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MORRIS ABRAM ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW I

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Signed by Morris B. Abram on April 6, 1993

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ACCESSION NUMBER 94-5

## INTERVIEW I

DATE: March 20, 1984

INTERVIEWEE: MORRIS ABRAM

INTERVIEWER: Michael L. Gillette

PLACE: LBJ Library, Austin, Texas

Tape 1 of 1

G: Let's just start at the beginning. You're from Georgia. I have to ask you about Senator Russell and your acquaintance with him.

A: I grew up in a little town called Fitzgerald, Georgia, a town of six thousand souls located in the exact center of South Georgia, two hundred miles south of Atlanta and sixty-five miles or so north of the Florida border. The town was established in a strange way, established by northern veterans of the Civil War as a colony city. Half the streets on one side of the town were named for southern generals, half for northern generals. Thus there was a Lee Street paralleling a Grant Street. We even had a Sherman Street. The park was the Blue and Gray, and the hotel the Lee-Grant.

I was always an intensely political animal and so was my father, who was a Rumanian immigrant who could scarcely read and write. But the way I met Dick Russell was as follows: I was probably thirteen or fourteen. He had been the governor of Georgia and was trying for the Senate seat being vacated by I think Senator [William Julius] Harris. The other contestant was Charles R. Crisp, from my congressional district, the Third Congressional District, Crisp being the son of a former speaker of the United States House of Representatives. Dick Russell, as he always did, created an effective prejudicial issue and made that prejudicial issue the basis of his campaign. I can't tell you exactly how, but it was possible to make Crisp appear to be the friend of the power companies by virtue of some bill that he had voted on when he was in the House of Representatives. And the campaign centered around Charles Crisp, a friend of the power companies, and Dick Russell, who had reformed and reorganized state government.

I was swept up in it, a young boy, very poor. I was gravitationally pulled towards this man who spoke this populist rhetoric as opposed to this man who was painted as a friend of the power company and the establishment. And I went to some of his speeches around the area with my father. And once, I recall--I could not have been more than fourteen, maybe thirteen--there had appeared an editorial or a letter attacking Governor Russell in the Macon Telegraph, which was the paper that we read. And I wrote, just as a kid, a letter--it's so silly, isn't it?--defending Mr. Russell. He read it and shortly thereafter I was invited to a deer hunt in South Georgia on the property of a man named John B. D. Paulk, a vast hunting preserve. I never killed an animal in my life; I just went to look. As

did my father, he never shot an animal in his life. And I met Russell then and I thought I had met the modern redeemer.

I continued to have a relationship with Russell until the time when I, as a young lawyer, began to attack the county unit system, which was a method by which Georgia elected all of its statewide officers, congressmen and senators included, a system in which one vote in Atlanta counted as one ninety-ninth of a vote as compared to a vote of a rural voter in Echols County, Georgia. I don't know what Russell felt about it, but all politicians paid obeisance to the county unit system. It was like motherhood. I suppose I then became a little untouchable as far as conventional politicians like Dick Russell, though he never engaged in any bitterness against me.

Herman [Talmadge] was different. Herman was in college with me, and we were bitter enemies, political enemies. Subsequently we became close personal friends, but never political friends. I've visited Herman and Herman's visited me; we have a good cool relationship that is friendly. But Russell quite obviously wanted to be president of the United States, and I felt that there was no hope in hell for him to do so considering the fact he was shackled--and I kept saying this to him, "You are shackled by this unit system. You cannot be a national politician if you've got to appeal to the worst and the most primitive elements in Georgia. How can you be a national politician?" I even said that to Senator [Walter] George, Georgia's senior senator and chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, who would admit that that was true. It was the unit system that caused him to get out of the race when Herman ran against him.

But when LBJ came, you see, he was, from my viewpoint, the gifted southern politician, gifted like Russell, different than Russell. Russell in many ways might have been even a better president than LBJ. That is not to say that he would have been as compassionate. That is not to say that he would have been as embracing of inclusion of people into the general populace in the sense that LBJ was, but he would have been an excellent president, a fact I didn't realize at the time because I was so opposed to his racial politics, which were reflective of his constituency. But I saw Johnson as the man most closely resembling Russell: a southerner, a leader of the Senate, a member of the club, experienced in government, who did have a chance. Because to put it in my terms, he was not shackled to the unit system, and as he himself said, he divorced himself from the southern traditions without divorcing himself--he called himself a southwesterner or westerner.

G: Did you have any insights of Russell's personal attitudes about the racial issues and civil rights?

