather accurate on that?

R: Yes, very insightful. He knew. The thing that interested me, however, is that his most interesting revelation was an awareness of strength in men that I myself didn't know was there. I'd always liked Watkins of Utah, for example. I hadn't realized until Johnson started talking what a very shrewd man he was and what a very strong man he was. It would never have occurred to me, although it occurred to Johnson immediately, that Watkins was one of the ideal men to have on that McCarthy Committee. He didn't appoint him, Bill Knowland did, but I suspect he tilted the wheel a little bit. I'd always considered Watkins kind of a weak sister. As it turned out, he fitted Mary McGrory's statement, "a chairman made of fire and ice." It had never occurred to me that anybody as gentle as John Stennis could actually get up in a cross-floor debate and not only hold his own, but mop up the floor with an Irish brawler like Joe McCarthy, which Stennis did. I think Joe McCarthy was cleaning blood off himself for two weeks after he made the mistake of trying to tangle with Stennis.

He had an uncanny knack for searching out things like that.

F: Incidentally, I'm seeing Stennis for the first time in the morning.

R: He's a tremendous man. I think Stennis in many respects has at least as much integrity as any man that I've ever known in the

United States Senate--and maybe more than most, just massive integrity.

F: I've developed quite an admiration for him through the years.

R: I'm very fond of him. I think he's wrong about an awful lot of things, but that's a man's.

F: Who isn't! Did McCarthy ever feel personally toward Johnson on this that you could tell?

R: No. As a matter of fact, Johnson even developed techniques for using McCarthy. I can recall one day when we had a terribly close vote on the Social Security issue, and every single vote counted. Boy, that was a rough one! The whole White House staff was up on the Senate floor, and we'd get a vote and lose two, and then we'd get a couple and lose one. They had Slick Persons up there and Jack Martin and a whole crew lobbying at one point. Johnson looked at McCarthy, and he walked over to him, and he said: "Joe, would you really like to screw Eisenhower, and screw him good?" And of course Joe was real mad at the President at that point. By God, that was one of the two or three votes, maybe even the vote--I've forgotten now--that put the Democratic position over.

F: Get the right vote but for the wrong reasons but get the vote.

R: Right.

F: How did Johnson get onto space so early?

R: Well, me and Russell, really.

F: This is one of his legitimate pioneering efforts.

R: It was, no question about it. When I say got onto it, I'm not detracting from him in the slightest. But it was a rather interesting sequence of events. There was a very interesting fellow--he was a very close friend of mine--Charlie Brewton, who worked for the

Alabama senators, and Charlie was a very imaginative man, very imaginative. We were down in Texas at the time. Charlie just made a special trip down to Texas to sell me on this space thing, that this was the thing that Johnson ought to get into, and he convinced me.

F: Why was Brewton so sold on space?

R: This is a very imaginative man, very imaginative! He didn't look upon it just as a technical achievement. He looked upon it as something that would deeply stir the American people, and he was right. He was thinking in terms of if Russians could put this dog up in space, that every American would think, "My God, there's a Russian up there looking down at us with spyglasses." Charlie's one of the most imaginative persons that I've ever known, caught onto it right away.

[telephone interruption]

F: We were talking about Brewton and space.

R: So I wrote Johnson a rather strong memo on it, saying that he had the natural vehicle, which was the Senate Preparedness Subcommittee, which had been relatively inactive in the recent months. So he got in touch with Dick Russell, and Russell thought it over and he was rather favorably inclined toward the idea. So Johnson thought it over and he became rather favorably inclined toward the idea. So Johnson just stepped into it and it followed from there.

F: Some fun was made of Johnson at the time. I remember, maybe, a Herblock cartoon that showed, as you were getting ready for the campaign of 1960, Symington speaking on air power, Kennedy speaking on civil rights, and somebody else speaking on labor--Humphrey maybe. I don't remember how they lined up. And here's Johnson speaking on

space which, as equated in the cartoon, with motherhood, Americanism. I mean, he picked the one safe thing that no one could touch.

R: Which of course is because that was 1960. It wasn't so safe in 1957. As you may recall, the Eisenhower Administration was very sour on it. Eisenhower purportedly made some remark about "Lyndon Johnson can have his head in the clouds. I'm going to keep my feet on the ground." Sherman Adams made some nasty crack about playing outer-space basketball. But in '57 it was quite an issue, and I think it was rather good for the public that Johnson seized the issue because it really did disturb people after Sputnik and Mutnik got up.

