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GEORGE REEDY ORAL HISTORY, INTERVIEW III  
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By GEORGE E. REEDY

to the

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Date

February 2, 1976

INTERVIEW III

DATE: JUNE 7, 1975  
INTERVIEWEE: GEORGE REEDY (Tape 1 of 2)  
INTERVIEWER: MICHAEL L. GILLETTE  
PLACE: A friend's home in Washington, D. C.

G: Let's talk about, first of all, your role as policy advisor to Lyndon Johnson while he was Senator.

R: Yes.

G: You certainly seem to do more of this than anybody else. In fact, there's not much evidence that anybody but you did this, consistently, say more than an occasional memo from someone like Jim Rowe or . . .

R: That's about right. You'll find some periods when Horace Busby put in quite a few memos, but over the eight years of his Leadership I was the only one that did do it consistently. And I would almost say that I was his theoretician.

G: His "think" man. How did this originate? How did you get into that role?

R: Because I discovered it was the best way of explaining things to him. He did not like to get thorough explanations of things. And unfortunately, I've always had something of the pedagogue in me. When trying to explain something, I like to go back and explain why. Something that always made him very impatient. He had some remark once that he was afraid to ask me the time because he might get a lecture in the sidereal movement of the stars. And that, by the way, was a trait that frequently got him into trouble. I was always worried about it. He'd do something on the basis of advice and it would work very well. So, the next time, in a slightly different

situation, he'd assume the same advice was still good and get into a considerable amount of trouble.

G: Can you recall a specific example?

R: Well, the worst part was the airline strike of 1965. That was a classic. Sixty-six. That was a classic. In 1964, I guess, when the railroad strike came on, and I had advised him at the time to bring the union negotiators and management into the White House and make them negotiate there. Under that kind of heat it worked. They did negotiate. They did settle a contract. That left him with a feeling that a way to settle those huge nationwide strikes was to call them [into] the White House, and sort of lock them up in a room until they settled. By 1966 I had left. You may remember the big airlines'--you probably don't remember it but you could look it up easy enough--the big airlines' machinist strike that year. It had been going on and on, and one day, walking down the street--I'd left the White House by that time--I had a sinking feeling in the pit of my stomach, "My God, I'll bet he's going to call them into the White House." Then I tried to get hold of somebody in the White House but couldn't find anybody. He was tied up in a Cabinet meeting, and Harry McPherson was tied up in something, Califano was tied up in something. And late that afternoon I got the official announcement that he'd called them into the White House, which I knew was going to be a disaster. And it was, sure enough. They called them into the White House. They agreed on a contract on Friday. There was a huge dramatic dash to the nearby TV station so he could announce very grandiloquently on TV that they had settled the strike. The machinists

voted on Saturday, and as anybody that knew anything about labor organizations would know, they voted the contract down. And he was left looking awfully silly.

That's the first time, I think, that the public ever realized that things were going wrong in the White House. And I regard it as a very significant turning point in his career as President, because after that nothing went right. I don't think that the airline strike made things go wrong, but I think that the forces that led to it were indicative of the sort of forces that were causing him trouble. If he had talked to anyone that knew anything about labor unions, he would have known better than to call the machinists in. They have a long tradition: they always vote down the first offer. The industrialists dealing with the machinists always slip them an offer they expect them to reject, and hand it over to them to vote down. And then they come back and offer them the extra five percent they intended to give them all along anyway, and the machinists accept it. They just take it for granted. Furthermore, the machinist's national leadership does not run the organization.

(Interruption)

But see, the interesting part--he'd seen this thing work on the railroad unions in 1964, and he just automatically assumed it would work on the machinists in 1966. This was a propensity of his that always disturbed me. Which is why I tried not to give him advice without explaining the reasons for the advice. But if I did it orally, all I would do would be to irritate him. I discovered that if I got it in in the form of a memorandum,

which he could read early in the morning or late at night, he would at least read the whole memorandum. And from that I just slipped into the habit of writing him almost daily memoranda.

G: Did he read them carefully?

R: Oh yes. He had two rituals. And, Lord, they were set routines. He liked to have a stack of stuff to read alongside of his bed when he woke up in the morning. And he liked to have a big stack of stuff to read the last thing before going to sleep at night. And even in the White House, sometimes there'd be a frantic search for material. If there'd been a dull day I think people would even go so far as to cut out chunks of the telephone book. Of course, it was easy enough in the morning, because you had the Washington Post, the New York Times, the Congressional Record, the Federal Register, and then whatever memoranda that had been produced. But, in the evenings, sometimes, it would be rather difficult. And those things he would go through. It was the one way you could be certain he'd read something. To get it in that morning stack or that evening stack.

G: Was he a good reader? Did he read with a good deal of understanding?

R: Oh yes. Well, when he really read he could suck a thing dry. There was nothing wrong with Johnson's IQ. It was damned high. What was wrong with him was his disrespect for theory--his failure to realize that ideas have consequences. That's where he inevitably got in trouble. He constantly said he was looking for ideas. Well, he really

wasn't looking for ideas, he was looking for gimmicks--for things to do. And a real idea in his hands was dangerous. You had to be terribly careful because what he would do, he would regard it as something to be tossed out to the press like a press release, and then expect to have another one the next day. This really was his basic, fundamental weakness.

G: I assume that some of these memos were designed to get him to change his mind.

R: Oh yes.

G: What was the process of him changing his mind? Did he do it through argumentation with you or through asking questions?

R: It wasn't too difficult. All you had to do was present it to him in a way that didn't require him to change his mind, or to admit that he was changing his mind. And again, this factor was helpful. As I said, he really had no respect for the force of ideas or the integrity of words. And, therefore, it wasn't too difficult for him to forget what he had said yesterday and what he had thought yesterday.

G: I've heard that, say for example, the secretaries could get him to do just about anything if they worded it in such a way that it would favor one alternative just in the grammatical . . .

R: Oh yes. That could be done easily enough. He had a superstitious respect for the word 'positive'. And for the words 'can do'. Which, again, quite frequently got him into trouble. He was under this illusion that every problem had to be answered. Every problem had to be resolved. Every question had to be answered. When in life, the reality is that eighty-five



percent of the time, if you just close your eyes, it goes away--which it ought to do. A real genius is the man who knows the fifteen percent of the time you've got to keep your eyes open and act. But he would put forth inordinate amounts of energy on issues that really weren't that important. So trivial that they are difficult to remember now. But I can recall [his] practically tearing my staff to pieces and driving them into a nervous breakdown on a couple of occasions on little knit-picking pieces of nonsense that really didn't deserve any time or effort at all.

G: In this sense, do you think he was overly concerned with detail?

R: It wasn't that he was overly concerned with details, it was just that when his mind focused in on something, it focused in so thoroughly and so completely that he would exhaust every branch of it. He ran everything into the ground. It wasn't his obsession with details. I've met a lot of people like that. It was just his obsession with the whole thing, whatever it was. He was always seeking for that extra . . .

G: I've heard that in attempting to arrive at a solution for a given issue or something, he would argue very vehemently with someone. Not so much because he disagreed with them, but to get their defense and their position--to really sound them out. Is this the case? Did he do this often?

R: I think he may have thought he was doing it. He actually didn't. He was so damned good at debate that it was impossible to argue with him. He could win any argument, even though winning the argument might mean losing the sale.

G: Yes.

R: He would do a lot of that, and I think that he may have thought that he was bringing out all the possible weak points.

G: He just liked to argue, do you think primarily?

R: I don't know that he liked to argue; he liked to dominate. I never bothered arguing with him after I learned the trick. I'd just send him a memorandum.

G: You didn't have to defend these memoranda after you wrote them. He'd just follow them or not.

R: He'd usually follow them.

G: Did he ever ask you to do some research and send him a memo on the other side of the question?

R: No.

G: A lot of these memos looked like they involved days of research. They involved technical aspects . . . I've seen some involving the Armed Services Committee, I think, and the advantages of one military aircraft over another, or something of this nature.

R: That would not have been mine. That would be more like Max Lehrer-- somebody like that.

G: But generally, how much research did you do on this?

R: Very little.

G: How did you arrive at your own position?

R: Intuitively. I've been around politicians and around the political process all of my life and most of my knowledge is right up here. His problems as Senate Democratic Leader were basically political problems. There were plenty of people that could dig up the facts. And, you know, in the

Senate, facts are reinforcing rather than determining. In any political atmosphere, facts are reinforcing rather than determining. The position is taken first, then the facts are gathered to support it. No matter what the position, you can always find facts to support it.

G: Yes.

R: In the real world of politics, politicians, good politicians, arrive at their conclusion by thought processes they don't understand themselves. Then they send technicians out to prove it for them. I can think politically. I can arrive at my conclusions about the same way a good politician can. Since he was living in that world, I was probably the best type of advisor for him.

G: Typically, then, would you come across something that perhaps was current or you felt was important, and write up the memo and give it to him unsolicited.

R: Oh yes. Always.

G: And did you generally tend to write about current issues, say . . .

R: Just whatever problems that were before us at the time.

G: Did you talk to other people in the Senate on these?

R: Not asking their advice in the memo, no, but I'd be constantly talking to other people in the Senate. It was a slightly different thing. I would not go out seeking advice, but since I was living with those people, and having lunch with them, and working with them, I didn't have to seek their advice. It was there.

G: Did you have in effect any George Reedys of your own who you really relied on?

R: No. I had people to do research for me. I'd tell them what I'd want them to get, and they'd get it.

G: During the fifties, who was the best political sage on the Hill?

R: [There were] two or three. Richard Russell, unquestionably, was number one.

G: I was going to ask you about him.