A: I think he was hostile.

G: Was he?

A: I think so.

G: Can you give me any evidence of that?

A: No, I can't give you any--I would have said this to you--let me put it to you this way and maybe this is the best evidence that anyone could give you. I'm sure if you look through the literature of his races you'll find what were mildly acceptable racist statements in the campaigns in the thirties. After all, he was running against Talmadge. He was not going to let Talmadge "out-nigger" him. But he wasn't going to engage in that himself as a prime element of his campaign. It would have been offensive. But he had to be protective on his flanks. I never heard him say once that segregation was wrong. I never heard him come out for any amendment to the voting standards in Georgia, which were absolutely awful as late as 1949. Herman Talmadge had pushed through the legislature a complete wiping off of the slate of all the registered voters so as to get rid of the black voters, and then caused a re-registration to be accomplished quickly, under very strict standards which would be applied strictly to blacks but not to whites. And I filed this suit with Elbert Tuttle (who later became the chief judge of the Fifth Federal Circuit Court of Appeals) to try to avoid that, couldn't get rid of it. I never heard a voice from Richard Russell either complaining about the injustice or supporting the cause.

But let me tell you why I think you have to judge him a little differently than you would judge a George Wallace. He had a mentor, a legal mentor, whose name was Charlie Bloch, who was a very fine lawyer from Macon, Georgia, deeply conservative, very constitutional in the strictest sense of the word. And Dick Russell relied upon him. He appointed him to various committees and [he was an] adviser to him in the Senate with respect to the committees he ran. And I know that Charlie Bloch was a strong believer in segregation. I don't think socially so; he was a Jew. But I think he believed that the Constitution conferred upon the states certain powers of which this right to segregate would have been one. And if you read the history of the times, you will find Charlie Bloch always testifying on behalf of Dick Russell and advising Dick Russell. So that's why I say that Dick Russell would not have been a--if he became president I don't doubt that he would have modified.

G: Did you have any involvement in or knowledge of his effort to get the Democratic nomination for president in 1952?

A: No, I was not involved in any way. I would have been opposed to it, very much opposed to it.

G: Did LBJ ever talk to you about his relationship with either Russell or Talmadge?

A: No. No. This may not be the time, but he talked to me about putting Thurgood Marshall on the Supreme Court. I guess I was one of the first to know that he was going to do that.

G: Let me ask you to recount that as long as we're [on it].

A: Well, Bill Coleman (who later became secretary of transportation in a Republican administration) and I were in the Oval Office when the President was asking us to serve as the co-chairmen of the preliminary conference of the White House Conference on Civil Rights in 1965. On October 5, 1965, I met with the President. Present in the room were [Nicholas] Katzenbach, Lee White, Clifford Alexander. The President was very expansive. He was glowing in the encomiums that had been heaped on him as a result of the Howard University speech that year. He was very expansive. And he said that he was moving Thurgood Marshall off of the Second Circuit--

G: Second or Third, I forget the--?

A: --Second Circuit and making him the solicitor general. You check the dates and see what happened. "For," he said, "I'm getting him ready for the Supreme Court."

That was an interesting day, because he also expressed his views-- and they are my views, too--about another man who is an old friend of mine whom I've come to have a number of disagreements with, Joe Rauh, Jr. You know Joe?

G: I know who he is.

A: When we were sitting in the office, aides kept bringing him, as they did from time to time, these clippings off of the news machine, and there was Joe Rauh making a speech or some comment about the failure of the President to enforce the civil rights laws in some southern town. And the President exploded, and he turned to Katzenbach exactly as if Katzenbach were responsible for Joe Rauh, and he said, "You go get on the phone and tell your friend Joe Rauh the President of the United States hasn't got the time to enforce or see to it to the nondiscriminatory enforcement of traffic light violations in Abbeville, South Carolina! You hear me? Go tell him that!" I think my subsequent contacts with Joe Rauh made me think that LBJ was exactly right.

G: What did he say about Marshall?

A: That was all. Getting him ready. Now you must bear in mind at the time sitting there with him was a black man, William Coleman.

G: A lawyer also.

A: A lawyer and a Republican. A very fine lawyer. But I thought it was interesting that he made that comment.

G: I want to ask you about the Marshall appointment. You had a long career in the field of

civil rights, and I want to ask you what you think about that appointment to the Court.

