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HARRY MCPHERSON ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW V

PREFERRED CITATION

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Transcript, Harry McPherson Oral History Interview V,
4/9/69, by T. H. Baker, Internet Copy, LBJ Library.

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The following is the text of a letter written by Harry McPherson in 1979, authorizing the LBJ Library Director to make his oral history interview available to researchers:

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May 22, 1979

Mr. Harry J. Middleton
Executive Director
The Lyndon Baines Johnson
Foundation
2313 Red River
Austin, Texas 78705

Dear Harry:

For some reason I can't remember what limitation I put on my oral history. I think it was 10 years, which would make it about due for expiration. In any case, there seems to be no good reason for further restricting access to the history. So you may take this letter as authorization to make it available to interested persons.

I hope all goes well with you. What's the story on our LBJ debates?

Best,

Signed: Harry

Harry McPherson

GENERAL SERVICES ADMINISTRATION
NATIONAL ARCHIVES AND RECORDS SERVICE

Gift of Personal Statement

By Harry McPherson

to the

Lyndon Baines Johnson Library

In accordance with Sec. 507 of the Federal Property and Administrative Services Act of 1949, as amended (44 U.S.C. 397) and regulations issued thereunder (41 CFR 101-10), I, Harry McPherson, hereinafter referred to as the donor, hereby give, donate, and convey to the United States of America for eventual deposit in the proposed Lyndon Baines Johnson Library, and for administration therein by the authorities thereof, a tape and transcript of a personal statement approved by me and prepared for the purpose of deposit in the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library. The gift of this material is made subject to the following terms and conditions:

1. Title to the material transferred hereunder, and all literary property rights, will pass to the United States as of the date of the delivery of this material into the physical custody of the Archivist of the United States.
2. It is the donor's wish to make the material donated to the United States of America by the terms of the instrument available for research in the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library. At the same time, it is his wish to guard against the possibility of its contents being used to embarrass, damage, injure, or harass anyone. Therefore, in pursuance of this objection, and in accordance with the provisions of Sec. 507 (f) (3) of the Federal Property and Administrative Services Act of 1949, as amended (44 U.S.C. 397) this material shall not for a period of ten years, be available for examination by anyone except persons who have received my express written authorization to examine it. This restriction shall not apply to employees and officers of the General Services Administration (including the National Archives and Records Service and the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library) engaged in performing normal archival work processes.
3. A revision of this stipulation governing access to the material for research may be entered into between the donor and the Archivist of the United States, or his designee, if it appears desirable.

4. The material donated to the United States pursuant to the foregoing shall be kept intact permanently in the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library.

Signed by Harry McPherson on October 28, 1970

Accepted by Harry J. Middleton for the Archivist of the United States on March 3, 1975

Original Deed of Gift on File at the Lyndon B. Johnson Library, 2313 Red River, Austin, TX 78705

ACCESSION NUMBER 74-210

BIOGRAPHIC INFORMATION: HARRY MCPHERSON

Lawyer; b. Tyler, Tex., Aug. 22, 1929; B.A., U. South, 1949; D.C.I. (hon), 1965; student Columbia, 1949-50; LL.B., U. Tex., 1956; admitted to Texas bar, 1955; asst. gen. counsel Democratic policy com., U.S. Senate, 1956-59; asso. counsel, 1959-61; gen. counsel, 1961-63; dep. under sec. internat. affairs Dept. Army, 1963-64; asst. sec. state ednl. and cultural affairs, 1964-65; spl. asst. and counsel to Pres. Johnson, 1965-66; spl. counsel to Pres. Johnson, 1966-69; private practice law, Washington, 1969-.

INTERVIEW V

DATE: April 9, 1969

INTERVIEWEE: HARRY MCPHERSON

INTERVIEWER: T. H. Baker

PLACE: Mr. McPherson's office, Washington, D.C.

Tape 1 of 3

B: This is a continuation of the interview with Harry McPherson.

Sir, we were talking last time about civil rights activities generally. To talk about them more specifically, the events in that area of civil rights and urban disorders--the beginning point from the time you were in the White House would be the Watts riot in the summer of 1965, I suppose. Can you describe the reaction in the White House when that broke out?

M: Generally, one of despair that it had happened and that it would almost certainly jeopardize a lot that we were trying to do. It seemed to justify the worst feelings of the racists in Congress and in the press. It would obviously make it more difficult to pass any legislation if needed, and it worked a very severe and immediate strain on the coalition of liberals. The President, and all of us, were baffled by it for a long time. Our data was almost nonexistent. It took us several days to understand that Watts was not a conventional eastern city tenement area, but it was an area of small houses. It would take many months before information would come in about family breakdown, poverty, delinquency in Watts.

B: As I recall, when the riot broke out, the governor was out of the state and the mayor of Los Angeles was away.

M: Right.

B: Did you have difficulty getting information from on the scene because of this?

M: I can't answer that very well. I don't know how the information got back to us immediately. Ordinarily in matters like that, the Justice Department is the primary source of information and gets it through United States

attorneys and assistant attorneys throughout the country.