R: In both houses of Congress. Richard Russell, is the most underrated man I've met in public life. That was a man of towering intellect. Towering intellect. Superb intuition. He only had one equal. In fact, one man that may have been a little bit better. That was Eugene Millikin of Colorado. But Millikin had no ambition whatsoever. Millikin was a man who was in the United States Senate because he thought it was a rather nice club. He joined the Senate the way somebody would join the Cosmos Club in Washington. And he had so much intelligence. Like Russell, it really was overpowering intelligence. Either of those men could have walked into any law school in the United States and taught any law course. And they could have walked into any philosophy department and taught any philosophy course. Millikin could have walked into any economics department and taught any economics course, as Russell could have taught any history course. And at the same time, they were intensely practical, pragmatic politicians. Two very unusual men. Rayburn, over in the House, was a man with tremendous stature, tremendous integrity, courage, honor. But I, frankly, never thought too much of his political perspicacity. He missed on an awful lot of things. Rayburn did

not owe his position to his astuteness. He owed it to his decency and his integrity.

G: I've heard it said that Russell was the best parliamentarian in the Senate.

R: Oh sure. Of course. By far.

G: There seems to be a pattern of the strong, senior Southern senators like Russell, working harder and knowing more about the Senate and how it operated. In effect, being more valuable senators.

R: Sure.

G: Why? Why were they . . .

R: Because for about a hundred years that was the highest position to which a Southerner could aspire. There was no industry in the South. There were few opportunities for an aggressive, ambitious Southern boy to go out and become head of United States Steel. They knew they couldn't become President of the United States. And the Senate was the apex of their ambitions. Consequently, those who were the most aggressive, those who were the ablest, fought for the positions. And once they got the positions, they fought to keep them. And generally speaking, if you examine it solely from the standpoint of capacity, you'll find that the Southern senators as a class were far superior to senators from other regions as a class. There's this theory of mine, and of course a theory, I believe it gets some backing from the fact that the next most important class of senators, at least in those days, came from the Rocky Mountain states, where again there was not too much that a very aggressive, ambitious, able young man could do. The Senate

Senate was shooting pretty damned high. Then when you move over into the industrial areas of the country where there are more choices available for people of ambition, you find the caliber isn't quite as high.

G: I've never thought of it in those terms.

R: Look at it. Can you think of any really outstanding New York senators? Probably the best known was . . . I don't want to take you back as far as Roscoe Conkling. In this century about the only senator who was really well known is Robert F. Wagner. And that was only because he had his name on so many bills. I knew him and he wasn't a particularly able man. Now the New England types, there again you get a very, very high caliber. In some ways I prefer them to Southern types. I think they may have a little more integrity. But again, you have an area of the country where there is not too much chance for an aggressive, able man to go somewhere. Muskie is about as close I think as Maine will ever get to having a President. Vermont--Coolidge was their President. That has a lot to do with it.

G: In addition to working hard, getting seniority, and knowing the parliamentary procedures well, what was another ingredient of being a 'whale' in the Senate?

R: Well, they understood people. Well, they understood people. That's terribly important.

G: Well, what were some of the unwritten rules in dealing with other senators? There must have been an informal code of ethics, more or less, that you didn't violate.

R: Oh, yes.

G: You didn't go up, for example, and blast Carter Glass.

R: If you blasted Carter Glass you were quite likely to have him at your throat. He was a little wildcat. I think the number one rule is that you didn't attack another senator unless you had a reason to attack him. This may sound a little peculiar, but it was one of the things that led to the downfall of Joe McCarthy. One day he let out a gratuitous blast at Carl Hayden with no good reason. God, that was a stupid thing for him to do. I think Joe, who had his limitations, regarded Carl as an old, blind, deaf fuddy-duddy and didn't know that Carl Hayden was one of the toughest creatures that ever walked the face of this earth. He didn't hear anything from Carl Hayden, and I think Joe assumed he'd gotten away with it. No. That was the beginning of the end.

G: Did you witness any of Hayden's response to this?

R: Didn't have to. I remember Dick Russell in a meeting of the Senate Democratic Policy Committee one day, when Johnson was building up forces to get a civil rights bill through, saying, "I don't need anybody to draw me a blueprint. I don't have to have a cake of ice dropped down my back. I know who's making them footsteps." Well, that's the way I felt about Carl Hayden and Joe McCarthy. I didn't have to be told. I knew.

G: I've heard, in addition, his role in the defeat of Millard Tydings turned a lot of the Senate against him.

R: Not as much as you'd think. Tydings had become so terribly arrogant that

he was quite unpopular with his fellow senators and very unpopular with the press. And I'm not even sure that McCarthy defeated Tydings. I think Tydings defeated Tydings. At the time I assumed, as did everyone else, that Joe had licked him. But there's one very peculiar feature about this town. And that is, nobody in Washington knows anything about Maryland politics except the few people from Maryland. It's a sort of shadowy, mysterious place. Kind of a never-never land. It's obvious that the politics are on a very low level and that--God, I'd like to see one governor get through without a scandal. It would make my old age a bit easier. But I did get to talking to some of the Baltimore politicians a couple of years later, and they said, "No, McCarthy had nothing to do with defeating Tydings," that Tydings had just made too many enemies. The communism issue might have been the excuse for defeating him. That is, the stuff that McCarthy was slinging at him, but that he'd really defeated himself. That if it hadn't been for that, there would have been some other issue.

G: That's interesting.

R: He'd been in an awfully long time. And I knew of his arrogance, myself. Oh boy. God, he was arrogant.

G: Did Johnson rely on Russell more than any other senators?

R: Yes.

G: Did he cultivate Russell?

R: Probably. It's hard to tell who was cultivating whom.

G: Really?

R: Russell and I became very close friends. And the truth there was, Russell



was deeply distressed by the divisions between the North and the South. And he had a feeling that if one Southerner could get elected President, just one, that it might put an end to the divisions in the country. And he, early, came to regard Johnson as the one Southerner who might have a chance to be elected.

G: How early do you think?

R: Russell first started talking to me about it in 1952.

G: That was before he ran for the minority leadership. Because he ran in '53 and became Minority Leader. Were those the terms he put it in?

R: Well, I can't remember the precise terms. That's more than twenty-three years ago.

G: Was this after Russell's own effort to get the nomination? Before?

R: No. No. No. The Russell effort was actually an effort to keep the South in the Democratic Party.

G: I see.

R: That whole campaign, I think, was primarily Russell, me and Lyndon Johnson. Russell had no illusions. But he knew he could get a lot of votes at the convention. And the general idea was that after he got defeated, he'd go onto the platform, which he did as you may remember, and say, "Well, we got licked fair and square. If we'd won we would have expected them to support us. Now it's up to us to support this candidate." Which is about what he said.

G: Was the relationship between Johnson and Russell one of a mentor and a

protege?

R: No, not precisely. Because Johnson would do many things which Russell did not like, which Russell could not cooperate [with], but which Russell still realized had to be done.

G: Can you give an example?

R: Civil rights. Russell couldn't possibly have advised in civil rights. Most of his advice in civil rights came from me.

G: I've heard that that '57 bill was in many respects a Russell bill because it incorporated the things that Russell thought were acceptable to the South. On the other hand it threw out the things that he thought the South would never tolerate.

R: In a way you're right, but that's an over-simplification. Russell got up very early and came through with a vigorous denunciation of Title 3 of the Civil Rights Act. And everybody [was] surprised [that] he turned out to be right about it. Somebody downtown had been very careless in their researching the bill, and they had produced a monstrosity. God, it was a monstrosity. The reason was a peculiar codification of the laws in which it did not have adequate cross referencing. They didn't know that certain laws were tied to other laws. This was not apparent when you looked it up in the various reference works. Russell had looked it up. He got up and made a speech denouncing Title 3, and he turned out to be right in his analysis of it, and the administration turned out to be wrong. Some of the Northerners, when they realized that, took out some of the worst parts of Title 3. But by that time the debate had really gotten going. And if you keep debate going for a few days, one of the

things that emerges is a pattern of what people really stand for and what they won't. Now it became apparent after a few days that the Southerners absolutely would not take Title 3. Not even the cleaned up Title 3. That if you want Title 3, you're going to have to break a filibuster. I don't think a filibuster could have been broken because the Southerners all by themselves couldn't sustain one, but they would have enough allies in the Western states to have kept it going indefinitely. You just weren't going to get a civil rights bill with Title 3. [There was] no possible compromise to Title 3.

The other thing the Southerners simply would not take was the concept of trials without jury. They had to have jury trials. Now that was a rougher one because the one thing the Northerners would not take was a bill that had jury trials in it. Because they assumed that you'd put a Southern jury in a civil rights case and there would be nothing but acquittals. So that looked like the dilemma that was really going to sink the bill. The Title 3 wasn't too important. Nobody was ever quite sure what Title 3 would have done. I've talked to a lot of lawyers about it, and it's one of those vague things that gives all power. You know, when you give somebody all power that means maybe you're not giving them any. But the jury trial, that thing was specific. And one day when I was reading a copy of New Leader, I came across an article by Carl Auerbach. That professor of law at the University of Wisconsin, a very famous man--

R: He said this thing could be solved very easily--that under ancient tradition, a judge did not have to resort to jury trials in cases of civil contempt in order to enforce the judgement of the court, but did have to have jury trials if there was going to be a case of criminal contempt. We had a very brilliant lawyer in our office, Solis Horwitz. I took it to him and he said, "Why, of course. Everybody knows that." Of course, everybody knew that, but Solis had missed the implications because he was not politically minded. I saw it pretty quick. What we did was to devise an amendment which would provide for jury trials in cases of criminal contempt, not in cases of civil contempt. Well the average man on the street is not aware of the fact that criminal contempt is far less serious than civil contempt. In civil contempt, the judge can lock you up and throw away the key. He might even be able to use thumb screws. Lawyers aren't sure of that. Or electric shock treatment. Anything. Because you see, in civil contempt you aren't punishing somebody. You're merely applying force to make them obey the order of the court.