A: Well, you can look at it several ways. I've been the president of the American Jewish Committee. I've been the head of many Jewish organizations. I have never felt there should be a Jewish seat on the Supreme Court. I do not think there should be a woman seat on the Supreme Court. I do not think there should be a black seat on the Supreme Court. Now this is a matter of doctrine; it's part of my belief in racial and religious neutrality. It's gotten me into a lot of trouble lately, because every day people begin to beat more and more loudly the tocsin for group rights. I do not know that the Constitution mentions group rights; it mentions only individual rights. And I think Thurgood Marshall can represent whites as well as blacks and do justice for whites as well as blacks, and I think that Sandra Day O'Connor can represent men as well as women. And I don't really think that a proportional representation by race or ethnicity should be the basis of Supreme Court appointments.

Now that's doctrinal. Now you ask me what do I think in the world in which we live of the value of that appointment? I think it was good. At a time when blacks had less and less faith in the system, it may have established some degree or modicum of faith in the system. You might even make a claim that since the Court does not really interpret a document which is totally objective and computerized to produce a result, it's good to have a variety of experience as it is to have a variety of law schools represented or a variety of geographic districts. But for example, if Marshall should die or resign, I would not think that the President of the United States ought to automatically appoint a black. I think that would be a mistake. Any more than when the last Jew went off the Court, [Arthur] Goldberg, Johnson, he did appoint [Abe] Fortas, but when he went off I don't think that a Jew should have been appointed necessarily. That's how I feel about it.

G: Leaving aside your doctrinal belief, he did decide to appoint a black. Was Thurgood Marshall the right black to appoint?

A: Well, I've known Thurgood Marshall for a very long time. When I was first battling the county unit case in Georgia in the early fifties, I was very much a village pariah, and I sought and reached out to get research and contacts with the North and I made contact with him. I remember his telling me, "Morris, for your sake, do not call me at the NAACP. Call me at General Motors. There's a tie line between General Motors and me." I mentioned that to him one day not very long ago. Those were rather strange days and I guess they're gone forever, let's hope.

He's a charming man and he's an intelligent man. I don't think he's been a great justice. I think obviously Bill Coleman would have been a much greater justice; he's a much finer lawyer. Bill Hastie was a better lawyer. But he was symbolic of the victory and a long struggle. And not everybody who's served on the Supreme Court has been a great lawyer. I don't think Homer Thornberry would have been a great lawyer, from what I hear about him. But he's been adequate.



G: Now let's talk about the 1960 campaign. Before we turned on the tape you recounted a story that sort of sets the stage for that year.

A: Yes. In 1960 the Democratic Party was preparing to oppose Richard Nixon, and the candidates, the three that I recall, who were in contention early in the year were all senatorial candidates. One was John F. Kennedy, the other LBJ, and the third of course was Hubert Humphrey. Now later, as we all know, there was a lateral entry by Adlai Stevenson, as I recall, which was not a very practical thing. But in any event, it appeared that one of those three senatorial candidates would be nominated.

Stevenson was at my house in Atlanta for a dinner one night, and I'd invited Herman over, Herman Talmadge. I drew him aside to get his views about that race, and he said that of course he knew the senators well and that he was supporting Lyndon Johnson. He said good things about Lyndon Johnson. He mentioned that he had an enormous ego, however. He did say something else. He said, "I do not understand how senators, who are all people with enormous egos and have local political strength, I don't understand how he bosses them around, but he gets away with it. It's a remarkable thing. He makes them do things they don't want to do. But he's dictatorial and I do not understand how he works his way on people as independent as the senators." He said he felt that John F. Kennedy was the least qualified. He said that if the matter were left to a free vote of the Senate, that is a secret ballot of the Senate, amongst the three, Hubert Humphrey would be the nominee. He made it very clear he didn't agree with Hubert Humphrey, that would not be his choice because of their political differences, social differences. And then he made this comment about Hubert. He says, "The man talks all the goddamn time. But, you know, he knows something about everything he talks about. He's a remarkable man." So he supported Johnson. But that was his estimate of the way the Senate would have voted had there been a free secret ballot.

In the race, as it developed I supported John F. Kennedy. I can't tell you quite why, except on a personal basis. I had a--oh, this gets into something that you don't have there. I had been a roommate in college of a man named Robert B. Troutman, Jr. Has his name come across?

G: No.

A: Oh, boy! He and LBJ had one hell of a battle over LBJ's responsibilities in equal opportunity enforcement in the Kennedy Administration, growing out of that Lockheed airplane plant in Marietta, Georgia. He and Johnson were at each other's throats all the time. That's an interesting story.