Ramsey Clark and Nick Katzenbach and Bob Kennedy all operated a very extensive network throughout the South. When you called John Doar about a problem that you had heard about in Meridian or in Selma, wherever, as sometimes happened--a lawyer or a judge or an elected official would call from that part of the country and say there is going to be trouble tonight, and there is going to be physical violence. One would call John Doar or the Attorney General and tell him that and he would usually have a report within a couple of hours that was pretty authoritative from an Assistant United States Attorney in the area. But that was in the South, and that network of information does not exist, or did not certainly in 1965, '66, and '67, to any degree as it existed in the South.

B: Up to that time civil rights activities, certainly the enforcement proceedings of the Justice Department, had been concentrated in southern small towns. Had anyone prior to the Watts outbreak anticipated that the real burden of civil rights in the future might be in the northern cities?

M: Only the Southerners in Congress, but that was taken to be a self-serving on their part. When they would say the real problem is going to come in New York and so on, everybody would say, "Well, you're just trying to shift attention away from the terrible problems in the South." And Watts seemed like an authoritative justification for their position.

There had been an earlier riot in New York, in Harlem, in 1964, I believe. But it did not have anything like the effect that Watts had. It wasn't extensive in the first place, and also one sort of expects it out of Harlem. You think of the South and Harlem almost as being the same thing. Watts was something different and strange. Why should it happen in Watts? What's Watts all about?

We did have information from people like Warren Christopher, who was practicing at that time in Los Angeles. He was later to be Deputy Attorney General. And from John McCone and from the Chandlers [Norman and Otis], who run the newspapers out there. And some other responsible people, who gave us a pretty good breakdown. But I should say that by far the largest part of the information we got was over the media. And as you remember, in those days, the chief villain of the liberals was the chief of police and mayor and it was quite obvious that there was a tremendous gap and a tremendous hostility between the Negroes in those areas

and the police and any lawful authority.

But we really didn't know much about it, and Ramsey [Clark, then Deputy Attorney General] went out with a team of people. There were some misgivings on the President's part about sending him out there, getting the federal government immediately involved in a responsible position. This was a controversial matter for years and in almost every struggle: how much should the federal government become involved? And there were those who felt that it should not at all. This was a matter of local police responsibility. The federal government couldn't really do much about it in a positive way and would only seem to be taking on responsibilities that it neither had nor could enforce. This was nowhere near clear to any of us.

The President the next day, or two or three days later, spoke for the first time about Watts to a meeting of people under the General auspices of the Equal Employment Opportunities Commission who had come to Washington--an awful lot of Negroes and a number of businessmen who were involved in that field. They sat on the South Lawn and the President had a speech which was primarily aimed at the conventional civil rights, doing better by Negroes in terms of employment, but he used the speech to launch a strong attack on rioters and people whom he said were very much like Ku Klux Klan people, who had depended on violence for an answer to social problems. I wrote that part of the speech for him and felt that he had to speak out very strongly against this.

In an interesting development, he, having done that and of course made the news and headlines with that kind of attack to this group, he then prolonged his pro-civil rights part of the speech to assure the gathering. It seemed to me that he was showing that he was not turning on them and was not anti-civil rights. But he was quite concerned beginning even before Watts and certainly thereafter that we were headed for tremendous national revulsion at extreme measures taken to secure better living conditions for Negroes--extreme measures meaning violent measures.

B: Did you also face, at that time, this question of whether or not to accelerate and initiate new federal programs in riot areas?

M: Yes, we did.

B: Or, as others said, to reward the rioters?

M: Yes. This was one of the most perplexing subjects that I can think of. There was almost a standard conversation after the riots that began by saying that the country wouldn't tolerate rewarding the rioters. And it would end by the development of substantial programs to rush into the area. And knowing that we were doing precisely what we said we were not doing.

B: Did anyone think at the time of trying to ascertain what other areas might be just this side of a riot and rushing massive programs in there?

M: Yes, there were some talks about this, and I think there was some research done. The Justice Department, again, felt inadequate to the task because it did not have the same kind of network of information that it had in the South, and it had to rely in considerable part on the FBI. The FBI is both very good and very bad in this area. It's good because its people work hard and they produce an awful lot of information. It's bad because so much of its information is unevaluated. This goes back to the old security check problem. You know, massive FBI dossiers on areas as there had been on personnel applications, including everything that "A" had ever said about "B", who had said it about "C" who had ever said it about the subject of the inquiry "E". It was heresay at its worst.

B: Was someone, say, in the Justice Department capable of evaluating those reports?

M: Well, it's hard to evaluate raw evidence like that without going out and making an independent check. You can say, "this doesn't sound right and it doesn't square with a lot of other stuff we have," but it's hard to know. The FBI had produced an enormous amount of information which affected the President. "There was apparently--There were malign forces at work here, gun-runners of one sort or another."

Subsequently they found that there was no evidence of a conspiratorial operation after [the] Detroit [riot of 1967], for example. But in the years before, they had served up an awful lot of raw evidence that there was. I used to think it was in part in order to satisfy the conviction on the part of a lot of politicians that there must be. You know, "good Negroes simply don't go around shooting the people unless they're inspired by bad Negroes or bad white people, Communists," or whatever. And so they would produce evidence to support that theory without definitively saying that it was so. Finally, when they did comment on it, there

was no strong and determinative evidence that there were.

B: Did you mean to imply that at least for a time reports like this had convinced Mr. Johnson that there was conspiratorial activity?