By 1960 the thing had bogged down somewhat. We had set NASA up by that point, and we had a number of fizzles in our early efforts to get these satellites into space. I think people had just sort of forgotten about it.

You know, it's rather unfortunate that in the popular mind Johnson is not really associated today with one of the most important things that he did, and that was the outer space thing. They sort of forgot his role in it. After all, the act that set up NASA is really the Johnson-McCormack act.

F: Did Johnson have much trouble persuading other senators to go with him?

R: No. Because the public reaction to his initial steps was so overwhelming that it became apparent to any politically sensitive person that this was an issue that people ought to hop on.

F: He realized early that he had something here?

R: Oh yes, because the reaction started immediately. You see, everybody else--Eisenhower was sort of ignoring it. Many other people were



looking upon it solely as a technical achievement. There aren't too many people with Charlie Brewton's imagination.

F: Did Johnson more-or-less hand pick Jim Webb?

R: Yes, pretty much.

F: Where had he gotten to know him so well?

R: When Webb was budget director, he happened to know him well and had been impressed by Webb's drive. I think Webb was the ideal man.

F: Did it take much convincing to get Webb across?

R: No, not as far as I know. I wasn't in on the conversations that Johnson actually had with Webb.

F: What about the people that Johnson had to sell Webb to?

R: No problem, no real problem. Of course I myself, in retrospect, think that we went overboard in space a bit. But that's for another reason, not that we went overboard in the necessity of the program, but I'm worrying now that we created too much of a constituency there. That's another story, though, that has nothing to do with Johnson.

F: As Vice President, was Johnson's space activities given pretty much a free hand by the Kennedy Administration?

R: No, because, you see, what had really happened--it wasn't a question of giving a free hand. There was one very unfortunate thing. When the Space Act was passed, Eisenhower did not understand the section which set up a President's Space Council. That was a tricky thing, Joe, that involved a rather subtle point of constitutional law. And that is, that nobody can really coordinate the activities of agencies except the President. Now, the President really hasn't enough time to devote himself to coordinating something like that.

So as a compromise, in order to avoid administration opposition of the Space Act, we agreed that the President would be chairman of the President's Space Council. Now, the thing's ridiculous. The President really didn't have enough time to direct the Space Council. So what had happened in the years, '58, '59 and '60, that the thing was in existence, the Space Council had no real impact upon the space program itself. Therefore, NASA went ahead with its programs; the Defense department went ahead with its programs; the Federal Communications Commission went ahead with its programs. And by the time Kennedy came in in 1961 and did the sensible thing of establishing the Space Council under the Vice President, all of these programs had developed to a point where they were sort of self-operating. There really wasn't too much, in my judgment for the Space Council to do. I think if it had been in in the beginning and had been a genuinely coordinating group--not that it could coordinate the programs, our theory was that if you had an advisory group to the President that was advising him on the coordination, that that would almost amount to the same thing. Then I think Johnson would have had a considerable role to play. But once you get these huge, massive programs started--after all, by '61, when Johnson came in, they were almost ready for their first orbit of a man around the earth. There really isn't too much you can do at that point.

F: When you're in the process of setting up NASA and the Space Act and so forth, did Johnson worry much about presidential veto or interference?

R: He worried about that one point. Eisenhower felt very strongly about it. Why, I don't know. He obviously misunderstood the thing. He thought that a presidential prerogative was being taken away from him.

I don't know that he would have vetoed the bill, but there certainly were strong indications that he would, Joe. That would have been disastrous. It simply wasn't worth the risk.

F: Johnson's the one who, in a sense, took off the sharp edges then.

R: Yes. But in retrospect it was a mistake because the result was the development of different programs with a very solid base and with heavy, heavy funding and a large constituency. To a certain extent, I think there was lack of coordination in the Defense Department, too, between the Army, the Navy, and the Air Force--all of whom had their own separate programs.

F: Did you have much opportunity to observe Johnson's relationship with Eisenhower?

R: No.

F: As a senator, I'm thinking.

R: All I really know about them is what he told me.

F: Did he feel when he went down to the White House that he usually got a good audience?