Anyway, Troutman was the scion of a Catholic family, a very prominent Catholic family. His father had been the president of the Georgia Bar Association, and Mr. Troutman had actually made it possible for me to go to the University of Chicago Law

School, because I didn't have the money to go. I was very close to that family. And when Bobby decided that he was going to support Kennedy--and I'll tell you quickly why. He had been at college with Joe Kennedy, who was killed, and was the only person in Joe's class who was not in the military service, Bobby having lost a kidney, [and] who was able to attend the memorial services. And he got very close to the whole family. He got very close to John F. Kennedy, whom he always called El Presidente. Troutman knew that for Kennedy to be successful in Georgia he needed two things: he needed the Talmadge machine and the conservatives, but he needed to touch base with the liberals. Now he needed to touch base with the liberals preferably not in public. And Troutman put together the damndest package. He had me and my wife and he, Troutman, and his wife come to Georgetown during the campaign, the primary, and have dinner with Kennedy and his wife in their Georgetown home, cementing the Talmadges and the Abrams and making it possible to claim that this man bridged both camps. So I guess it was flattery as much as anything else and friendship of Bobby that caused me to support Kennedy. And of course Kennedy was the nominee.

I was shocked when Johnson took the vice presidential nomination.

G: Were you?

A: Oh, God, yes!

G: Were you there at the convention?

A: No. I was shocked; I was in Nashville trying a case. I remember it so well. I couldn't believe it! To step down from a position of leadership in the Senate to accept the vice presidency and to make common cause with a man who he probably did not have many personal relationships with! I was shocked. I thought it was good sense on Kennedy's part, but I was not a supporter of Johnson in that. I think perhaps President Johnson was always suspicious when my name came up for appointments as to whether I was Kennedy or more loyal to him. I have the feeling that, when I was appointed to the United Nations Commission on Human Rights--you'll notice the letters there--that damn thing was meeting in Geneva on the twenty-second of March of 1965 I believe, and I wasn't appointed until about the seventeenth. The matter had been hanging fire for I don't know how long, and Bill had been trying to get it out of him, Bill Moyers. But I think he wondered to what extent I was beholden to the Kennedys. I don't know whether that's right or wrong.

G: Did he ever ask you point-blank?

A: No, never did.

G: Did he ever test your loyalty?

A: No. No.

G: Let's go back to the conflict between Troutman and Johnson.

A: Yes.

G: Let me ask you to recount that in some detail.

A: Well, Kennedy comes in. He's very anxious to have government contractors like Lockheed comply with some fair labor standards with respect to blacks. As I recall it, and you'll have to check this out because this is pure speculation and recollection, a big case was made of Lockheed. It was a prime government contractor, it had a large number of jobs. And I think Johnson was made the chairman of a commission, is that right?

G: Yes.

A: I don't know, what was it called?

G: Equal Employment Opportunity Commission.

A: He assembled a staff and was going to enforce the equality of opportunity. As I recall, Troutman thought he was going too far too fast. I don't know what Troutman's role was, but he had some kind of commission from Kennedy that made it possible for him to articulate with Johnson and it made it possible for him to have a lot of quarrels with Johnson, which I think were from time to time--according to Troutman, it's all secondhand--taken to the White House. And there you would have had Troutman, who had many stakes in Atlanta. His friends were in Atlanta; he would not have wanted to offend his friends. He was a lawyer in Atlanta. He was a developer in Atlanta. He would have had every conceivable reason to want that Lockheed thing to go slow. And he is a very imaginative man. You'll find in the files somewhere a program, it will be a long one, it will be a detailed one, in which he, through the nights and the early mornings, had set out how he thought it should be accomplished. And you will find somewhere a collision between him and LBJ on this, and it will be one of the first collisions on civil rights in terms of employment in the Kennedy Administration. You haven't come across it?

G: No.

A: Have you gone into the records of that commission?

G: No, not in any detail. We are planning a series of interviews on that commission, and when we do this will emerge, I hope.

So it was, in sum, a case of Johnson being more aggressive on civil rights and Troutman attempting to accommodate interests within the state?

A: That's the way I recall it. May be wrong, but I think that's right.

G: Okay. Did Russell get involved in that at all, to your knowledge?

A: I don't think so.

G: Okay. Let me ask you to recall the first time that you met Lyndon Johnson, or your first significant meeting with him.