M: No, I'm not saying convinced, really, but he was less willing than a lot of other people to go ahead and say "there isn't any conspiracy." He felt that there must be, and he was encouraged in that belief by occasional FBI findings of someone who had flown from one area to another, or somebody who had heard that rifles were passed out thirty minutes after a riot began, or thirty minutes before, whatever. I think if he had to raise his right hand and swear as to how he felt during this 1965 to 1967 period, he would say "I feel there is probably a conspiracy. I don't have any evidence to prove it, but it seems to me likely there is one."

B: The Clark group who went out to Watts wrote a report when they came back. Do you know what happened to that report?

M: Well, insofar as it called for substantial expenditures of one sort or another for social programs, it was not surfaced and trumpeted by the Administration. We were having our first difficulties with finding enough money for social programs. The President was quite dubious about the possibility of getting major social appropriations through in the aftermath of the riots. He thought that it would be rather hard to defend that in Congress, and I suspect he was quite right. His intelligence sources in Congress were far better than anybody else's. So, he felt it better not to say "my Attorney General recommends that we spend 'x' million dollars immediately," with money which we didn't have, "and we will need a supplemental appropriation" and that sort of thing.

There were some things that were done. He supported HUD in spending some money to start a bus service in Watts, since one of the problems apparently was that people had to travel such terrific distances to get work. There were [Federal] Community Relations Service activities out there, although Roger Wilkins, the head of the Community Relations Service, has had ghastly experience in Watts in which he was stood up against the side of a car and frisked and treated extremely rudely by some Los Angeles cops, even when he showed that he was the head of the Community Relations Service in Washington. That had soured him considerably and made him pretty bitter.

But there was no massive plan. The McCone Commission was created out there, and they found a lot wrong with the way the Negroes were living. But they also found that there had been terrible violence which was unjustified, and that there was no cause for it. We had to strengthen the police and increase their capacity to meet this sort of thing. Fairly tough report by Kerner Commission standards.

B: The fall after that, the fall of 1965, there were changes in the organization or administration of various civil rights activities. It appears to have been a taking of the various committees and coordinating those that were spread through the government, putting them together under the general supervision of the Justice Department. Where and why did that idea originate?

M: Well, I think it originated in the White House. Joe Califano was deeply engaged in it. Califano was the reorganization man of the White House over any kind of authority, virtually, or substantive area. It didn't matter. Joe would handle that. Lee White was still there so he did some work on it, I believe. Part of it was an organizational and efficiency measure. The Community Relations Service was sort of hanging out on a far wing of Commerce. It had been put over there primarily because Leroy Collins was there. This was the sort of thing, which, incidentally, Johnson had originally sponsored in the '57 or '60 civil rights bill--a community service of mediation and conciliation. He had been violently attacked by the liberals at that time because they saw in it, given its sponsorship, an attempt to ameliorate away Negro rights. But they came back to it. They began feeling that maybe something like this was needed.

So it was put over in Justice over the objections of a lot of people. It was ultimately accepted there. It never was a particularly effective service, as far as I could tell. At least--I'd better put it this way: It was effective in situations of rather low tension, where there were problems, but they were not ghastly problems. And it could get some people together, say, on a bus boycott or something of that sort, but where there was a sudden terrific heightening of tension, an increase in the temperature that seemed inevitably headed for massive violence, the CRS was not very effective.

B: Was it effective as an agency for gathering intelligence or warning of this kind of massive outbreak?

M: If it was, I wasn't aware of it. And I know that when I called Nick or Ramsey, later Warren Christopher, for information about a particular town as to what the racial situation was there, that it would almost always come from--as they would put it--"our people." And "our people" to them meant the regular machinery of Justice, the Assistant D.A.'s, and not the CRS.

Part of the reason for the move was to end the Vice-President's coordinating committee, and for what reason I don't know frankly. In the meetings I attended of it, it was not a powerful committee. Perhaps its capacity for mischief was thought to be high, but why I don't know because its capacity for good was not very high. The Vice-President is a eunuch as everyone knows and he has no real power. It's impossible for the President to divest himself of Presidential power--that is, the power really to make things move--and give it to the Vice-President. And the Vice-President, without a large staff and with no operating responsibilities--nothing that's given to him by law to run--really has only a kind of referee's position. But as to the reasons why that was a desirable goal, I don't know. It was apparently a goal.

B: It could have been interpreted as a personal slap at Mr. Humphrey.

M: Well, that's a possibility. The President's relationship to the Vice-President is a wondrous thing. I mean, it incorporated virtually every opinion that one man can have of another. It was certainly "father-son." The Vice-President, although he's only three or four years younger than the President, was always in this junior capacity from as far back as I remember, from the time I arrived in the Senate in '56. He was always being told something by the President, or by Senator Johnson. Lyndon Johnson had tremendous love and affection for Hubert Humphrey. He had immense admiration for his heart and for his brains, for his capacity to grasp and master material. He had a rather low estimate of his judgment and felt that he talked far too much, felt that he was not tough enough. Indeed, I feel that: that he's not capable of the kind of ruthlessness that a great politician needs to have. He's too gentle with people, and he's too inclined to say yes to too many people. Mrs. Humphrey once said, "It's a good thing he wasn't born a woman, because he can't say no." But he made a number of errors which sprang from a too quick tongue during his Vice-Presidency. And yet the love was there. There were some marvelous meetings between them,

probably the closest relationship that has ever existed between a President and a Vice-President--a most intimate one which had its extremely good points and which also had suffocating points. The country's feeling during '68 that Humphrey was just a creature of Lyndon Johnson was much too simple a judgment, and yet it was essentially right. That is, Johnson could intimidate Humphrey. Humphrey found it very difficult to stand up and really let fly his opinions, if they were opposed to those of Johnson. In a nose-to-nose encounter, he was simply outmatched. So was everybody else for that matter. Very few men in our time have been able to stand up and face down Lyndon Johnson. The power of his personality, the force with which he comes on is so intense.