G: Yes.

R: And the theory is that the person to whom the force is being applied has the key to the jail cell in his own hands. Well, that was a real 'beaut'. The Southerners could go on home and say that, "Yes, that's a bad bill. It's an awful bill, but at least we made sure they couldn't brand you as a criminal without a trial by your peers. The Northerners were able to go home and

say, which was equally true, "There's all the enforcement power you need in this bill. You don't have to worry about juries. There aren't going to be any." Which there wouldn't be.

G: Yes.

R: Criminal contempt is a very limited thing. The most you can get for it is six months. And since it's a limited punishment, it's not the sort of thing that would be used. Now what happened then, however, the point that I'm trying to make here, is that what finally emerged really emerged from an analysis of a floor debate as to what was possible. It's not that Russell got what he wanted, it's that during the course of the debate it became clear that certain things had to be done if there was going to be a bill.

G: I see. He didn't sit down and write out the . . . I see.

R: No.

G: I've heard that Frank Church played an important role.

R: Yes. He introduced . . . which amendment did he introduce? It was a very important one. I'm getting the amendments a little bit mixed up now. Anderson introduced the amendment to strike Title 3. I think Kennedy introduced the jury trial amendment, or was it O'Mahoney? Those things were set up by Johnson. I'd have to refresh my recollection on that, but Church did play a very important role.

G: Obviously, Johnson appreciated Russell's stature. Did the Northern and Eastern senators appreciate him as well?

R: Yes. There was a tremendous appreciation of Russell in the Senate. Russell was a peculiar man. If you as a senator, let's say from Indiana or Ohio, went to him and said, "Senator, I've got a problem." And if you'd acted pretty square with Russell he was quite likely to say, "Well Senator, if I were in your position I would . . ." All of a sudden you'd discover that Russell knew more about your state than you knew. It was the most fantastic performance. And he would give them legitimate, honest advice. If you were honest with Russell, he was honest with you. And even some of the most liberal people from New York, or from New Jersey. They discovered that Russell really understood their state better than they did, and that he usually knew the key to survival. That was one of Russell's strengths--almost everybody in the Senate owed him for something like that.

G: I've heard that there was a big difference between him and Strom Thurmond, philosophically as well as . . .

R: Do you mean between Russell and Strom?

G: Yes.

R: Yes. Russell was not really a last ditch--a confederate. I don't think Russell objected to integration. I think he was quite sincere in being against the legislation because he thought it was an effort to legislate morality. And as I said, I think he was very sincere about that. But I don't think he was against integration itself. Whereas Strom, Strom really was waving the [flag] of the Confederacy. Russell wanted to bring

the South into the United States. Thurmond wanted to keep it out. There was a very, very deep difference. But, of course, the thing that irritated all the Southerners, after those two compromises had gone through, Russell had decided that the safest thing--and he was right--was for the Southerners to filibuster a decent length of time and then roll over dead while the juggernaut passed over them. And the Southerners agreed to that. And Russell had a hell of a good point because once those two compromises were adopted the Southerners lost their Western allies. I don't think they could have really sustained a filibuster, then. There weren't enough of them. And so, what happened, they all made that agreement that they'd roll over and play dead at the same time. And then at the last minute, up pops big Strom with that grand-standing, twenty-four hour filibuster or whatever it was.

G: Yes.

R: Oh God, the venomous hatred of his Southern colleagues. I'll never forget Herman Talmadge's eyes when he walked in on the floor of the Senate that day and saw Strom carrying on that performance.

G: How important to Johnson was Russell as an ally?

R: Oh, extremely important. Extremely important. But I think even more important as an advisor. Russell was determined to make Johnson a national figure. And I think if it hadn't been for Russell, Johnson would have been in real bad trouble in the Southern manifesto, for instance.

G: Did Russell advise him on that?

R: No, I don't think Russell advised him on it. Johnson wouldn't have signed it under any circumstances. But I think Russell went to work on his colleagues and talked them out of raising hell with Johnson on it. Johnson and Kefauver were the only two that didn't sign it. Now of course, Kefauver was in a better position than Johnson. He could get away with it. Kefauver had all that eastern Tennessee that didn't give a damn about the South. I don't think Nashville cares much, or Knoxville either. Whereas Johnson, even in far West Texas, which is not very confederate, that Southern manifesto was pretty popular. Of course, there weren't very many votes in West Texas, either.

G: There are in East Texas, though.

R: Right.

G: I've heard that on another occasion the, I think it was the Howard Smith Bill, was pretty much a slap at the Supreme Court like the manifesto.

R: Yes.

G: That the liberals were . . .

R: Well, no. The Smith Bill had substance to it. The manifesto was just hot air.

G: Right. Which was really the question of nullification, wasn't it?

R: Yes. Although again it was one of those vague things that might have a mountain of mischief in it, or might just be empty. Nobody was certain.

G: But I've heard that the liberals, in an attempt to dramatize their ability to defeat it had called it up and in the process they lost control of it and the thing almost passed. And it was only due to Johnson and Russell



that they headed it off. Do you remember what happened to that bill?

R: I remember what happened. I don't think they'd have to do much about that, because that bill was almost certainly doomed for defeat anyway. Paul Douglas, as soon as he heard it was coming up, prepared a Civil Rights Amendment. Now that really put the Southerners in a dilemma, because if they filibustered the Civil Rights Amendment they'd have to filibuster the whole bill. If they didn't filibuster the Civil Rights Amendment, it'd get passed. And so what happened was, it was recommit-  
(Interruption) And so, you know, I think if they'd just let that alone it would have been defeated. Possibly they cooked something up, I don't know. But I think that Douglas would have offered that Civil Rights Amendment anyway. I was never very much worried about the Smith Bill.

G: Yes. One of the Johnson/Russell teamwork measures was on getting Senator Hoey to change his vote on something, and what they went through to do it. And I've never been able to find what that was. They used to laugh about it, I understand. Does that ring a bell?

R: No. Things like that were happening all the time. I wonder if that was the Housing Act of 1955? That one was really funny.

G: What happened in that?

R: One of the greatest pieces of legislative legerdemain I've ever seen. They had a very liberal Banking and Currency Committee under Bernie Maybank. And Bernie Maybank was probably one of the most liberal of all the Southerners, especially when it came to questions like housing. And Bernie, also, was

very smart, very shrewd, and he really controlled that Committee. They came out and they had a Bill with six-hundred thousand public housing units in it. Of course, the South couldn't swallow that. That was socialized housing. The Republicans were in great glee. Homer Capehart prepared an amendment to reduce the six-hundred thousand housing units to thirty thousand, which had been recommended by Eisenhower. And everybody assumed that Johnson was going to get licked on it. All they had to do was count up the Republican votes, and count up the Southern Democrats, and the thing was licked, Then the Capehart Amendment would be offered. Just before the vote that day, Capehart walked up to Johnson on the floor of the Senate and said, "Lyndon, this time I really got you. I've really got you and I'm going to rub your nose in it." And Johnson just looked at him, looking kind of downcast and sheepish. They started to vote. Harry Flood Byrd was the second or third name on the roll call. And when he voted no against the Capehart Amendment, Capehart's head snapped around so fast I thought his neck was going to break right there on the spot. Every single Southerner voted against Capehart which meant, in effect, that they were voting for the six-hundred thousand public housing units. What had happened [is] that Johnson had persuaded them, and I think this mostly meant Russell, that there was no difference between thirty thousand and six-hundred thousand public housing units. They were both socialism. And socialism was bad whether it was thirty thousand or six-hundred thousand. So every Southerner voted against the Capehart Amendment,

then against the bill. Now it was all right for the Southerners to vote against the bill, because the Republicans had to vote for it. They had to vote for it because there was a lot of FannieMae money in it. And they didn't dare vote against that Fannie Mae money. I would assume there that Johnson had probably arranged that through Russell. Every single one of the Southerners immediately got on to a radio recording and made tapes and shot them down to their states explaining that they were fighting this deadly socialism. This bill was loaded with socialism. Thirty thousand public housing units [is] like being a little bit pregnant.

G: Can you think of other examples where the Southerners would, in effect, cooperate with the passage of more liberal legislation while assuming a posture of opposition?

R: I can't think of one off hand.

G: I've heard that one time when Knowland wanted to adjourn the Senate or something without consulting with Johnson--when Lyndon Johnson was Minority Leader--that he, the latter, managed to latch on to a few extra Republican votes and defeat Knowland on that.

R: I don't remember that one. I just don't recall that. You know, it's hard to think of examples.

G: How about Senator Kerr?

R: In what sense?

G: How did he stack up with Russell and Johnson in terms of power and intelligence?

R: He had considerable power and considerable intelligence. I wouldn't say he

was in the league of either one. Kerr got most of what he got by sheer force. He was a very forceful, almost brutal personality. Deadly in a debate. The kind of man that would get up on the floor of the Senate and start swinging a sledge hammer and leave a lot of bloodied heads around. The man had considerable ability, but I would say a limited vision. [He was] reasonably liberal for a wealthy oil millionaire, but not necessarily a man of vision. He was somebody that had to be taken into account.

G: Let's get back to your role as Lyndon Johnson's intellectual during these years. What issue do you think, in terms of the memoranda of something had the largest effect on Johnson as Majority Leader. Do you recall one in particular?

R: Civil Rights.

G: The '57? Was this with regard to the Title 3 itself?