R: Oh, sure, which he did. He got an excellent audience. There's very little doubt about that in my mind. You know, our whole tactic during that period was to emphasize the differences between the Republicans and Eisenhower, and the differences were rather extreme because they were in the field of foreign policy. That was an era in which foreign policy was very, very important. Well, naturally Eisenhower, as the former head of NATO, as former Supreme Commander of the Allied Forces in Europe under Roosevelt and later under Truman, naturally he was a man whose thinking would be much more closely attuned to the center of the Democratic party than it would be to men like Taft or

Styles Bridges.

Most of the isolationist sentiment in this country was in the Republican party in those days. It's a mistake to analyze the Republican party as an isolationist party, because after all you had that whole New England group with men in it like Saltonstall and Warren Austin, George Aikin, who also agreed very strongly with the foreign policy that had developed over the years. But what isolationists there were were in the Republican party, and it wasn't at all hard to make it look, in foreign policy to make it a reality, like the Democrats were constantly rescuing Eisenhower from his own party.

F: Moving to another topic, tell me a little of what you know about Johnson's relationship with Senator Eugene McCarthy at this time, both while he was just another senator from Minnesota and then the possibility of his possibly being Johnson's Vice President in 1964. I judge the two men got on fairly well earlier.

R: Sort of off and on, Joe. It was a peculiar relationship. McCarthy seconded the Johnson nomination in 1960, although when the Stevenson candidacy looked like it might be a reality Gene switched real quick. I've never been certain what the relationship was. It turned very sour after '64.

F: Was it sour on both sides?

R: Yes, but especially sour on Gene McCarthy's side. And I don't really know why. I can only guess. I'd have to go in for some two-bit psychiatry, and I'm not very happy with two-bit psychiatry. Of course, in my mind the two men always were incompatible. McCarthy was about as close to pure an intellectual as you're going to get anywhere, and this really is like mixing oil and water. One of Johnson's

great troubles, he never really understood the intellectuals, and I don't think he ever really understood Gene McCarthy. But I think that he had a certain fascination for Gene, and intellectuals are fascinated by men of power. They'd flit around Johnson like moths around a candle flame. I think if he'd understood them a little bit better--I think he had more real attraction for them than Jack Kennedy had, but he didn't know that.

F: Was this to a certain extent because they do turn the rock over and look on the other side? In other words, they act as devil's advocates?

R: To be honest about it, Joe, he alienated them and to a great extent it was his own fault. You know, Eric Goldman in his book on Johnson has a very revealing two paragraphs out of which even Eric didn't draw the proper conclusions. He mentions his first meeting with Johnson, which was brought about by a very young fellow in the White House named Nelson who had taken a course in history from Eric up at Princeton. One of the first things Johnson did was to ask Eric for a memorandum on his public relations. Now what the devil does Eric Goldman know about public relations! Absolutely nothing. But Eric missed the point.

But I'll tell you another man who got it--Walter Prescott Webb! I became very fond of Walter Prescott Webb when I was down in Texas. We became strong, close friends. There have been few men I've known in my life that I enjoyed as much. He was delightful. And I made a point of trying to get the two together because I thought this was an ideal marriage. Here was Walter Prescott Webb, the historian of the West, the man that really did understand the desert, and who had this kind of knowledge and the kind of expertise in academic

affairs that really related directly to Johnson's concerns. And I got the two of them together for a rather extended meeting.

I still remember Walter Webb coming out of that meeting. He was mad. He said, "George, that man asked me to write a speech on foreign affairs. Now, I don't know anything about foreign affairs. My field of specialization is the West. Doesn't that man know what I do?"

This is one of the problems. Johnson really didn't know what intellectuals did, and he assumed that if you brought in an intellectual that he was supposed to give you material to put in speeches. I really think he thought of intellectuals and what they did in the same sense that in the old days you'd teach your daughter to play "Chopsticks" on the piano. Then on Sunday, when the priest came in you would open up the curtains and dust off all the furniture in the living room--you kept it closed the other six days of the week--your daughter would sit down and play "Chopsticks." It was sort of an accomplishment.

This got Webb mad. You know, Webb was a man who was capable of slicing right through the heart of something. Eric was a little more confused, because he was not accustomed to the Southwestern type.