B: To back up to the Community Relations Service a minute, about this same time there in the fall of '65, about the same time the Community Relations Service was moved over to Justice, that's when Roger Wilkins was actually appointed as director. He had been, I believe acting director or something before. Did this cause any particular travail? Wilkins apparently was one of the more militant black men in the Administration, or less moderate perhaps would be a better phrase.

M: Well, I don't know about Roger. I don't know how to define him on the "less moderate" scale. He ended less moderate, and he wrote an immense paper which he sent over to the White House on definition of black power, which was quite accepting of black powers a deeply psychological paper--going into the loss of manhood and so on. Yet he was extremely cooperative and helpful, understanding and witty about civil rights problems throughout the time that we worked with him. The President liked him a lot. Whether that was something that was generated ab initio purely out of relations with Roger, or whether it had to do with his uncle whom the President really loved--Roy Wilkins--I don't know. But at any rate, he was always very high on him. He considered him at one time as the mayor of Washington, or as chairman of the City Council, various things. So he continued to have a high regard for him.

Roger wrote an interesting resignation letter in '68, a very long letter, in which he praised the President, then began talking about the areas in which they differed. And the differences had to do primarily with the lack of intensity in the last year or so of the Administration, in meeting Negro problems.

And I wrote the letter back for the President to Roger

and praised him and said that I thought--The President said in the letter that he thought that the time ahead would be an extremely dangerous one in which the voices of moderation would be few and all the more precious for that, and he counted on Roger to be one. And Roger was terribly moved by that letter, terribly moved. He needed to have Johnson affirm him obviously. But he was always very good, I felt. He adored Ramsey Clark and did as much as he could to help him over there, and I think probably had some impact on Ramsey's views and helped him understand what the black rebellion was about.

B: After this time, did the White House try to improve the Community Relations Service or the Justice Department or any other means to open up a line of communication with the disaffected blacks of the cities, or was such a thing possible?

M: It became increasingly difficult and ultimately damned near impossible. It seems to me that the White House did the only thing that it could have done. We were poison to them; they were poison to us. That was the problem. The hand of the Man's authority on their shoulder was damning to them, to the real militants. Johnson had enough acute political sense to understand that while he needed Young and Wilkins and Randolph and Rustin, that his embrace of them would endanger them after a time.

B: Endanger them in the sense of--?

M: With the Negro community. That they would become "Uncle Toms" and "the white man's niggers." And yet he did need them and he did use them in urgent situations. We had a ticklish one the day after [Martin Luther] King was killed. I remember I got the news in a phone call from Warren Christopher at home about seven o'clock. "King had been shot and was dying." He was already dead, but that's all we knew. And I called a car and on my way down, I got the word that he was dead.

When I got to the White House, Califano and I went to see the President. Someone had already written for the President a statement to be given on television about King, which he did. And that's all he thought he would do. We felt strongly that he ought to call in Negro leadership the next day. And after several memos and a couple of phone conversations, around ten o'clock at night, he agreed to do that.

B: He was reluctant at first?

M: He was reluctant at first. This had to do with, I suspect, a certain feeling about King. He had been terribly disappointed in King for good reasons or not. King had become increasingly anti-Administration, particularly on the war. Hoover had supplied the President with a vast amount of scurrilous--well, maybe that's the wrong word--of defaming information about King. It was said that the FBI even had a tape that came from bugging a hotel room in which King and [Ralph] Abernathy and a number of others were engaged in all kinds of circus sexual acts, and that this was played for members of Congress and others to demonstrate that King was not a trustworthy man. The President was contemptuous of the tape, and yet was affected by the information on it.

B: You mean there really was such a tape?

M: Yes. I am told that there was. I never--But King's strong feeling about the war--And my own feeling at the time was that King was running out of civil rights friends.

(Interruption)

B: You said that your own feeling was that King had just about run out of civil rights friends.

M: I should say, had run out of people willing to put substantial amounts of money into his operation, and that part of his feeling about the war--this is purely a guess, I don't know this about King--but part of what drove him to be so intense about the war was the new coalition against the war and the fact that there was money there from people who were opposed to the war as there had not been for people who merely wanted to support big marches in Selma. There weren't any more big marches in Selma, and there was a complete bafflement about where to spend money in the field of civil rights. What do you do? How do you take on, as a private donor, the problems of Hough and Watts and Newark and so on? You can't. Where do you put the money? It gets swallowed up in a day. The one hundred thousand dollars that might arrange for a thousand people to get to Selma to march or for a demonstration is just meaningless in a big city. And so nobody knew where to put their money in civil rights, but there was a strong feeling that money should go into an effort to oppose the war. That sounds cynical. I think King genuinely felt that the war was wrong, and I think that he felt his own cause was worth making this kind

of double campaign, but it had antagonized the hell out of the President, obviously, to have the major civil rights figure speaking as he was against the war.