R: Oh, no. The whole strategy from the beginning. I had persuaded Johnson early that year that there just had to be a civil rights bill, at all costs. And at that point we weren't too certain what it could be. But I think that the most important thing that I did was to convince him that it would be possible to pass a civil rights bill, if you limited it to voting rights. Impossible if you went into anything else. That's one of the reasons Title 3 had to go. It covered other things than voting rights. Because I had had a sense, and I was right about it, that the Southerners felt guilty about depriving the Negroes of voting. They didn't feel at all guilty about depriving

them of jobs. You know, when you've been oppressing a people for a long time it's very easy to kid yourself that these are sub-humans, anyway, that couldn't handle those good jobs. That they don't have enough intelligence, they don't have enough sensitivity, etc. They didn't feel sensitive about the job thing. Lynching had really died away as a practice in the South, so they didn't feel sensitive about that. They felt sensitive about past lynchings, but not about present. They didn't feel sensitive about housing, but they were defensive about the vote thing. That, they couldn't justify. One of the characteristics of the Southerners is they really do believe in the Constitution as written. And when they have to take some stand that is clearly unconstitutional, it worries them. Well, it was clearly unconstitutional to deprive these blacks of their votes. You don't have to be a lawyer in order to read the Fourteenth, Fifteenth, and Sixteenth Amendments to see that it was perfectly clear that they were entitled to vote. And the Southerners knew they were being hypocritical on that one. My whole belief was that if you concentrated solely on that, the Southerners would have to give. And if they gave on one bill, then that down the road it would be possible to get other bills that would branch out into the other fields. You know the old theory of getting the first olive out of the bottle. But you had to start at the one place where there was some chance of success. Now at that point, we didn't know what Eisenhower was going to send up. But it was obvious that the only way that you could possibly get a bill through was to take the Presidents bill. You weren't going to get a bill through that was

introduced in either the House or the Senate by any civil rights advocate, because that would just be another civil rights advocate. You know, over a period of time people get typed. People get classified, and a bill introduced by a civil rights advocate couldn't possibly have enough weight to carry. But a presidential recommendation always carries some weight. And so the strategy was to lay back and wait for the Eisenhower recommendation and see what had to be done to it to shape it into a pure voting rights bill, and then go on from there. Which really is what we did. That was my strategy that I sold him on.

G: Did you ever advise him in terms of what this particular senator's price was on a bill, or that particular senator's price was?

R: No. Bobby Baker would do more of that than I would. But I would advise him on what I thought groups would take. Bobby wasn't very good at that. Bobby always thought of it in terms of 'this particular senator and what does he need, and how much.' I always thought of it in terms of 'what can this senator afford to do in terms of his constituency.' And senators are a pretty decent lot. They will act pretty damned good unless their constituency is armed to the teeth in the issue. And so I would never presume to advise Johnson on an individual senator and what his price was. In fact, I didn't want to know. I didn't want to get into that business.

G: Do you think on civil rights, for example, that Johnson earnestly felt that the time had come for voting rights, or was it to him a political expediency in getting the best of the Republicans?

R: His motives were highly mixed. In the first place, the man had less bigotry in him than anybody else I have ever met. Much less than I had. As a kid, I was brought up in an Irish section of Chicago where we'd get out and beat up all the Polack kids whenever we could, or all the Italian kids, or they'd beat us up if they'd catch us alone. And I grew up thinking that dumb Swede was one word. And it took me a long time to discover that every Italian didn't smell of garlic. But Johnson had none in him. Literally none. I've never seen a man so completely devoid of any type of racial or ethnic prejudice. He had others, but not racial, ethnic, or religious prejudices. The story he tells about getting outraged over his cooks . . .

G: Gene Williams . . .

R: Yes. Gene Williams and Zephyr. That story is true.

G: Oh it is?

R: That's really true. That's not apocryphal.

G: Did you witness his reaction to that?

R: Yes. I saw him the next morning. He'd talked to her about it that night. And I think that had some influence. Not just the story, but it sort of made him realize what was happening. Then I think he knew that from his standpoint, if he was ever going to go anyplace, he had to somehow at least neutralize the issue. I think he also thought in terms of unifying the country. But you couldn't possibly unify if there was a deep, divisive issue that the Senate couldn't even vote on. And then finally, and in a peculiar sort of a way this may have been one of the most important things, Johnson had

a very fierce pride in the Senate. He really was proud of the Senate. And I think it hurt him to think that here was an issue the Senate couldn't handle.

G: Did he ever express that thought?

R: No, but it was plain. He never said it in those words, but it was so plain just from listening to him talk. Even [C. Van] Woodward, the historian, grasped that. He wrote an article for Commentary in which he made that point. He was absolutely right. So, all those motives have to be taken into account. Johnson always was a complex man. And you can look at any particular side of him and decide that's it. There's no question that there was an element of political expediency in it. If that's all you look at, you can say, "Well, politically expedient."

G: How did you tell which was which?

R: I didn't.

G: Could you ever tell how he was motivated?

R: No. Not really.

G: This is something that scholars are wondering every day.

R: I don't think they're ever going to know.

G: Really?

R: I think I knew him as well as anybody. I wasn't so good at predicting his individual moods. The best person for that was Helen. She was the only one that knew precisely how he was going to feel at any given moment of the day or the night--the maid. But I think in terms of what generally moved him, I knew as well as anybody. And yet there are some very



deep mysteries to Johnson that I haven't got the faintest handle on.

G: What for example?

R: I'm never sure whether those rages that he flew into were real or not.

G: That's one thing I've wondered.

R: I'm not at all sure.

G: He could turn them off so quickly, it seemed.

R: Yes. I'm not at all sure how valid were these deep, dark moods of depression, because they could be turned off awfully quickly, too. He was constantly resigning from something. I really had to chuckle a bit when he did that piece with Walter Cronkite in which he talked about having discussed with me the possibility of resigning from the presidency in 1964. And that was true, he did. The night before we went up to Atlantic City he walked with me on the south lawn of the White House for about two hours saying he was going to go up there and quit. He actually had me believing it for a while. I got home that night in a nervous funk thinking, "My God, he's going up there tomorrow and resign; the convention will be thrown into chaos; Goldwater will be the next President, . . ." The next day he flew up there and accepted the nomination. Everything was hunky-dory. But I should have known better because ever since I knew him he was always quitting something; [yet] he never would quit.

G: Why was he discouraged? What led him to consider resigning?

R: You see, this is the mystery. Really, when I analyze it, there wasn't any good reason for him to quit. And yet he'd get into these moods and he could be terribly convincing. The whole world was against him; he

was a Southerner. These Ivy League intellectuals were always going to consider him a cornball. Why should he mess around with all this bullshit, which is the way he put it in his milder moments. And then he'd go back down to the ranch in Texas and say, "Fuck 'em all." I'm giving you the gestures and the words, and everything else. And of course, what would invariably happen is that ten or fifteen people would be around there to beg him not to do it. And I sometimes wonder if that's not why he did it.

I remember one night Bill Knowland begging him not to quit. [We were] in Skeeter Johnson's office [with] Knowland, myself, Skeeter, and two or three other people, and he got into one of those moods. "I'm going to resign tomorrow, George. Go write me out a statement." Knowland pleading with him not to do it. The country would go to hell in a hand basket. Now, was it real, or was it that he just wanted to be begged not to, Was it a form of controlling other people?

G: He must have required an incredible amount of attention from those around him.

R: Oh, he did. God yes.

G: Constant maintenance on the personality.

R: An incredible amount of service. Unbelievable.

G: I've also heard that he liked you and Walter Jenkins better than anybody else that worked for him.

R: Over a long period of time that's probably true. He didn't like me very

well when I left. I don't know what would have happened if we'd ever had an opportunity to get together again. We left under rather bad feelings. But he was a man capable of very sudden--you might call it a crush on somebody. This, by the way, I think is one of the explanations for the Bobby Baker phenomenon. There was a certain type of very young, very ambitious, very hustling type of young man that could take Johnson hook, line, and sinker. Barzini, in his book on The Italians, has a whole chapter on the art of seduction of older men, which apparently has been practiced many times in Italian history. And it happened to Johnson many times. I don't know if he thought of them as his sons, or whether they just flattered him more than anybody else, but it was constantly happening. <sup>^^</sup> And usually they weren't very good people, either. Bobby Baker, strangely enough, was probably the best of them.

G: Perhaps he saw it as a reflection of his own climb up the ladder.

R: I think he could have, because he was like that. Except of course, he wasn't either because Johnson was a tremendous man. Johnson was about as close to a political genius, I think, as you can get. Most of these were crumbs.

G: Let's talk about Bobby Baker. The image that I get is a very mercurial person. Someone who at times seems very profound and very much--

R: Bobby?

G: --very much able to understand the workings of the Senate, and then on the

other hand a very flighty person who deals almost exclusively in the lighter aspects of the . . .

R: I think you're mistaking knowledge for profundity. Bobby knew the workings of the Senate. There's no doubt about that. He really knew the workings of the Senate.

G: How did he learn? Just through experience?

R: There are just some people like that. He'd come to Washington as a page boy. And he had the biggest ears for such a small man of anybody that ever lived. He was constantly listening. Constantly snooping. And he did know the workings of the Senate.

G: Well didn't this aspect of him alienate senators and make him . . . .

R: No, he was awfully good at it. They all liked Bobby because he was useful. Very useful. He'd trade information back and forth. You know Bob had a quick pair of feet, and a boundless supply of energy. And he was constantly running around, talking to people, exchanging gossip, [he would] get things for them, got himself in positions where he could deliver money to them during political campaigns. . . . No, he didn't alienate any senators. They all liked him. But when I say Bobby was not profound . . . That was all he knew, the workings of the Senate. He didn't know what to do about it. To him the Senate was a mechanism that cranked out good things for Bobby Baker if he played it right. Bobby had tremendous ambition. He had two major ambitions. He wanted to be a millionaire and he wanted to be the governor of South Carolina.