But basically, sooner or later, Johnson wound up at cross-purposes with every intellectual who was genuinely an intellectual. I don't mean who'd labeled himself as an intellectual, because the academic field is as full of phonies as any other field. But the genuine intellectual who was interested in thoughts and concepts for the sake of the concept, he and Johnson were bound to be at swords' points somewhere along the line.

I patched up that particular thing with Walter Webb, by the way.

F: I was going to say, did Webb write the foreign affairs speech?

R: Oh, no. But you may recall that Webb did write that part of the program that had been reserved for Johnson in the 1960 inaugural. They became reasonably good friends after that. When Johnson looked over the work that Webb had done on intellectual resources in the Southern part of the country and the work that Webb had done on the fact that the South and the Southwest were lagging behind the rest of the country by almost any standard, he began to zero in on that, and he really had something.

But this was at the heart of Johnson's difficulties with the intellectuals. Johnson always attributed it solely to snobbery. There was an element of that, there's no question about it, and I think that the average Harvard graduate or the average Princeton graduate or the average Yale graduate sort of has a feeling that anyone with a Southern accent must be deficient mentally. I was fortunate. I went to the University of Chicago where I was taught that Harvard was a place where they turned out stock salesmen and Yale was a place where they turned out bond salesmen.

F: Actually, some of them look down on their so-called fellow intellectuals from other parts of the country.

R: Of course, there's no doubt about it.

F: When you drag in a man who's a pragmatist on top of that, then you've--

R: Sure. But Johnson could have overcome the snobbery. Johnson had as many troubles with intellectuals that had never gotten near Harvard or Yale or the Ivy League, and this is at the root of it.

F: Did he tend to think they were experts in the field they were not,

or did he tend to think that they showed off their expertise in things they didn't know anything about?

R: He'd tend to think of them as public relations types. You know, if you read his mother's book, there are some very fascinating parts of it. When he was a child and she'd give him a book to read; he'd always want to know, "Is it real? Had this really happened!" I think he equated a barber college with the Philosophy Department at Texas.

F: It is somewhere you went.

R: Right. I think he thought of education solely as a means of preparing someone for a job and that if a man didn't study something that prepared him directly for a job, that is, other than teaching that particular skill, that then it became sort of a public relations thing, a sort of an accomplishment. I think this is a very real confusion in his mind. You see, he understood what engineers did; he understood what physicists did--not completely. But he at least knew that by a combination of physicists and metallurgists and astronomers and mathematicians and what-have-you that you could get a satellite up in space. But he had a great deal of difficulty with historians, with philosophers, with--

F: Sociologists.

R: Sociologists. Not quite so much with economists, because I think that he equated them with the stock market and employment somehow.

F: Did Johnson feel that this White House Fellow idea was viable?

R: Oh, yes. He was very strong for it. But, again, I think he thought of it and also thought of centers of political science as possibly the means of creating academies in which you would train government administrators who could then take over the government. I personally



think that was a mistake on his part.

You know, Johnson had an abnormal superstitious respect for education. I believe he even thought it would cure chilblains. He's got much more respect for it than I have. I'm talking now about formal education. I have a great deal of respect for education.

But this accounts for many things that he did, Joe, many things. Again, to refer to a historian, the historian gave you something to put in the speeches, and consequently these other people who were doing things that didn't produce something hard and solid and concrete, they must be doing the same things also.

F: Over the years Johnson had a lot of people associated with him who, of course, were just totally loyal. But he had a lot of other people that fell by the wayside, without assessing whether it's his fault or theirs. Did he ever get sort of cynical toward people? I've almost picked a feeling that sometimes he could be nearly trusting, you know, like the poor girl who just keeps having lovers kick her in the teeth.

R: He usually trusted the wrong people, Joe, which was all right in the Senate days. You know, one of the beauties of the Senate is that you can find out when you're doing something foolish before it gets you to the point of catastrophe. You don't find that out in the White House. You don't find out you're doing something foolish as President until the ox is in a ditch.

And he had some very curious blind spots toward some of the people he trusted. Just incredible!

F: Are you thinking of their being inept or their being impractical or of their being disloyal?

R: Inept and disloyal both. In the Senate he'd find it out in time.

In the White House he wouldn't find it out in time. And by the time he'd find it out in the White House the damage had been done. But I think there was another problem.

F: What damage can you do a President?