So he [Johnson] had very mixed feelings. He was sorry King was killed, he was afraid of the consequences in the country, the riots that might follow. And yet he was, in that curious way Lyndon Johnson has--One thinks of him as being the total politician who can swallow his feelings at any given moment and smile and shake hands with someone he despises. It's not the case. I mentioned on an earlier tape that he had the capacity on the Senate floor to take terrible disappointment and then come back and do it all over again and succeed. But perhaps as he became older and as he became President, maybe, he developed more of a feeling of ornery independence in that regard and would not embrace people whom he felt bitterly toward. So he had mixed feelings about this. He finally consented about ten or eleven o'clock to let us do this, put together a group.

And we called around the country until five o'clock in the morning, getting people to a meeting at ten o'clock in the morning. Charlie Evers in Mississippi; Bayard Rustin was on his way to Memphis, stopping at Dulles Airport. We got him out there and got him off the plane and into town for the next morning.

I remember the most touching conversation was with Martin Luther King Sr. And Jim Gaither, who worked for Califano, said, "Mr. King, the President wants to know what can we do for you." And this old man said, "Oh, Mr. Gaither, that's not the question. The question is what can I do for the President." This from a sick old man with a nurse by his bedside, at five in the morning. It was most remarkable.

B: Did the President also call Mrs. King?

M: Yes, he did. And he called Mr. King Sr. the next morning himself.

We had the meeting about ten or eleven o'clock. We had invited a broad spectrum of people. We didn't invite Stokely [Carmichael]. We invited Floyd McKissick, who was already by this time an extreme spokesman for the radical Negroes. And he said that he would only come if we invited Stokely. And we said, "That's not going to be done." And so he said he believed he would find it impossible to be there.

The meeting was very moving; people spoke with a real sense of rallying. As we got up to go to the cars and drive out to Washington Cathedral where there was a service for King, the word came that Floyd McKissick was in the basement of the White House. I could imagine a sit-in in the basement of the White House; it seemed quite likely that he would say, "I was invited and I'm here, and I'm not going to be given this kind of second-class treatment," and so on. He was there with Roy Innis.

That marvelous faithful about whom enough can never be said, Louis Martin, volunteered to go down and take care of Floyd while the rest of us went to the service at the cathedral.

B: Who is Louis Martin?

M: Well, I should have brought him up before. Louis Martin is a Negro publisher and journalist and politician who, for at least the last four or five years until January '69, was deputy director of the Democratic National Committee. He was deputy chairman in charge of minorities and so on. He is about fifty-five years old. He is one of the most intelligent men in the United States. I'd say he's almost in a class with Bayard Rustin. He is a supreme politician, one of the most gifted men in getting people together and in defusing a bomb I have ever seen. He's an utterly devoted Democrat, who kept Lyndon Johnson and the Negro community together longer than anyone else assumed they could be kept together. His principal constituencies were three: the Negro press, with whom he had totally amiable relationships and out of whom he could get the damndest editorials at any point, praising any step Lyndon Johnson took or any appointment he made; the Negro churches, and while the militants were running around and calling church leaders "honkies," Louis was sedulously building his constituency in the churches, and after all, it turns out that they do reach more Negroes than any other institution in Negro life; and Negro politicians, elected Negro politicians. Every year, once or twice a year, the Rose Garden would be filled with three or four hundred black faces, all of them voted into office, in there to see the man whose sponsorship of voting rights legislation had made it possible for them to be elected. It was a love feast every time and Lyndon Johnson was never better than he was with that crowd of people. You can imagine Negro elected officials and Lyndon Johnson; it was almost an orgy, delightful experience every time. Louis worked those three vineyards to a farethowell, and was a marvelous adviser to the President, and they were on

extremely warm terms.

Just before the President left office and the night before he went out and spent a week in the hospital with flu, he went to an appreciation affair for Louis in the Sheraton-Carlton and made a marvelous speech. He made a very, very warm speech.

- B: To get back to the chronology, Louis Martin went down to handle Floyd McKissick.
- M: Yes. Got him cooled off and he left the White House. It was a hairy time. As we were driving out in the cars, I was on the radio-telephone with the White House telling a couple of guys, Jim Gaither and someone else, to help Louis. And I didn't know it, but the radio-telephone was blaring in the press bus. So we were badly exposed, but apparently we put it in sufficiently confusing terms so that they didn't understand what we were talking about.
- B: I think perhaps we'd better back up and explain or amplify something you mentioned. You said that the President was receiving reports from the FBI on King and his activities. Were these reports, including the tape recordings, initiated by the FBI itself, or were they at the request of the President?
- M: No they were not at the request of the President. And as I say, the President's views about bugging were so extreme that he despised the existence of the reports and yet like all of us, was impressed by what they revealed. It's like a law case--a trial in which an attorney suddenly elicits an inadmissible piece of testimony from a witness and the judge says, "Strike that," on objection. But the jury has it in its mind and despite the fact that it's told not to consider it, it does.
- B: Then Mr. Hoover, presumably, initiated these on his own? There was a time back there when Mr. Hoover and Dr. King had a public vendetta.
- M: Yes, I think he did. Or, at least, the FBI did. And it always was given an internal security overtone. Some of King's friends and associates, Harry Wachtel(?) of New York and others were people who had been active in various organizations that were still on the Attorney General's list and that sort of thing. So it had that patina of concern for internal security.