A: I would say the first significant meeting with him was in the--well, I tell you, this was a great occasion. It was June 21, 1961 or 1962 in the East Room of the White House. Kennedy had assembled a hundred lawyers to found the Lawyers Committee for Civil Rights Under Law. I guess that was one of the first times I ever met Johnson. He was a very impressive guy. Kennedy had made an intellectual appeal for the lawyers' duty and so forth. You must bear in mind this was sort of hard, to push lawyers into this field. I believe Bobby Kennedy said a few words.

There was no passion in any of it until LBJ took the podium. And he gave an impassioned speech about what kind of a country is this that a man can go die in a foxhole and can't get a hamburger in a public restaurant. I would say he was by far the most effective fellow there. I was impressed with him.

The day happened to be the day, I know, that [the election of] Pope Paul VI was announced, his papacy began [June 21, 1963]. Because I was sitting by Joe O'Meara, who was the dean of the law school of the University of Notre Dame.

But then I think this conversation about the White House Conference on Civil Rights, there's a very elaborate paper in there about what he was supposed to do and what he was supposed to say, and he did it. He made it very clear that he wanted this to succeed. I must tell you quite frankly, that was an impossible assignment. In 1965, from his viewpoint, I can see how he felt. Hell, beginning with the 1957 [Civil Rights] Act, he'd gotten that through. No one else had ever gotten one through since Reconstruction. He had gotten the 1963 equal pay act through for women. He had gotten the 1964 [Civil Rights] Act through, and he crowned it with the 1965 [Voting Rights] Act. I don't know that there was any further legislative agenda of the civil rights movement. The only subsequent civil rights statute that I know of that's been enacted is the Fair Housing Act in 1968.

So look, here he is, the southern president who had done all these things, and no one else could do it. So I think he wanted to have the White House conference as a celebration, a justified celebration, of his achievement. Between the time he announced the conference and the time that it took place--the preliminary conference--Watts had occurred. Cities were burned. The black power movement was erupting. The dissolution

and the disillusionment of blacks and whites with each other in their common efforts were unraveling. The Vietnam War was heating up. Martin King, who was on the executive committee of our group, [it was] damn hard to get him to come, he was so mad with LBJ about Vietnam. I think he finally put in a token appearance simply because Bayard Rustin and [A. Philip] Randolph wanted him there.

G: Did they negotiate directly with him?

A: Yes.

G: You didn't?

A: No. Anyway, he did come for token appearances.

Then in 1965, something else happened. Daniel Patrick Moynihan published his report on the black family, as assistant secretary of labor. Now, I read that report and I thought it was right. I had no difficulty with it. I don't see anything incendiary about it. I think it's just a scholar speaking the truth. And people don't really know what it said, but I'll sum it up in one paragraph.

Pat looks at the unemployment lines as they [during the?] decline in prosperity, and then he looks at the Aid to Dependent Children lines as they [during the?] decline in prosperity. [They are] parallel. And then all of a sudden in the Kennedy recovery, unemployment goes down further, [but] Aid to Dependent Children skyrockets. So Pat said, "Well, what in the hell is going on here? Aid to Dependent Children is thought to be a program that deals with temporary problems of distressed during bad times. Times are good. It's escalating. What's happening?" And then he began to look at the family structure of the ghetto.

Well, that report had been published, and since we were to have a panel on the black family (at the White House Conference), I wanted very much to have Pat Moynihan. Well, I'm telling you, if you thought I was trying to invite a polecat, you would have found no greater resistance. Absolutely not. He now was out of the pale. I kept hammering at the White House, because ultimately they controlled the invitations, but on the other hand they were listening to black leaders, and certainly they were not going to do anything to offend the executive committee, on which sat Whitney [Young], Roy [Wilkins], Martin [King], Randolph, Dorothy Height, Marion Barry. I forget the whole crew.

Anyway, finally at the last minute, either Harry McPherson or Lee Alexander [Lee White or Cliff Alexander?] called me and said, "You can invite Pat Moynihan." So Pat was then a fellow of Wesleyan University, and I called him up and said, "Pat, you can come." And Pat being the kind of guy--have you interviewed him?

G: No. He's on our list.