R: Oh, you can do fantastic damage, Joe, fantastic damage, if he trusts you. You can really do damage. Because Johnson will trust a person to the extent of letting down his hair and just coming up with all sorts of inmost thoughts. He'd been accustomed to an extremely loyal staff in the Senate. I think he just sort of automatically assumed that everybody in the White House would be the same. Well, of course, the reason he had the loyal staff in the Senate was because he found out about people in time.

I think another factor--let's get back to this question of public relations again for a second. This was really the rock upon which many of the Johnson ships foundered. He had somewhere along the line picked up the concept of a public relations man as a kind of a high priest who was the keeper of the real secret, of the ultimate secret and the ultimate mystery. If you could find the right public relations man, it was something like finding the right high priest. He never realized that public relations is really nothing but a series of routine techniques, and that what really counts is what you're doing.

And in this restless search for a public relations man he was caught in the dilemma that since no public relations man can really do the things he thought a public relations man could do, that therefore anybody that he got was unsatisfactory and would be discarded sooner or later down the line.

He had all kinds of strange ideas. At one point he thought that

Pierre Salinger was the man who had made Kennedy President. He said so; he told Pierre that, which was utterly ridiculous. I don't think anybody was more surprised than Pierre at this. I think he thought that Charlie Michaelson had made Franklin D. Roosevelt. Well, of course, my own judgment is that Charlie Michaelson was sort of a handicap; that the only service Charlie ever performed was kind of rallying the troops--you know, your own troops have to be fed some raw beef from time to time.

This would lead him to sort of flit from person to person and frequently to discard people with whom he had had a close relationship but who had not been able to produce what he wanted to produce--which nobody could. It wasn't possible. It became something like the nymphomaniac running around the world looking for the ultimate impregnation which never comes.

To get back to this question of intellectuals for a second because there's another very interesting factor involved. Johnson's intelligence--I don't know what his IQ is but I suspect it would blow the top out of a thermometer. Once he realized that an abstract concept was essential to his doing something, he could master that abstract concept with a thoroughness and with a completeness that was incredible.

In 1957 the civil rights bill--the first one that had been passed in eighty-two years--rested upon one of the trickiest and one of the most abstract legal concepts that I've ever run across--the difference between civil and criminal contempt. And that is a little humdinger! Constitutional lawyers could spend months arguing about it. And it goes back to the English concepts of common law. It was the sort of

thing that you'd think Johnson wouldn't waste thirty seconds over, and if you were deceived by the fact that he was such an activist and so little understanding of intellectuals and what they do, you'd think that he was incapable of understanding it.

Well, it became absolutely essential to attach it to the Civil Rights Act because it was the only way in the world that we could have jury trials without juries. I won't bother to explain it to you, if you really want to understand it go to the University of Texas Law Department and get some of the constitutional lawyers and be prepared to spend about six months. We'd first found out about it because of an article that Carl Auerbach of the University of Minnesota had written for the New Leader. We had Solis Horwitz on our staff who was a very brilliant constitutional lawyer and he understood it.

Johnson took it to Dean Acheson and my God, within three days he could have argued that thing before the Supreme Court, Joe. I've never seen anything like it. He could have argued it before the Supreme Court.

This wasn't a question of lack of intellectual ability on his part. He had it. But really the block was his failure to understand what intellectual concepts were. If he could relate any single one of them to something that he had to have in order to act, he was right there on the spot.

F: I've picked up the notion that he sort of had an inordinate admiration for Bob McNamara as the one man who maybe exceeded him intellectually.

R: Oh, for awhile he regarded Bob McNamara as the Messiah. He was holding conversations in which he was saying wistfully that he sure wished

he could bring McNamara into the White House to run the country.

McNamara absolutely bowled him over and, of course, would because of this computer-like mind of McNamara's, the fact that Bob always had reams of figures at his fingertips and could rattle off statistics like a Hotchkiss machine gun. No, I think for awhile he really regarded Bob as a Messiah.

F: Did Johnson have a kind of child's faith in miracles?

R: At times, yes.

F: I mean, miracles was hard work, but if you get in there and really hustle it you could get the complete package.

R: Yes, there was a certain mystical quality to him, Joe. I think that this is one of the things that happens to the sheer activist; that a man who spends most of his life analyzing things very pragmatically and trying to do everything on the basis of two plus two equal four, I think that he frequently develops an Achilles heel for sheer mysticism. Now normally this is serviceable because most things in life, if you really want them hard enough and have a reasonable amount of intelligence, you're going to get them. If you want to be a millionaire and if you--

F: Do that to the exclusion of all else.