B: Did the evidence convince you, for example, the tape you mentioned of alleged sexual irregularities?

M: I think there were mostly regularities, but apparently also some irregularities. I don't know. I've heard about it. Inasmuch as this tape is for long-term posterity, I tell about it because it had an impact on a number of people, including particularly a lot of Congressmen; and it came known to some members of the press and was referred to occasionally; but it is purely heresay from my point of view. I never heard the tape. I only heard that it exists from several people, and I assume it does.

B: I'm not trying to cross-examine you on this, but it's the kind of thing that if it were mentioned briefly and allowed to pass would probably raise more questions than answers.

To get back into the chronology of these years, the two succeeding summers, '66 and '67, the summers after Watts, also saw urban disorders--Cleveland's Hough area in '66; in '67 Newark, Detroit--does anything about these stand out in your mind?

M: Well, I suppose the most famous is Detroit. One moment, one word about Newark. The Newark situation, from the President's point of view, was the most quote, successful close quote, one, because he was dealing there with a governor, Dick Hughes, in whom he had complete confidence. And with him he had a very close relationship, so that the issue of federal intervention, of the governor calling for massive numbers of troops or for immediate multi-billion dollar federal programs in a way that would embarrass the Administration did not arise. This is a narrow consideration in the light of the suffering of Newark, but I tell it because that's what I know about it.

Detroit was just the opposite, of course. The President and [Mayor] Jerry Cavanaugh had been friendly, then had begun to fall out somewhat. They fell out a lot more later, but they were not as friendly at this point as they had been and, of course, [Governor George] Romney was a potential Republican candidate.

That whole afternoon and evening of Detroit was a most trying one. We had Cy Vance and Warren Christopher in Detroit. They were traveling about all over the city. There is no one in whom the President had more confidence in more situations than Cy, and he is an immensely talented and cool-headed man. The whole issue for hours was whether the

governor and the mayor would request troops. We were determined not to send them in until they did.

B: Is this legal or political?

M: It's legal and it's political too in that the law is based on politics. It's based on our federal system. It's based on some unhappy history, or at least it has an unhappy history. We naturally did an historical summation of it after the controversy arose, and we found situations in which troops had been sent in quickly--Labor disputes, especially those in the mining areas of the West--and areas in which Presidents had absolutely refused to send in troops, even where there was real civil disorder. And had either said, "My independent judgment is that they're not needed," or, "the statute has not been complied with in every detail." It was clear that sending in troops into Detroit would have been--was--an extraordinary measure. They hadn't been sent into any place since Detroit in 1943 in the riot of World War II, which was incidentally much more of a race riot than the riot of 1967, which was what Pat Moynihan would call an untermenschen riot--a real explosion of the ghetto against the ghetto with whites almost a secondary target.

It went on for hours with conversations back and forth. Cy and Warren Christopher would be out in radio cars and we couldn't reach them and the communications would fail and General Throckmorton, who had the troops, was saying that the troops had moved up into a ball park place on the outskirts of Detroit and were ready to move in and we didn't know how many there were and so forth.

At about nine o'clock, nine thirty, I was dispatched upstairs to write a statement for the President's sending in the troops. And I went up and spent about an hour and came back downstairs. And the President and Justice Fortas were going over a statement that Justice Fortas had written, or if he did not write, was rewriting. I do not know who wrote that statement. It was handed to me, and the President said, "What do you think?" And I said, "All right." And Justice Fortas said, "Really? Are you really going to approve that?" And I said, "Yes."

I thought he was asking me, and perhaps he was, whether I would approve it because it was virtually devoid of any social language, any language about the suffering and the poverty of the people of Detroit. Old soft McPherson is the guy that would always throw in "Of course, there are reasons

why people are rioting," and so on. And this one was almost without that.

The problem I had with it, and I discussed this at length with Joe Califano who, it turned out weeks later when we talked about it, had had the same problem and had not mentioned it for the same reason I did. The problem was that three or four times in the remarks, the President said, "I've been asked to do this by the governor and by the mayor, because they cannot maintain order in Detroit." My belief is that Justice Fortas was emphasizing this point over and over to meet the statutory requirement and to make it clear that the President was not usurping power and sending in troops where they were not wanted. I think the President both had that in mind and giggling Romney in mind. It occurred to me that it was excessive and that it would come back to haunt us, but I was intimidated by the stature and the brains and the judgment and the reputation and my own relationship with Justice Fortas. I was very much the junior man and although I would have argued with the President alone about it, I didn't argue with Justice Fortas. And that I regret deeply, because it was precisely that point that occasioned all the trouble.