G: I would have though, perhaps, a senator.

R: No, he wanted to be governor.

G: How important was he to Lyndon Johnson?

R: Very important. He'd count votes. God, he could count votes.

G: He was accurate?

R: Oh yes. Oh yes. He'd carry messages. He could dig up dough.

He always knew things. The most important part of Johnson's operation was really sort of an intelligence operation that kept feeding in things with a scale and an efficiency the CIA never dreamed of. Bobby was a very important element of that operation.

G: I've heard that Johnson would trade apples for orchids all day long.

R: Sure. That was a crack made by that senator from Michigan, McNamara.

G: Another image that I've received is that Bobby Baker was fine as long as LBJ was Majority Leader, because he kept him so busy he didn't have time to get into trouble.

R: I think that's pretty much true. He had started to get into some trouble,  
\*  
but not very deep. I think the MGIC deal took place while Johnson was still the Majority Leader--I'm not sure of that. That's the only one that I'm not clear on.

G: Did you ever hear Johnson oppose the opening up of the law office?

R: Yes. Johnson got very disturbed when he heard about it. It was something Bobby did without telling him. But Bobby conned him out of it somehow.

\*Nota Bene: This refers to the Wisconsin corporation titled MGIC but pronounced MAGIC.

Bobby was almost as good as Helen at figuring out Johnson's moods. He was real good at that.

G: Really?

R: Very good. And Johnson was always quiet and calm when Bobby was around. He was real good at calming him down. But it did disturb Johnson when Bobby opened that law office.

G: What did he do? Did he try to talk him into closing it?

R: Yes, but I think Bobby talked him out of it.

G: Do you have any other recollections on Bobby Baker?

R: Oh, I have plenty of recollections on Bobby Baker. Plenty. One thing, I'm getting a bit confused with the times, because this was so long ago. And I don't remember whether this happened while Johnson was still Majority Leader or when he was Vice President, which is when Bobby really got into trouble. But a friend of mine that did a lot of fishing with me at Ocean City once told me he had heard that Johnson was buying resort property near Rehoboth, or that some Johnson people were interested in it. That kind of intrigued me. I asked Walter and he'd never heard of it, and I couldn't find anybody that had heard about it, so I forgot about it. But I realized, years later, that that was Bobby buying Carousel and putting it together. And I have no doubt that he used Johnson's name all over the place. I doubt if Johnson even knew about the Carousel until it was . . .

- G: Back to Bobby Baker. What areas do you think I ought to pursue with him?
- R: Well, of course, you almost have to get into the scandals. I'm pretty certain that Johnson was absolutely clean on all that. I really think what happened was that after Johnson left and Mansfield became the Majority Leader--you know, Mike is sort of easy and relaxed in his operation. Not in his personality, but in his operation. I think he left Bobby alone. You can't leave a guy like Bobby alone. He's got to find something to do. He's hyperthyroid. He has tons of energy that has to be burned up somehow, and he's intensely ambitious. After he got into trouble, and it's funny, the trouble really did proliferate all over the place. All sorts of little things came out that you wouldn't suspect. That club over at the Carroll Arms--I was a member of it myself. I didn't even know Bobby was a member. Somebody else had solicited me. Bank stuff, and what have you.
- G: What about the hundred thousand dollars. I heard that was Senator Kerr's money, and Baker just really took the rap for Kerr on that.
- R: You know, what I would guess, is that was political money. That it was probably money that had been laundered somewhere. And that Bobby

simply couldn't explain it without getting an awful lot of people in trouble. That would be my guess. I'm only guessing, I don't know, but a hundred thousand in cash--that's a lot of cash. People don't usually cart a hundred thousand around in cash unless they have a reason for it.

G: Well, adding to your thesis, I've heard that twenty thousand of it was for Everett Dirksen's campaign.

R: That could be.

G: Have you ever heard that?

R: No. No, but I wouldn't be too surprised. Everett Dirksen, Johnson and Kerr were all pretty thick. And it was good to have a Senate Republican Leader who was a voice of reason at the right time. But I don't know that. I stayed as far away from money as I could. I wasn't any good at raising it, and I just figured it was trouble, and that I was of no value in that field, anyway.

G: Did Lyndon Johnson handle the Bobby Baker scandal properly?

R: Very poorly. It's one of the most inept things he ever did. Just trying to sell that line that 'he hardly knew Bobby Baker.' Oh my God, that was incredible. He got disturbed by the word "protege." Well, of course Bobby was his protege. It was just too well known and it was too obvious. He'd shot Bobby up overnight from page boy to Secretary of the Majority. And you just couldn't sell that ridiculous story, that he wasn't Johnson's protege. Abe Fortas presented the argument that



Baker wasn't Johnson's protege because the Secretary of the Majority had been elected by the majority members of the Senate. Well, of course that's true, but it's one of those truths with no meaning to it.

G: A legalistic . . .

R: Yeah. A legalistic truth. The majority will always give the Majority Leader his choice as Secretary of the Majority. Nobody would ever fight over a thing like that. That was very inept.

G: Why do you think Johnson agreed to do this?

R: This was one bad habit of his. When the same thing happened in that scandal involving Billy Sol Estes--I'm absolutely convinced he was clean of that. Absolutely convinced. Billy Sol, generally speaking, was on the other side of the fence from Johnson in Texas politics. And yet, what he did was to clam up. A few simple, calm explanations from Johnson would have blown a lot of it out of the water. The only reason to suspect that Billy Sol was attached to Johnson was because Billy Sol was from Texas. We ransacked our files, and I don't think we found more than seven or eight letters from him, most of which were little notes sending Johnson a crate of melons at Christmas which is a very common thing. But yet he clammed up. And I believe the Billy Sol Estes scandal, as far as Johnson was concerned, would have been forgotten the first week if he'd merely explained it. With the Bobby Baker case, I think if he had merely stated the facts, he would have been all right.

G: Did he, do you think, relate it to what he feared was an effort on the part

of the Kennedy Administration to get rid of him?

R: Oh yes. No doubt of it.

G: Did you ever talk to him about this?

R: No. I didn't have to. He would just say so.

G: Did he generally feel during that period that they were considering dumping him?

R: Yes. But mostly Bobby. And I think that there was probably substance to it.

G: Yes. I've heard they were offering it to . . . at least [they were] trying to get people to attack Johnson.

R: I don't think Jack would have. My guess is that's Bobby. Johnson and Jack got along quite well. Johnson and Teddy got along quite well. But Johnson and Bobby--they were antagonists from the moment they saw each other. And I think that Bobby may well have been pushing the Baker scandal and the Billy Sol Estes scandal hard in an effort to discredit Johnson.

G: Yes.

R: But there just wasn't anything there. Literally. I remember when Johnson accepted that stereo set from Bobby Baker, which as it turned out came from that insurance agent. I think Johnson just thought that Bobby was making him a gift. I've never known the slightest connection between Johnson and MGIC or Johnson and ServU. But Johnson's

impulse whenever he was under attack by the press, was to cover up.  
An impulse that really hurt him.

G: I think the stereo set probably assumes a different significance when one considers the fact that he always seemed to give expensive gifts--

R: He did.

G: --to people on his staff.

R: Sure. He gave me everything from cuff links to a Lincoln.

G: Is that right.

R: Suits. [He'd give] the women dresses. Expensive beauty treatments up in New York whenever he was in New York with some of them. Underwear. He was compulsive almost like the members of that Indian tribe that gives the potlatches. You know, where they give away everything they have.

G: Yes.

R: He had some of that in him.

G: The Baker scandal then reflects on Johnson's relations with the press and his whole concept of the press. Do you think he had more of an adversary view of the press than most other politicians?

R: Somewhat, yes. Everything was overdeveloped in Johnson. And Johnson simply could not understand why it was he could buy a reporter a drink and take him out to the ranch, show him a good time, and that reporter would write a story he didn't like. He could not understand that. Again, I think that's because Johnson had so little respect for the integrity of words. I think he thought words were just something you used as weapons.

G: Advertising.

R: Right.

G: It seems that he was more successful in dealing with the press before 1963.

R: Of course he was.

G: That he was able, to a certain extent, to use the press as PR.

R: Oh yes. That was because to a great extent he didn't do it. He didn't have to face daily conferences. He left most of that to me. It's simple to deal with the press. There's nothing difficult about it, as long as you realize there are only limited things you can achieve.

G: Do you think that possibly it stemmed from Johnson not liking his own-- what he represented to everybody else? He didn't want to be known as the true politician, the compromiser, the wheeler-dealer?

R: Oh, that was a part of it, but I think the more basic elements were that first of all, Johnson assumed that the whole world was in an adversary relationship. That people were either for him or against him. And if they weren't for him, then he classified them as being against him. And, of course, once he put them in that classification they quickly became against him. That was a part of it. The other part is that a large part of the Texas press that he knew during his days as a young congressman did not represent the finest in integrity of the American press. I think his view was somewhat warped by that.

G: But on the other hand, he seemed to have gotten to know some of the best

reporters in the country and became friends with them.

R: Not friends, precisely. They were fascinated by him because he was a fascinating personality. There was a period when he had the press eating out of his hands. That was the first six months he was in the White House. He kicked that away himself. I think that if he'd walked in and casually announced that he'd just come back from a walk on the Pedernales [River], I believe they would have carried it with a straight face. He really had them eating out of his hand for a while. But then, he'd get mad at them for some reason, and they couldn't understand it. He, himself, really didn't know what a good story was. He thought a good story was something that began, "Lyndon Baines Johnson is a calm, collected statesman who is the finest representative of the American dream." That's for openers. That was his idea of a good story. And damned good stories that really helped him would send him into a real rage. I can remember once, up on the ranch, he took a bunch of reporters including Helen Thomas for a walk up to Cousin Oreole's. I assume you know about Cousin Oreole.