R: You'll get it. Even a Bobby Baker, who was not a giant intellectually, became a millionaire.

But this strain of mysticism did a few weird things to him. I'll never forget the story about him and Luci going out to the monks and praying in this little monastery late at night. That's a rather typical example of the strain of mysticism. I'm something of an amateur theologian. You'd never get me to go out at midnight in a storm to

pray in some monastery for the little monks. That's because I've been accustomed to grappling with theological concepts ever since I first met Bob Hutchins. But a man who is not accustomed to grappling with abstract concepts can be taken for quite a ride. And I think he was from time to time.

F: Speaking of Bobby Baker, did he feel he'd been used by Bobby, or did he feel that they used Bobby to get at him?

R: No question that he felt they used Bobby to get at him, and there's no question in my mind that they did. But, again, he panicked on Bobby, Joe. I'm absolutely convinced that Lyndon Johnson was innocent as the driven snow where Bobby Baker was concerned. I don't believe that he ever got into one crooked deal with Bobby, and I don't think he was aware of Bobby's crooked deals. And for that matter I don't think that Bobby did very many crooked things when he was working for Johnson because Johnson kept him so busy that he didn't have enough time.

F: There wasn't time for him to make his contacts, huh!

R: The only thing I've ever heard of that Bobby pulled that was somewhat questionable while Johnson was the Majority Leader, this "Magic" thing I think started out in about 1958 or thereabouts. That's the only thing I've ever found. All the other things, all of this business with the hotel and all the stuff with the wild women and what have you, that all came after Johnson gave up the leadership and Bobby was under the somewhat more relaxed regime of Mike Mansfield.

But Johnson really panicked. Two or three things happened at that time which I believe were really being used to get Johnson. That guy out in West Texas--Billy Sol Estes--

F: There was no relationship there, was there? Someone asked me the other day had I seen Billy Sol--

R: It was ridiculous on the fact of it. Billy Sol was a Yarborough labor-liberal man. The only relationship you could find was that Billy Sol had sent him a crate of melons once upon a time, which was a very routine thing. And the only man in our office who knew Billy Sol was Cliff Carter, and Cliff may have had some relations with Billy Sol. But Billy was on the other side.

I can recall, after the thing broke, I was saying one day, "My God, who in the hell is Billy Sol Estes? I've never even heard of him," which I hadn't.

And Cliff Carter saying, "Well, you met him one day, George."

I said, "I did?" And Cliff reminded me, and I recalled that he had brought him into the office--this was one time when Johnson was down in Texas and I was over in the Texas office, and Cliff brought him in to me and introduced him. And then Billy Sol started talking about he made a million here and a million there, and ten million, and I just dismissed it as one of these blow-hard Amos and Andy deals.

My wife tells me that there was a reception out at Johnson's house in 1960, at which Billy Sol was present and she talked to him.

F: Billy Sol was somebody to invite at that time because he was one of the outstanding young men in the country. You can't screen everybody for purity.

R: Oh sure. But Johnson had absolutely no connection with Billy Sol. He had absolutely no connection that I've ever been able to find, and I think I would have known of any of Bobby's crooked deals.

But he absolutely panicked. I think if he'd just accepted the thing calmly and revealed the facts as they came out, I don't believe he could have been touched by either one. But for some reason he got terribly panicky about Bobby.

F: It was the opposite really of the Walter Jenkins' situation, which I thought was handled impeccably.

R: Yes, that was handled very well.

F: You admitted the incident and you said, "Poor Walter," and went right on.

R: Right. That was handled beautifully. But the Bobby Baker thing was handled very poorly, very poorly.

F: Was it bad advice or refusal to take advice?

R: Johnson had some terribly advice on the Bobby Baker thing.

F: Who was giving it?

R: I think Abe Fortas made a mistake. Do you remember this line about how "I hardly knew Bobby Baker?"

F: Yes.

R: My God! Bobby was one of his messiahs. There was a period when he had just fantastic confidence in Bobby Baker because Bobby was producing. You know, Bobby could give you the best count of the Senate vote of anybody around other than Lyndon Johnson.