- B: Did Justice Fortas' question to you indicate that he had doubts about that language?
- M: No, he thought I believed, as I said. I think he was asking whether I really accepted a statement that did not have sociological language in it as well.
- B: Any more on Detroit?
- M: Nothing that I can recall.
- B: Did you have then, or did the White House later plan military contingency plans?
- M: No, the White House didn't plan military contingency plans, but it turned out in--I suppose, now that you mention it, that during Detroit, we had a map of Detroit in Joe Califano's office. And we had a special telephone put in to the Pentagon, to the War Room of the Pentagon--good place to put the phone into for something like that. We certainly had one in the riots that followed Dr. King's assassination. Had a huge map of the city of Washington and markers for every contingent of troops in the city and every place where there was fighting and where there was burning.

- B: I was thinking in a more general sense. Some time in this period, there was created in the Defense Department a directorate of civil disturbances.
- M: Yes. I don't know much about that over in the Pentagon. I can imagine what it was like, because I had been in operations in the Pentagon that have taken over situations like this--something like this. We had quite an operation for the Panama Canal riots in '64. They're very good at it. They're very thorough. They require a lot of crosschecking and control. They get better as time goes on, as riot follows riot, but they did require a considerable restraining hand. Generally, the Justice Department under Ramsey were against their moving in anywhere, even against their being brought up into outlying areas, because they thought that exacerbated the situation. I think Ramsey was dead wrong on that, and I think we did a hell of a lot better when we had troops ready to move and in place. That the Washington riot is a good example. We were pretty good in that, much better than we had been in any other city problem that we had. But we did have troops at Fort McNair, and we had substantial numbers of troops ready to move within, as it turned out, within about four hours. If it had been one hour, we would have saved ourselves a lot of additional misery. But the presence of troops, as we've learned, makes a difference. It tends to begin quieting a situation at once. So I think it was just erroneous judgment on Ramsey's part. That's my opinion.
- B: Did you play any part in the march on the Pentagon in the fall of '67?
- M: No, and the White House didn't play much of a role in that. That was essentially a Pentagon operation, run very extensively by [Robert] McNamara himself and by some people in his secretariat. I forget who they were, but they did a good job of it.
- B: You've mentioned in passing several times the riot in Washington that followed Dr. King's assassination. Had a War Room, the whole bit?
- M: Yes, I remember when we came back from the Cathedral we gathered in the President's office for another conversation with almost all the same people. Bayard Rustin flew on to Memphis, but others were there. And Walter Washington got up and went out to telephone call about half way through, and he asked the President if he could see him in his small room off the Oval Room and told him that we were in real

trouble. And we talked about it. I've got a lot of photographs of that occasion, strangely, that [Yoichi] Okamoto gave me.

[Clark] Clifford, somebody from Justice--maybe Ramsey, although I think Ramsey had gone to Memphis by this time--and Califano and I and Walter. We began calling around town, seeing what we had, where the troops were. I remember suggesting to the President that the Park Police might be an immediate quick reserve, and he called over there and got David Black, the new, the brand new Under Secretary. And when you conceive of a guy who has really come in with expertise in the areas of power, conservation, and so on, he's brand new and his boss is out of town, and he gets a call from the President saying, "How good are your Park Police, and how many of them can you get downtown fully armed and ready to take care of a riot?" I was listening--it was on the speaker-phone--and David Black was really--. It hit him like a ton of bricks. I must say he was very responsive and just said, "I don't know, frankly, the answers to any of these questions, but I'll get right back to you." And he did, quickly, did a good job. But what an introduction to government!

It got going that afternoon. It was already underway by the time Walter was talking to us, and we didn't know it very well. That night was bad. The next day was bad.

That afternoon--to go back on this--we had lunch in the mansion, and the President was on the phone a good deal of the time with the Defense Department. Christopher and somebody from Defense were out in a squad car, and we couldn't get hold of them. And for about three hours, we couldn't get the mayor, Pat Murphy, the head of law enforcement, and Chief [John B. Layton], the police chief, to say simultaneously, "We've got to have troops." One of them would be in an area where one might have expected trouble, and there was no trouble; and he would telephone in and say, "I don't think we need troops." The other would say, "It's desperate; we've got to have troops!" We'd get back to the first guy and he would say, "Well, it's desperate here too. We've got to have troops." We'd call back to the second guy and say, "All right, now everybody agrees," and he'd say, "Well, it seems to be cooling off. I think it'd be better without troops." And it went on like this until the President was climbing the wall. He had also had calls from [Mayor Richard] Daley about Chicago, and he moved troops. We called the Pentagon, and he got troops to go in from Texas, from Fort Hood.

B: There must have been other calls too because--That is, the White House was aware that all over the country this was going on?

M: Right. As I say, if we had moved, if we had been able to get agreement on moving troops three hours earlier, we would have saved a lot of damage, I think. But even as late as it was, the troops, thank God, killed nobody! They were just as good as the troops under Throckmorton at Detroit, where the regular infantry troops and airborne troops killed no one. An awful lot of people were killed by the Guard. This was at a time, if you remember, when people were really beginning to raise a lot of anxious questions about the Guard. Newark--and the report up there has shown that the Guard had been quite irresponsible.

B: And the whole controversy over whether or not to shoot at looters.

M: Right.

B: Shortly after that was the march on Washington and Resurrection City. Did you get involved in that one?

M: Only peripherally. There was a growing tendency, by and large a wise one, in '66, '67, '68, to keep the White House out of areas like this as much as possible, so that the entire job of handling people in public would be done by [routine agencies].