G: Sure.

R: And that was kind of fun. They'd walk up there and there would be a lot of "hoo-rahing" and pounding on the doors.

G: And yelling.

R: Cousin Oreole just loved it. It brought some excitement into her life.

And she walked out of this little simple cottage in her bare feet. And Helen

wrote a story about it. It really was a charming story. I thought it did Johnson worlds of good.

G: Yes.

R: God, he was mad. Because of the bare feet. See, to him, Helen was saying this was a no-good hillbilly family. They walked around in their bare feet. They've probably got hookworm and pellagra. You could never convince him that that story was going to do him more good than the kind of gunk that he liked.

I remember another occasion during the Cuban missile crisis. He wanted me to call up the United Press and raise hell with them because of a picture that they printed. Well, I took a look at the picture, and my God, what it showed was him getting out of the car and turning to slam the door as he rushed into the conference on the Cuban missile crisis. And I said, "For the love of God, what better picture do you want?" You know, here was this crisis, and here's the Vice President of the United States rushing to this vital decision-making moment in our country's history-- he couldn't see it. He thought a good picture was something like a Chambers funeral ad. You know, with the hair neatly combed, and your hands composed, looking like they were all set to lay out the body. It was too bad.

G: Do you think this was really his downfall?

R: No. It was symptomatic of his downfall. I think his downfall was basically a kind of separation from reality. He'd reached a point where he didn't know what was real and what wasn't. I know he was terribly bewildered

by the student demonstrators.

G: I've heard that.

R: Because nobody, nobody, had done more financially for college students than Lyndon Johnson.

G: And for civil rights. And I guess the last batch of college students had been big civil rights advocates.

R: Right. And he didn't realize a number of things. When he was a young man, a college education was a tremendous prize. Just tremendous. It meant the keys to the kingdom. Well, it doesn't mean the keys to the kingdom today. Today, a lot of college is a babysitting proposition. And I doubt whether students value it that much. And it didn't mean anything to them that this was the man wh'd gotten all those scholarships and educational funds. What do they care? They were more interested in Vietnam. Second, their lifestyle was totally different from his lifestyle as a young man. When he was a young man, as soon as you graduated from college you were very careful to comb your hair right and tie your tie right, get a pressed shirt, pressed suit, and you'd start making the rounds looking for a job which you'd get pretty quick. The long hair bothered him, the careless, sloppy clothing, the blue jeans, and he'd look around in the White House and he'd see a lot of young people that looked exactly like his ideal--what a young person should look like. And so to him that was the real American youth. I don't know where he thought those people outside came from, probably Mars or Neptune, or something like that. But he did, he got separated from reality.

G: I've heard the story that he'd have the Secret Service just drive him around

looking at the, what he called the 'hippies' in DuPont Circle.

R: I don't know about that. That was after I left. I wouldn't be surprised though.

(End of Tape #1)

(Begin Tape #2)

R: My book has some concepts that are philosophical and partially psychiatric. I think it would have put him to sleep.

G: Did you ever talk to him about the book?

R: No. I never talked to him after he left Washington. And he didn't talk to me. Although, about a couple of months before he died I was in Dallas, Texas. Warren Woodward said I ought to go down and see him. I remember saying, "Oh Woody, he doesn't want to see me. I know better." He said, "No, he is not reconciled to your book, but I think if you went down . . ." I figured Woody had gotten that from some place. And I was going to try to arrange to get a lecture at the University of Texas or something like that, but he died before I could do it. You see, I think that he could not have understood my book, because I don't think he could distinguish between the President and the presidency. And I was really writing about the presidency. I was using what I saw in one White House, but I had checked that against the recollection of assistants in other White Houses, and was pretty sure that what I was writing was valid. But I think he'd be completely stopped by the abstraction. It wasn't that he was incapable of understanding abstract ideas--he could understand. On the civil rights debate, it became very essential at one point that he personally understand



the distinction between civil and criminal contempt proceedings.

Now this is a very subtle piece of business. It goes back to the British Parliament in about the fifteen or sixteenth century. And my God, he went home one night with a bunch of stuff to read, and the next day he could have argued the case in the Supreme Court.

G: Is that right?

R: Yes. It's just that if you could relate this abstract idea to a concrete reality in front of him at the moment, he could grasp anything. The man's intelligence was of a very high order. But he had kind of a mental block against abstractions.

G: I also get the impression that he didn't want to be bothered with a lot of this.

R: He wanted action. He was a man of action. And it led to some rather peculiar things. His concept of philosophy was something like, 'a stitch in time saves nine.' And his concept of an idea was delivering the State of the Union Address in the evening in prime time, instead of noon at the regular time. That he considered an idea.

G: We've heard a lot about the Johnson treatment--his methods in dealing with other people to achieve an advantage over them, particularly his use of the telephone and calling people late at night. I've heard that he was so obsessed with the use of the telephone in his dealings that he physically couldn't walk by one without picking it up and making a call.

R: Right. He couldn't reach enough people going around to see them, you

see. The telephone enabled him to reach more people.

G: But wasn't it much harder for him to project himself over the telephone?

R: No. He could practically crawl through that wire. And the full treatment really was an incredible thing. Mary McGrory wrote a marvelous description of it, and so did Stew Alsop. It was a combination of badgering, cajolery, an enormous amount of statistical data, scraps of paper that might not seem so very relevant. And he was a great debater. God, he could debate.

G: Did he generally use logic in his debates? I've heard, for example, that he was a master of exaggeration, overstatement. Often humorous.

R: Oh, of course he used logic. He was a master of logic. Awfully good at it. Logic is one of the trickiest of all human attributes. (Interruption) This mastery of debate technique actually hurt him in a very strange sort of way, because he'd throw himself into the most trivial arguments with all the same force that he would into the most important argument. He would argue just as hard to get a painter to reduce a bill for painting his house by forty dollars, as he would to get a civil rights bill through. And the result was that after a while, people would begin to get the impression that he wasn't sincere about anything. That anybody putting all this force and all this vehemence into so many different aspects of life just couldn't mean it. I think the truth was that he really liked to argue, that it was a compulsion with him. Because the man, I'm convinced, was terribly sincere about certain things for which he was not given credit for sincerity.

I think he was very sincere about civil rights. I think he was very sincere about the war on poverty. I think he was very sincere about the education legislation. That really was what he would have regarded as his finest achievement, because he was obsessed with this concept of giving every child, how did he put it? --"as much education as the child can take." I don't know that all of it was precisely an intelligent sincerity, but nevertheless it was sincerity. And yet, people didn't give him credit for it. Now he thought it was because he was a Westerner, and a Texan, and a Southerner, sort of thing. That wasn't it. It was just because they saw him constantly arguing this way over things that were of little account.

G: When he argued, did he do it from a positive, persuasion point of view, or did he do it from a negative, opposition point of view?

R: Oh, no. Persuasion. Persuasion. Johnson always hated to be in the opposition.

G: He would prefer to talk somebody into doing something, rather than try to talk them out of something.

R: Right. Yes. And usually, if he did have to talk them out of doing something, he'd do it by talking them into doing something else. He never tried to talk them into not doing it. To him, the word negative was taboo, unclean somehow.

G: This, to me, is somewhat in contrast to what I've heard about him as much of the time being a negative person. Not wanting to campaign, griping about a lot of things.

R: Oh that's true, oh that's true. But you see, you're in a different field. You're in a different field now. That wasn't the field of argumentation. I am convinced that most of that was merely to get people to beg him to do it. I think that was a tactic: "No, I'm not going to run, I'm going to resign, I'm tired of this job, I'm tired of that job." Well, immediately twenty or thirty people would step in and beg him not to do it. That had nothing to do with the kind of arguments he would make when he was trying to get something done or to prevent something from being done. You're speaking in a different field here.

G: I felt like that perhaps it might be just part of his disagreeable nature, that he would argue with someone simply to be disagreeing with them.

R: No. No. I don't believe he ever did that. When he argued it was to achieve a positive purpose. Now maybe the positive purpose was to get people to beg him to do it. That's entirely possible, but if you don't grasp that basic concept you'll never understand Lyndon Johnson. And positive I don't mean necessarily in the sense of . . . positive has become sort of a 'buzz' word--it means this thing is good and negative means bad. I don't mean it in that sense. I mean it in the very literal sense. He was always arguing in order to achieve some positive result.

G: Did it matter to him what these results were?

R: Oh yes. Oh yes. He really wanted a civil rights bill. When I say there are all kinds of mixed motives there, I grant that. But he wanted a bill. He really wanted education legislation. He really wanted public electric power.

This to him was a tremendously positive thing. Actually, if you want to look at his politics, he was the last of the populists. If you go back to that particular period, you'll find that basically the populists were united by their belief that if you raised income, supplied everybody with cheap electric power, supplied them with an education, you were going to solve all the problems of the world. And one of Johnson's tragedies is that he became President in a period when that formula no longer fit the problems of the world.

G: Do you think that he suffered from not enough exposure to experts, let's say, and not receiving enough direction?

R: No. No. He could get all the expertise he wanted or needed. He was good at that.

G: How big a loss was Walter Jenkins?

R: Tremendous, because Walter understood him fairly well. Johnson would say "do something," and the do something was obviously idiotic. And Walter would interpret it as a fit of temper and just sort of get it lost for a couple of days. By then [Johnson] would have thought it through. Walter really was a good administrator. I've had some experiences with Walter since then that have made me dislike him somewhat, but not completely. But Walter was an awfully good administrator. He didn't look it. His desk looked like the sloppiest thing since the Charlie Chaplin comedies, but Walter had a good orderly mind. A very good mind. And he understood Johnson.

G: I had before been under the impression that he was very subservient--

R: Walter?