F: Was this generally shared? Did other people have this kind of confidence in Bobby?

R: No. Not many. Bob Kerr did. You know, one of the things that occurs to me, Bobby got convicted and his story was that Bob Kerr had given him that fifty thousand bucks. You know, I'm quite capable of believing that, because Bob Kerr had that same confidence in Bobby for some



reason. I never got to like Bobby myself until after he got in trouble. I did develop a certain admiration for his guts and for the way he stood up under what must have been shattering. Here was a young man building what he thought was an empire, and I think Bobby acted pretty well when he got in trouble. But I was terribly afraid of what he was going to do because I started to pick up rumors when Johnson was Vice President, and they worried the devil out of me and I couldn't do anything about them. Back in those days to Johnson, Bobby could do no wrong.

F: Did Johnson sort of feel that Bobby had done him in, or did he just close up on the subject?

R: I don't think so. I think he adopted this line that he hardly knew Bobby Baker, and I think he tried to convince himself the line was true. You know, one of the things about Lyndon Johnson you always have to be careful of. Whatever Johnson tells you at any given moment, he thinks is the truth. The first victim of the Johnson shopper is always Lyndon Baines Johnson. In his own mind I don't think the man has ever told a whopper in his life. And once he came out with that line that he hardly knew Bobby Baker, I think he decided in his own mind that he didn't.

F: I've heard the cliché that Johnson never fired anybody. Is that more or less true--that as long as you'll stick around he'll stick around?

R: I only know personally of--

F: He'll move them around.

R: Yes, he'll move them around. I personally know only two men that ever got fired. They were two investigators for the Senate Preparedness

Committee. However, he could make life so unpleasant for a man that he'd leave. He could really freeze you out. When you say that he never fired anybody, that's technically correct, but--

F: Drive them off.

R: It reminded me of the old Hearst formula. You know, Hearst would have a contract with somebody. He may be managing editor of a paper, and the guy would fall out of favor, and the next thing you knew he'd be cleaning out the washroom.

F: Did Johnson ever give his Senate staff--I know he was too busy as President but did he ever give the Senate staff talks on how they should behave either with women or money or anything else?

R: Oh, sure. He was full of it.

F: Did he pay much attention to little peccadilloes?

R: Oh, yes, he loved them. Johnson's quite a gossip, you know. I think he enjoyed gossip for the sake of the gossip.

F: Did he kind of have favorites? You know, most of us have somebody that is almost incorrigible that we kind of love for their sins.

R: Yes. Oh sure, he had favorites, people who could get away with quite a bit. But his major trouble--there was a certain type of person, Joe, that could really pull the wool over his eyes. And the requirements were that that person be very young, very much on the make, extraordinarily ambitious, and willing to ladle on the flattery with a trowel. You'll find quite a few similarities of those people over the years that were Johnsonian favorites. They might come from different parts of the country, but very young, very--

F: Kind of like a description of Bill Moyers.

R: It was. There was very little difference between Bill Moyers and Bobby

Baker, except that Bill moved in--

F: One was a Baptist preacher.

R: Yes, one was a Baptist preacher, but Bill learned to move in some of these more sophisticated Eastern establishment circles, where he may never have realized it, but he was really an outsider.

F: What happened between Moyers and Johnson?

R: The story I've heard--and I don't know that it's real or not--is that on the Asian trip--the one where he went to the Phillippines, then to Viet Nam, and up to Korea--he had been scheduled to come back from that trip and go on a stump-speaking tour of the country. Now, here you get into a little bit of peculiar Johnsonian psychology. Johnson would not definitely say yes on any project till the very last minute, but what usually happened is that his staff would read certain signals and obviously certain things had to be set up in advance. Most of the staff had read the signals that he was going to go on that stump-speaking tour, and things were being set up in advance. Stands were being built, an itinerary had been worked out.

Now, in Johnson's mind he had not given an okay on those things until he had definitely given an okay, and that would be about five minutes before he'd start the trip.

F: And you'd better darned sure be ready!