A: The kind of guy who'd say, "Goddamn it, it's about time!" "What do you mean, about time?" He said, "Hell, there wouldn't be any conference had I not written that into the Howard University speech. Here I am the father of the conference and I haven't received an invitation. Why?" I said, "Well, Pat, you know that you are the subject of an enormous dispute and debate." He said, "What are you talking about?" I said, "Well, have you seen what Benjamin Payton"--who's now president of Tuskegee and who was then a scholar-in-residence at the Protestant Church Council in New York--"has written about you and the Moynihan Report?" He said, "No." I said, "Well, you ought to look at it." Pat sneered and said, "What kind of an academic writes a paper about another academic and doesn't send him a copy?" (Laughter) Anyway, Pat came and was thoroughly trashed. You see, at that moment there was erupting what I think is now in full bloom, the dichotomy between civil rights as I know it, which everyone ought to salute like the flag no matter whether you're a Democrat or a Republican or rich or poor, and civil rights as it has come to be, I think, understood by the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights, which is an economic and social program. Now that began to conflict with LBJ, because he was engaged in the war, he had deficits, and I remember he was determined to keep the budget in 1969, I believe it was, under a hundred billion. That's hard to believe. Look at it some day. It came out around ninety-nine billion, I believe. And at this conference, a centerpiece proposed by old man A. Philip Randolph, who was a great friend of the President's and supported by Bayard [Rustin], who was a great friend of the President's, was for a hundred billion-dollar freedom budget. Well, you can imagine how the President felt about that. Here [after] all he had done, he had laid the cornerstone, he had built the edifice. Nobody could think of any further civil rights legislation. He did it. No one else had. And what were these people doing, hammering at him about a freedom budget of a hundred billion dollars? That's not civil rights. That's something else.

Now interestingly enough, A. Philip Randolph and Bayard Rustin never asked for a hundred billion dollars for blacks. They asked for a freedom budget for all who needed it. It was not a quota, it was not a subsidy [?], it was to lift the tide of the poor and on that rising tide all men would come in. It was not racially oriented. Today if you asked for a hundred billion dollars from the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights, they'd ask for it for blacks or maybe Hispanics. Or if Liz [Carpenter] were part of it, it would also have to be for women.

G: Well, of course at the same time he was mounting a war on poverty. Did the two movements come together at the conference? Was there any focus on the War on Poverty at the Civil Rights Conference?

A: When did he establish the Conference on Economic Opportunity?

G: The task force was begun in early 1964 and the legislation was submitted that spring. And

the group that you were on, the advisory council, I guess was set up shortly thereafter.

A: After when?

G: After the legislation passed, which would have been August.

A: Of 1964?

G: 1964, that's right.

A: Well, it undoubtedly played a part in the conference, but you must bear in mind that Head Start was not a great consumer of money. The community action programs when they started were not great consumers of money. The hundred billion-dollar freedom budget would have been a huge--just look--that would have been the whole total budget for one year, defense and everything else.

G: Was this hundred billion-dollar freedom budget designed as an income maintenance program?

A: No, I think it was something like a Marshall Plan. I don't recall the rubrics of it, but it was to improve the status, the infrastructure of America, job training, employment. I guess it had to be Bayard's way, as a socialist, of trying to improve the lot of the least advantaged people in society by all kinds of programs. He would have wanted--I've heard him on this subject so many times--it to be through minimum wages and through endorsement of labor union programs. He has a great belief that labor unions are the only way that blacks are going to find their place in the sun. I'm not sure he is right, but that's what he believes.

G: Can you provide any more details about Moynihan's appearance at the conference?

A: Oh, he was just roundly criticized. Oh, he was beaten. I felt--you know, I guess that created a certain disenchantment in me. I tend to want to go about as far as logic will take me, and logically I thought the man was dead right, irrefutable. And the fact that he had opened a Pandora's box, exposed a nest of worms, I thought was absolutely significant and important. Let me tell you, because this has got a lot to do with where we are in this country today. In the 1950s, the number of blacks, teenage, or single family female-headed households was something like 8 per cent of the population. By 1960 it was 20 per cent. Today it's 52 per cent. Now, you cannot improve the black median income as long as that's going on. Black median income for vast segments has skyrocketed to the point where it's almost the same as white median income. But it's all dragged down by this problem of the single family female-headed household where poverty lurks. Now I don't know what you do about it, but I know you don't do anything, you *can't* do anything about it until you address it and say it exists. And if it is to be hidden under the rug, if it's to be shielded from the public gaze, you can't do anything about it.

I recall getting into an argument with a young black woman, a scholar at Hunter College named Joyce Lader [?], who in the mode of the sixties said--or she is interpreted by Martin Kilson. He says that she says that the single family female-headed household today is no worse than a two [income-earning] male-headed household and in some ways may be better. Now as long as that is a relevant [?] position and you will not listen to Pat in what he's saying about the figures and the dire consequences, I think you just repeat and repeat and repeat the tragedy. That was beginning to surface at the White House conference. But I'm going to say I was too naive to realize it was part of the issue.