G: --with LBJ and was more or less a courtier. But you're the second person who's told me that, no, if Walter thought that LBJ didn't really mean something, he'd completely ignore him.

R: Sure. Well Walter was subservient, there's not much doubt about that, but not subservient in the sense of an automatic "do what he says." Subservient isn't quite the right word. Walter's loyalty to Johnson was intense, complete, and total. All of his loyalty. I was a very loyal man, but I think I reserved my intellect for myself. Walter didn't even do that. But nevertheless, Walter was not subservient in the sense that you're talking about. Later people were--and that's the thing that did get Johnson into a lot of trouble.

G: I think the thought is that Jenkins would have kept Johnson open somewhat.

R: Yes. When Johnson would come out with something nutty, Walter would call me and we'd talk about it, discuss it, and decide we'd talk about it some more this evening, then we'd talk about it some more the next morning . . .

G: I'm trying to place Walter Jenkins in terms of substantive advice on policy.

R: None.

G: But he would call you on these things if he thought Johnson had gone astray.

R: Yes. Right.

G: So he did have an input there.

R: Oh yes.

G: It was just primarily the administrative . . .

R: I don't know whether Walter would have been capable of substantive advice or not. Walter didn't have enough egotism to give it, though. He would not have considered himself . . . which, I think, may have been a mistake on Walter's part. I think Walter had a better mind than he ever admitted to himself. It does require a little bit of egotism.

G: Do you think he was essentially as liberal as Lyndon Johnson politically?

R: Oh, easy. Oh, yes. Walter was not a conservative man. No. In fact, there were very few people in the office that were actually conservative.

G: I really got the opinion, particularly with regard to the Texans, that Lyndon Johnson liked to surround himself with people who were more conservative, that he liked to be the most liberal.

R: No. No.

G: Well, do you think that he was as comfortable around people who were more liberal than he as he was around people more conservative than he?

R: More comfortable I think, really. Except again, when you use the word liberal, you're speaking of a category of ideology that's difficult to define; to the extent that liberalism became identified with what's known as the Ivy League. There Johnson was terribly uncomfortable. I think he had the feeling that all Ivy Leaguers were looking down on him through a monocle. He very definitely had a bad inferiority complex there. God I wish he had gone to the University of Chicago when I did, where Hutchins taught us that Harvard was a trade school for stock salesmen, Yale was

a trade school for bond salesmen, Princeton was where wealthy people parked their kids--they didn't know what else to do with them, and Chicago was for intellectuals. If Johnson had had a little of that Hutchins snobbery--and it was snobbery--put in him, I think his whole presidency might have been better and different. But he did not feel confident about himself among the Eastern intellectuals. Now if you identify the liberals with Eastern intellectuals, he felt very uncomfortable with them. If you identify the liberals with people like Dave Dubinsky, or Maury Maverick--even though they were enemies, or some of the rougher trade union-farm types, he was very comfortable. Conservative people were people that he used.

G: Do you think that in some of his legislative achievements he attempted to prove something to the Eastern crowd?

R: Oh of course he did, but I don't think they were intended for that purpose. His legislative achievements were genuinely things he wanted to do. Just on the question of sincerity, the man has to be given very high marks for sincerity. But then of course, once he had done them he tried to get the maximum mileage that he could out of them.

G: Someone said last night that Watergate never could have happened under Johnson.

R: No, it wouldn't have.

G: Why not?

R: It wasn't his style. I'm afraid something else might have happened



because, again, I think what ultimately hurt him was the separation from reality. I interpret Watergate in the same terms, a separation from reality. But you would never have had something like the Plumbers setup under Johnson. He got intrigued from time to time in reading FBI reports and that sort of thing, but basically, Johnson did not have a police state mentality. He just did not have it. There really was in Johnson a basic fundamental respect for the democratic process. He couldn't have articulated it himself. Whenever he would start talking about his country, he would go off in incredible raptures on the flag and "the most beautiful sight," and that sort of thing. But deep down, he did respect the Constitution, even though he may never have read it. You see, Watergate has overtones of a police state, the idea of secret outfits out burglarizing doctors' offices. No, never.

G: How about the coverup? Do you think he would have countenanced [that]?

R: Oh sure he countenanced coverup, I would assume. Almost any politician will. I'm terribly surprised that so many people are startled by the fact that a politician would try to cover up something. Of course a politician is going to try to cover up.

G: He might have done a better job, perhaps.

R: No, no. He was pretty awkward at those things. I don't think he would have done any better job. You just wouldn't have had a thing like that to cover up under Johnson.

G: One difference, I think, that I have picked up is the difference, as reflected in the White House transcripts, between the ways the two men handled the office. With Mr. Nixon it seems like an indecision. He's just one of the boys trying to make up their minds together, not sure. Yet Johnson just seemed so decisive, and there is no doubt who is the boss. Is this accurate?

R: No, I don't think it's accurate. The tapes only show you a small part of the Nixon White House, and that part they show you is when Nixon has really been stunned by the sheer magnitude of the case. I simply cannot believe that Nixon did not run that White House. You know, I knew Nixon fairly well. In fact, I knew him quite well one time when he was a first-term congressman, because I covered the old Alger Hiss case. I devoted about two years of my working time to Nixon. I didn't learn very much about him, but I think he can run a show.

G: I have heard that we would have gotten a much better President in 1960 than in 1968, that during those years, defeat made him a lesser man.

R: No, the Nixon of Watergate hadn't changed essentially from the Nixon that I knew in the Hiss case. The only difference was that in the days of the Hiss case, he was younger and somewhat more sensible. You know, he emerged from that looking pretty good. I don't know where Nixon ever got this idea that the press was against him because of Hiss; that's nonsense. That committee was the worse one that was ever assembled in the entire history of American politics. Most of the

members wouldn't tell you the truth even when it served their own purpose. Nixon was literally the only man on that committee to whom you could go and get a straight answer to a straight question. No, he didn't get any enemy out of the press because of the Hiss case. Not in the slightest.

G: The two men [Nixon and Johnson] were not political friends, I understand.

R: Oh no, they weren't friends in any sense.

G: Johnson regarded Nixon as his major political enemy.

R: Worst than that. Johnson at one time used the phrase to me that Nixon was a fascist, and I thought that he just didn't understand the meaning of the word fascist. My wife since reminded me of it and said maybe he did know the meaning of the term.

G: How far back was this?

R: I'm trying to remember. My wife can't recall either. It was some time in the Fifties. In discussing Nixon one day, Johnson said, "He's a fascist," or "that fascist so-and-so." I just sort of laughed, but that was a very strong word for Johnson. I never heard him apply it to anybody else.

G: Do you think his dislike for Nixon was associated with the Nixon defeat of Helen Gahagan Douglas?

R: Not particularly. Johnson always assumed that politics was kind of a no-holds-barred proposition, which it is. No, I don't think it was that. I believe he was really serious about Nixon being a fascist. I think that it was about that simple. And of course, Johnson was heavily influenced by

Rayburn. Rayburn was the man who really hated Nixon. Rayburn wouldn't even speak to him.

G: Why did they dislike him so?

R: Well, I can tell you why Rayburn disliked him. During the '54 campaign, Nixon made a couple of speeches in which he used a phrase that was referring to the Democratic Party as a party of treason. Now that is probably not the exact phrase if you go and look it up.

G: "Twenty years of treason," or something like that.

R: If you look it up you are going to find there are all kinds of coppers in it. It has never ceased to amaze me. You think you remember clearly something that Nixon said that was straight and definite. Then you go back and look it up and you'll find out it wasn't quite that way. I don't think Nixon ever made a statement in his life that couldn't be reinterpreted in another fashion, and I imagine that one could be reinterpreted in another fashion, too. Nevertheless, the message that came through clearly at that time was "the party of treason." And Rayburn thought that was out of bounds. Rayburn had a belief that in politics, he didn't mind being called a crook or a thief, or something like that. He just regarded that as normal political exaggeration. But treason: Rayburn regarded that as an out-of-bounds word. I know directly what led to that; Mr. Rayburn told me.

G: You mean his own dislike of Nixon, tracing it to this?

R: Rayburn told me directly.

G: Do you think he influenced Johnson as well on this?

R: Well, he would have. He always influenced Johnson. But I don't think that was the sole reason.

G: Do you think this in turn was the reason for Rayburn to argue that Johnson accept the vice-presidential nomination?

R: Probably, probably.

G: To beat Nixon?

R: Yes. You see, they changed Rayburn's mind on it. Rayburn was against it at first. I think somebody said, "Do you want Nixon to be President?" and Rayburn didn't have to think that one over for more than one-tenth of a second. Actually, I think Nixon would have won that in 1960 if it hadn't been for Johnson. I think it's probably the only election in history where the Vice President really made a difference. , But Johnson unquestionably made a difference in that one .

G: I have heard that election morning when the returns were coming in, Johnson turned to someone and said that Orville Freeman could not have carried this, talking about Orville Freeman as if he might have been the alternative.

R: Orville? In '60?

G: Yes.

R: Nobody was considering Orville in '60.

G: I had never heard that before, either.

R: No, they were talking about Symington. Oh, who else? Symington is

the only one I remember clearly, but I know Freeman wasn't under consideration. Somebody might have suggested Humphrey, but Freeman wasn't regarded as a candidate.

G: Maybe a dark horse?

R: No, I think that's probably somebody else and it got garbled. The stories all get garbled. I remember all the garbles I have heard on the Rayburn remarks about Acheson. Thank god I really heard that one, otherwise you get all the garbled versions.

G: Which one is this?

R: "If that man had only just once run for sheriff of Wise County, the whole free world would be stronger and more secure."

G: I have heard a variation of that.