R: The story that I've heard--and I suspect this is fairly accurate--is that on the trip back Bill Moyers--for which I don't blame him because Bill was rather inexperienced--had actually briefed the press on this trip; that he'd told individual reporters where Johnson was going. Therefore, when Johnson at the last minute said he'd never contemplated any such trip and instead he was going to have this rather

minor operation--I've forgotten what it was now, but it was very minor--here all the press had gotten this information from what they regarded as Johnson's top assistant, which he was at that point. I think Johnson had more confidence in Bill Moyers than almost anybody around at that time. But Johnson eventually found out where all of these stories came from, and how silly they made him look.

That was the first time that Johnson ever realized where a lot of White House stories had emanated.

F: Do you think Bill had been kind of easing them out to the right people?

R: Oh, there's no question about that.

F: Just to curry favor or to look more important himself? Of course, you're looking inside another man, I know.

R: Looking inside another man. I do know that Bill was quite capable of telling some rather rough stories about Johnson. I know the man who once asked him, "My God, how can you do this when you're sitting right there on his right hand!"

And Bill's answer was, "Well, I have to maintain my credibility." Meaning with the press.

F: If you make the White House you've got some ambition and you've got some push, but did you get a lot of little individual knifing and kingdom-building and so forth among the White House group?

R: Of course. I described the process in my book without naming names, but that process is very valid, Joe. That's the way it works.

F: Did Johnson show any interest in keeping them down, or did he play people off against each other?

R: I'm not quite certain.

F: George Reedy's too much of an old hand in this sort of situation, so

we're not going to push George in this, but it seems to me some of the younger people could very easily be used--patted at the right time, spurred at the right time, and so forth.

R: You see, the problem is this, Joe. This is going on in the White House, there's absolutely no question about that. Johnson was playing people off against each other, but I don't know whether he was doing it deliberately or whether this was just part of the Johnsonian psychology. Now, there's no doubt whatsoever that quite a few leaders will use this as a technique. Roosevelt did. Roosevelt would give two or three men the same assignment to see who would come through with it first, and Roosevelt was quite a master of the game. Now I don't know whether Johnson was doing it deliberately, or whether he would just hand something to somebody at a given moment if that man was standing there. The mere fact that a man was standing there at the moment a thought occurred to Johnson would mean that he'd hand it to him. Now when Johnson was in the Senate we were all rather accustomed to that, and there was a very strong staff morale. We all worked very closely together. That didn't happen in the White House. There were just too many people around him that had never been with him before. They'd be greatly flattered to have the President of the United States imposing all this trust and confidence in them.

F: I judge one difference between the Senate staff and the White House staff was that the Senate staff really was a team whereas the White House staff were individuals. That's an oversimplification.

R: Right. You see, he had very few people in the White House who had been with him in the Senate. The only two that had been with him in

reasonably strong positions were myself and Walter Jenkins. Bill Moyers was on the Senate staff during one period when he handled the mail and during another period he was sort of a valet. And most of what he did, he just took over the Kennedy staff in the White House and then started adding his own to it. But people that he hadn't had before had no particular loyalty to him, no reason to be loyal.

F: Was there enough difference between Johnson's handling of staff and Kennedy's handling of staff to breed resentment in the holdovers?

R: Oh, yes.

F: What was the difference?

R: Kennedy--and I myself being Irish, I attribute this to a hangover from the Irish clan system. You know, the Irish have this very strong in-group feeling and they all have. And the Kennedy staff was a staff that always felt a certain degree of security. They might not be in favor with Jack Kennedy at any given moment or with the powers around Kennedy, but they knew they would be taken care of one way or the other.

This was one feeling that Johnson never gave to his staff people. They never had the inner feeling of security.

F: Yet he actually spent more time with them.

R: Oh, much more time. I remember one of the things that I recall very well was after Johnson became President. He had a sort of social hour one evening for staff members. And my wife Lillian, in talking to one of the wives of the Kennedy members, discovered that this was the first time that the Kennedy staffers had ever seen the living quarters of the White House. It really bowled them over.

I think Johnson could have made most of those Kennedy staffers loyal to him if he'd understood them.

F: Kind of a case of just really not knowing how to go about it, wasn't it?

R: Right. He didn't understand the Boston Irish, and he didn't understand the intellectuals. But I think that if he'd gone about it a different way--you know a man like Ken O'Donnell, for instance, he simply didn't understand those fierce clan loyalties. Ken O'Donnell's a black Irishman and he became very moody after Kennedy's death, but I think he could have captured the same loyalty out of Ken that Jack had.

F: Well, thank you, George.

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