G: But the whole thrust of the criticism was that Moynihan was taking a position that was prejudicial or against blacks, is that the idea?

A: No, he was blaming the victims for their plight rather than the victimizers. That the condition, whatever it was, was a result and function of racism and that he had not paid enough attention to that. Actually, what he'd done was to point out a fact. He certainly did not say that blacks are irresponsible. He indicated that slavery had produced a matriarchy and that the matriarchal society had depressed the importance of the male and that this had been part of the condition. I don't know whether he's right about that or not. But there was great exception taken to that because--this I don't want published, this next sentence, for fifty years. But I have often, as a university president in 1968 and subsequently, listened to black males, and do you ever say to a fellow of yours, "man"? "Man, let's do this," "Man, let's do that." Every other sentence, "man," "I got you, man," "I hear you, man," "Man, let's go to town." That is the discourse, or was the discourse, of the black male on campus in the late sixties. It's an affirmation that I'm not a boy, I think, and I am a man, the enormous drive for self respect as a male. I think that what Pat did was touch a very deep nerve and a very deep concern. Possible, you think?

G: Could be.

A: I don't know.

G: Did the Moynihan controversy come before LBJ?

A: I don't think so. I don't ever recall his pronouncing about it.

G: In going through the correspondence, there seems to be some concern at the White House about the direction of the conference and being able to keep it within bounds. Did LBJ or anybody on the White House staff talk to you about keeping the--?

A: Oh, yes, sure. Listen, there was enormous concern. Now let me tell you when the concern began to erupt. Sometime before the conference met--I think it was November--Bill Coleman, than whom there was no more establishment figure on earth, he wears a vest and his Phi Beta Kappa key and he is--what's his name? He has a nickname



(Pomp). Anyway, it's very appropriate. He's a very bright, very able man. He decides that he's going to get together some of the black militants in the Hotel Bellevue Stratford in Philadelphia. And you must get Bill Coleman to tell you what transpired at that meeting. In the first place, the people who met there were outrageous. And in the second place, Bill Coleman, not of the streets but of Harvard Law School and [Louis] Brandeis' law clerk and an editor of the *Harvard Law Review* and a partner in a Philadelphia law firm, he could not imagine what he was hearing. And from then on we knew there was going to be trouble. Trouble, because on the one hand Johnson wanted praise, which he was entitled to, and nothing makes a man more unhappy than if he thinks he's entitled to praise and he gets condemnation and not praise for what he has done. Their attitude was, the radicals, "What are you going to do for us next?" And the attitude of the establishment was, "Royally praise him." But on the other hand, you had Martin King who was giving him hell about the Vietnam War. And then you have the Stokely Carmichaels who were out on the streets, were chanting "Black is beautiful." And you have Watts [and] burning down the cities.

So it was bound to be a tumultuous conference. No eruptions occurred at the preliminary conference. I think we did the best that could possibly be done under the circumstances. But I think the President was very unhappy with it. I think he believed that that had been a symbol to acknowledge his contributions and it didn't come through. And of course the conservative press, [Rowland] Evans and [Robert] Novak, they gave it hell. They didn't like Johnson anyway, and they sort of set the tone. The press, anything you ever know about yourself and see the press reports on, even in the best papers, you are usually dissatisfied.

Anyway, the President apparently decided that he would get rid of Bill and me and have Ben Heineman come in and run the final conference, even though we had never been promised the role of co-chairmen of the final conference. I think he decided he wanted a businessman in. Maybe he could run herd on him better, and maybe he could. Ben Heineman was not close to any of the black leaders and therefore didn't have any ties to them, and he's a very competent man.

But if I'm not mistaken, Bill Coleman had a conference with the President of the United States about this. I was not present and I don't know how it happened, but Bill told me about it. He said, "I went in to see the President"--now whether this was after he knew that we were not going to be the co-chairmen or whether this was before, I don't know. And whether it happened, I don't know. But this is my recollection. Bill is in to see the President. And he tells the President he doesn't need this job one bit. And I can remember this: "Mr. President, I make \$135,000 a year out of my law practice," which in those years would be an enormous amount of money.

G: More than the President made.

A: Oh, sure. "So I don't need this." But then he said, "I haven't done much work on this

conference. But Morris has. And I just want you to know that." I think his attitude was that the President was ungrateful.

But anyway, Heineman had the conference. I served on the executive committee. A conference came about that didn't do anything. The most you can say is that there was no disruptions. Everyone was afraid of a disruption.