R: Oh, there are lots of variations of it. That's what he actually said. The Freeman thing might have been garbled. I have no doubt he said that about somebody, maybe Symington or Humphrey. And of course, Johnson actually did make the difference, because it was Texas, South Carolina, states like that.

G: What other areas do you think that we might pursue in some of these interviews? You indicated the mysteries that you've been grappling with.

R: I think if I were in your place I would like to know more about his childhood. Any picture that you get of him, either as Majority Leader or as President, you are going to find is a confusing picture.

Because not only did Johnson get somewhat separated from reality, he had a fantastic faculty for disorienting everybody around him as to what reality was. Every time I think of Johnson, the first thought that springs into my head is Pirandello. Have you read Pirandello's plays? Try them sometime: "Six Characters in Search of an Author," "Henry the Fourth," some of those. The whole point is that Pirandello is a playwright who would leave you with the most baffled wonderment as to whether there really were six characters in search of an author or whether the whole thing was a figment of somebody's imagination; whether this man really was a king, or whether he was just a demented lunatic that was surrounded by some others. Johnson would leave you like that. The man that should write the life story of Lyndon Johnson should be Pirandello; unfortunately, he's dead.

In searching the history of Johnson, you are going to get some very solid achievements. I don't know how they will go down in history. I am a little afraid that Vietnam's going to overshadow everything else. On Vietnam, I just don't believe there is any way that can turn out right in history. But when you get beyond that, you are never going to get satisfactory answers to any of your questions. He was a man of too many paradoxes. Almost everything you find out about him you can find out a directly contrary quality immediately, and your problem is always which quality was real and which was assumed. Or maybe neither quality was real. Or maybe both were real, who knows. But I think that a

lot of the answers to the man can be found in his childhood. This fascinates me because I have heard so many different versions of his childhood. He had one, his mother had another, people at Johnson City have still a third, the people of Fredericksburg have still a fourth. There are some answers back there.

G: We don't know much about that trip to California, either. He lived in San Bernardino for a year.

R: I know what he had told me about it, and most of it came out in terms of talking about something else. I remember one day we were discussing the rather remarkable phenomenon of a super-sophisticated intellectual like Bill Fulbright being elected from a state like Arkansas, which has such a high illiteracy rate and is so poor in its economy. A number of us were talking, and Johnson finally said, "Oh, I know that answer to that. I know all about it. On my trip out to California when I was a kid and ran away from home, we ran out of money in a town in Arkansas where there is a big fruit-packing shed. We spent a week working in that fruit-packing shed, getting enough money so we could go on west. That's where I found out about Arkansas." He said, "Where you've all gone wrong, you don't realize what it is to live in a state that everybody else makes a joke out of. The Arkansas I Saw. A Slow Train Through Arkansas. A state where almost everybody is supposed to have hookworm and pellagra, a state where there's not much future, but by god, they've got a Rhodes scholar as their senator. The things that



you think are defeating him are the very things that are putting him up there." I think he was right.

The only other thing I ever heard him speak about in that trip was when he was working that elevator, I think in San Diego, wasn't it?

G: San Bernardino, the Platt Building. He returned in 1964 to attend a dedication ceremony there.

R: San Bernardino, was it? He did tell me that a Vice President was coming through San Bernardino and that he actually paid somebody else to take his shift on the elevator so he could go down and see what a Vice President of the United States looked like. That really is about all I ever heard about the trip.

G: Did he say what he thought a Vice President looked like?

R: No. No, because his point was that he believed that any time a President or a Vice President went somewhere, they would draw a crowd. That's the only point he was trying to make. Sam Houston knows quite a bit about it if you can get him to talk. Again, you never know how well to judge the validity of Sam's conclusions.

G: I hear he was quite a problem for [President Johnson].

R: Oh, no secret to it; he says it in his book. Sam's a terrible alcoholic.

G: I have also heard that he was a great mimic of his brother, that he

would pick up the phone and call people. . . .

R: Oh, yes. Of course you know Lyndon Johnson was a great mimic, too, really great. He could have made his living at it. His mimicking was always pretty mean, but my god, you would suddenly swear you saw Winston Churchill standing in front of you. He had the same talent Dave Fry has. Have you seen Fry? I saw him in Milwaukee last week, and here you get this kind of rubber-faced, very Jewish-looking guy with lips and ears that wiggle a little bit, and long hair. He's standing there, and my god, there's George Wallace. He turns around and turns back, and there is Hubert Humphrey. God, he's good. Johnson had that same talent.

And you know, Bobby Baker: there's some clue to Johnson there. There was quite a succession of people like Bobby, and you'll find a similarity between Bobby and Bill Moyers. You won't recognize it at first, but it's there. There was some deep, psychological need in Johnson to have people like that around him. Sometimes it was just unbelievable. Kids that didn't have the talents of Bobby or Bill--of the two Bobby was the more talented--would have no talent whatsoever, kids that had absolutely nothing except ambition. My god, he would elevate them to a high position overnight. There is something there that is worth exploring.

G: Well, I guess he picked some good ones as well as some bad ones.

R: Among the young people, no, he didn't do very well with young people.

He didn't understand them. I think part of that was that he really couldn't see the succeeding generations for what they were. The best people he had were, by and large, the older people. Because among the younger ones, lord, he would make some mistakes that were real beauts. What he did to the Democratic National Committee when he was President was a scandal to the jaybirds. It's hard to conceive of any intelligent man thinking that some of the people he sent down there were capable of managing a hot dog stand at Coney Island, let alone the National Headquarters of the Democratic Party of the United States. But he did it, and would make very fond remarks: "Now there goes that young man who is the best political brain in the United States." You would wonder, "Is this a put-on, or what?" Because obviously said young man had never even seen a political campaign, didn't even know the names of the state chairmen.

G: One of his great assets, supposedly, was his ability to judge people.

R: On his own age, or people that were within a certain time span: at that he was extraordinarily good. Extraordinarily good. His perceptions were very acute, very sharp. I know he changed my thinking on a couple of senators. He spotted Herman Talmadge of Georgia, for instance, as a really able, capable man, long before anybody else did. I think part of it [was that] if it was someone around his own age or within a time frame of about twenty years, he could really look at them without preconceived ideas. One of his

weaknesses was his disregard of the weight of theory and of the power of ideas. But at the same time there was a certain strength to it, because when he would look at people, he would look at them without any preconceived theoretical ideas of what they should look like. I found that, generally speaking in my own terms, how many times I missed the real quality of a number of men that he caught immediately.

G: Can you think of any other examples?

R: The one that I can think of the most was "Big Ed" Johnson of Colorado. I had known "Big Ed" an awfully long time and I had liked him, but I had regarded him as a big, dumb farmer. I think I made such a point to Lyndon Johnson one day, and he said, "George, go look at the consent calendar yesterday and see what happened to that Johnson bill." I looked and I simply couldn't believe it. A forty million dollar bill had gone through on the consent calendar without an objection. You probably haven't been around the Senate long enough to know what that means. As a rule, if a private bill involves more than five thousand dollars, the author is forced to get up and spend 35 or 40 minutes in a tortuous explanation. Forty million dollars!

G: I've heard Carl Hayden could have these things shouted through, too.

R: Oh Hayden, yes. Not shouted through, the consent calendar. Not even a pretense of a debate. Hayden got an eighty million dollar bill through once.

G: On the consent calendar?

R: You know, my mind went into a fast shift real quick, and all of a sudden I started to reappraise Big Ed Johnson. The realization suddenly came to me that this big, dumb, clumsy farmer was getting just about any god damn thing he wanted. I realized then the whole thing was an act, but Johnson spotted that immediately. Immediately.

He spotted [Senator Sam] Ervin's courage immediately, so he put Ervin on that Censure McCarthy Committee. We put him in because we knew it took men with real guts. Well, we had John Stennis, that was easy enough. You can't be around Stennis very long without realizing he was a man of both courage and integrity. And by that time I was convinced where Big Ed Johnson was concerned, but Ervin hadn't occurred to me at all. He was just another fellow with a funny accent and a nervous twitch in his face. Johnson spotted it. He was awfully good, but in young people, no. They could take him for a fantastic ride.

G: I don't understand that.

R: And women could generally, too, at any age.

G: Do you think he was more vulnerable to women?

R: Oh, terribly vulnerable to women. Largely, I believe, the influence of his mother. His mother was out of the Victorian era, when you put bloomers on piano legs--on piano limbs, excuse me. She had filled him with all kinds of incredible gunk.

G: Did he ever talk about that?

R: Yes. I felt verry sorry for him. I remember once he was talking about how his father, this rough mountain man, had taken that sweet, cultured innocent woman up into the hills. I thought, Jesus Christ, Lyndon, what kind of a dose have you been fed? He believed it. His mother was actually hard, she was awfully hard. But he couldn't see it. He thought every woman was soft, feminine, devoted--well, he was strictly Kuche, Kirche, Kinder type. He would pour out his soul to them in nothing flat. They all reminded him of his mother. Part of that may have been an act, too.

But he was vulnerable because he had this Victorian picture. I think in young people he was vulnerable because again he had pre-conceived concepts. If they kept their hair neatly combed, their clothes pressed, and were full of energy and full of bustle, I think he assumed that these were the leaders of the future. Oh boy, some of them. Some of them should have been drowned. Again which is why I think that the more important clues are really back in Johnson's childhood. I don't know how many efforts you've made to get it, but you're going to find it's awfully hard to do. Those Johnson City folks are awfully close-mouthed.

G: A lot of them don't remember too much.

R: There aren't many left. I don't know if the Criders are still alive. They would remember something. The theater guy down in Austin, Eddie Joseph, if he's still alive, might know something. I doubt if he would talk. But there aren't many left.

G: Well, I certainly do thank you for your time.

(End of Tape 2 of 2 and Interview III)