G: Did LBJ talk to you? Did you feel that he was ungrateful?

A: Yes, I thought so.

G: Did he talk to you about it?

A: No. No. I only talked to Harry, and Harry was a gentleman and I think he always tried to blur the harsh edges of everything as a gentleman. I think he [LBJ] thought that if we had orchestrated properly we would have gotten the applause that he deserved. Does this come to you as a shock or not? Have you done anything on this conference before?

G: Well, of course we've read about it and that sort of thing. Did this experience reveal to you anything about the relationship between Lyndon Johnson and Martin Luther King?

A: Well, I gather that they didn't like each other. That's what I would have gathered from it. As far as Martin Luther King was concerned, he didn't give a damn whether or not it helped the President get elected in 1968, or whether it didn't. I think he had, by this time, regarded the war as a principal issue and a moral issue. And I don't think he liked the President, though I think as an honest man and an intelligent man he must have realized what the President had done for black America. But I think he had an overriding concern about the war. Does that comport with the general view?

G: Yes. Anything on Johnson's attitude toward King?

A: No, I have nothing there.

G: He didn't talk about King?

A: No. The White House staff was very upset with King and maneuvered and jimmied and leveraged to get King to come to the meetings and to put in a token appearance, which is all he ever did.

G: What did they do?

A: Call him, importune him, sent emissaries to him, in particular Bayard. After all, Bayard had been the tactician of the movement, very close to Martin at one time.

- G: Well, in reading through the documents I had the impression that they were a little concerned about Bayard Rustin, that he might take it in a different direction than they wanted to.
- A: Well, yes, he did, the freedom budget. You see--I'm glad we had this interview before my lecture this afternoon, because my thesis is that the civil rights movement had the edifice in place by the end of the Johnson Administration with the one exception of the Fair Housing Act. There remained only the necessity of enforcing the laws and having the Court stand firm. Now, if Johnson were unhappy, as you've indicated that he may have been, with Bayard Rustin, he was not unhappy with a wild man, no. He was not unhappy with a man who was a separationist, no. He would have been unhappy with a man who wanted to convert the civil rights movement into a socialist experiment. That is, not necessarily make the country socialist, but a vast expenditure program. And you say he was unhappy.
- G: Well, I say they were concerned--
- A: Well, I would think he would be.
- G: They felt the need to keep it in hand.
- A: Absolutely.
- G: Now, let me ask you about the more radical elements of the civil rights movement, the people such as Stokely Carmichael, even the people from CORE. To what extent did you try to draw them into the conference?
- A: I don't think we made much effort. You see--who was the closest black leader to Lyndon Johnson? Roy Wilkins and Clarence Mitchell.
- G: Whitney Young I guess, too.
- A: Well, I mean, I don't think anybody was as close to him--I don't know--as Roy. In the first place, Roy was a strong man and he loved Lyndon Johnson. I don't doubt that--hell, Whitney goes over and looks at the elections in Vietnam in 19--whatever it was, to see that they were fair and honest, and came back and said it was a great exercise in democracy. So he has to be considered a loyalist. But Roy wouldn't have had any use for these people. So as long as he was the principal adviser in the black community on race relations, there would be an attempt to exclude the nuts, as Roy would have seen them and as the President would have seen them, and as I would have seen them.
- It was funny. Bill went out to find them.
- G: Moyers did? Oh, Coleman. You were talking about the hotel incident?

A: Yes.

G: Well, in retrospect, should you have cast a wider net for this thing? Should you have tried harder, do you think?

A: Yes, I think so. But let me tell you something, given LBJ's desire for order and desire for praise, it would have been a disaster, under the White House eaves, to have a conference that was disruptive, that was cussing him, that was using dirty words about him, that was negating everything he'd done, calling him the worst kinds of [names]. That's what would have happened. Now you know, you could have that maybe with a president--God forbid--like Reagan, because Reagan doesn't care, in the sense that Reagan has a--did you see Sam Donaldson berate him? "Are you an amnesiac president? Do you work hard? Do you sleep all the time? Is your memory failing?" He laughs! Johnson wouldn't laugh at that, would he? So it's a strange thing. I've never thought of this. But a White House conference that condemns Ronald Reagan, it might make the staff furious, but it would amuse Ronald Reagan much more than it would have amused Lyndon Johnson. Do you think that's a fair [statement]?

G: Oh, I think so. Sure.

A: I've got to go. He's told me I must be there at eleven-thirty.

End of Tape 1 of 1 and Interview I