[End of Tape 1 of 3]

INTERVIEW V

DATE: April 9, 1969

INTERVIEWEE: HARRY McPHERSON

INTERVIEWER: T. H. BAKER

Tape 2 of 3

B: This is a continuation of the interview with Harry McPherson. You were saying that by the time of Resurrection City, it was the general policy to allow agencies rather than the White House to handle things like that.

M: That's right. An example is the poor people's sit-in in Lafayette Park. You may remember that some tents were put up over there. There was a response from liberal Congressmen that one might have expected about going over and making one with their cause. There was a response from vastly more people, saying they ought to be thrown off the Lafayette Square area at once. We did our best to keep the entire thing in the hands of the OEO, which had denied the grant that they were complaining about. And the Park Service--

B: Did the White House give any general guidelines like, "Treat them gently," that sort of thing?

M: Oh, sure, sure. At that time, just as a footnote, there was quite a controversy on whether picketers should be allowed on Pennsylvania Avenue sidewalk. I had felt very strongly they should and finally produced a compromise so that one hundred marchers could be entertained at any one time on the sidewalk out there. The police, particularly the White House police, were fearful that very large numbers of people gathering on that sidewalk would present an impossible security problem. They felt that it would really require not very much to break through the gates with a vast mass of people and then, with huge numbers streaming into the lawn of the White House and headed for the House, that their only means of turning back the group would be by force of arms--that they would have to shoot and kill some people. And they felt it much better to keep people over at Lafayette Square. It's a very sensible policeman's responsible position and yet at the same time, the sidewalk in front of the White House ought to be available for people who protest--at least a reasonable number of people who want

to protest. It's a controversy that derives from history. If people had never marched there, if they had been restricted to Lafayette Park, you wouldn't have the problem. But they have marched there and they ought not to be forever prevented from doing it.

I don't know what they're doing now [in the Nixon Administration]. We made a deal in which the Park Service issued an Executive Order, declaring some parts of the White House area off limits entirely and others subject to permit, which would restrict the numbers.

But anyway, back to Resurrection City. This was handled chiefly by the Justice Department although at a Cabinet meeting, the President told everybody that he wanted them to see the representatives of the poor people and to be courteous and to be responsive, without rewarding people for coming and disrupting the capitol city. We set in motion a review of programs and Abernathy was quite right, when he wanted to claim some credit for Resurrection City, that they did get a total of increased benefits of one kind or another, forty-five to fifty million dollars worth. And they pointed up some things that were wrong about the way our programs were operating. But as an overall judgment, it was a disaster. It failed in its objectives and it immensely exacerbated public feeling around the country about the cause of the poor and the cause of the Negroes.

B: Did the President ever see Ralph Abernathy in person?

M: No. I suggested it one time shortly before they ended that he see Abernathy and Mrs. King, have them in for breakfast on Sunday, and talk to them, and tell them some of the things we had done and some of the things that we planned to do. But apparently he didn't think much of that idea and in any event, Ramsey had already made a deal with him, I believe, in which they would march up to the Capitol and go off limits up there and be arrested, which was what they needed as a symbolic act to close it down. As you recall, the final wiping out of Resurrection City was done without serious incident. It was as much a political quagmire as it was a physical one. The leadership soon slipped out of Abernathy's hands. He was treated, at various points during the existence of Resurrection City, as a man of no consequence by other Negroes there. There were an awful lot of gangs; there was a lot of anti-social behavior, and it was a dangerous place for people going by there at night. This was fully reported in the press and a lot of--particularly, because members of the press got beat up.

I suspect that if ordinary civil servants had been clubbed, this would have been a natural and spontaneous demonstration of the restlessness of the poor; but since a few photographers got clubbed, that was too much to bear!

B: Did you, at times like that at Resurrection City or other occasions, go yourself or call in leaders like Abernathy?

M: No. The White House participation, as far as I could tell, was virtually nil. There may have been some between the President and Ramsey, but there wasn't any from the staff's side, except as a programmatic exercise. I was speaking earlier--if things had been done for the poor and for the Negroes, that was done primarily at the direction of and the control of some of Joe Califano's people, Jim Gaither and others, who made sure that there was a tabulation that could be shown--that we could show what various departments had decided to do.

B: When, during all this, did the White House first get the idea that a fair housing law could be and should be attempted?

M: Well, every year it was sent up. Well, sent up in '67 and again in '68.

B: You mentioned, when you were talking about the Conference to Fulfill These Rights, that after the Voting Rights Act, no one at that time dreamed that a fair housing law would be possible in the Congress.

M: There was a strong sentiment in behalf of people who thought about such things for Presidential action to forbid discrimination in housing that was bought or financed through any bank loan. The hooker would be that the insurance of the bank by the FDIC was sufficient to give the federal cast to it. I felt that was terrible and that we would run into awful trouble if we moved on the Executive order, because the FDIC was never created with any such purpose in mind. It had a single purpose which was to insure bank deposits, not to give the federal government a degree of social control over the activities of banks. I thought the reaction would be extreme if the President did that. I think the President thought so too. He also thought that any act like this which was done purely by the White House without the support of Congress would be greeted as a virtual usurpation of authority and power.

So he made the decision to send up the bill. And he

sent it up in '68 again, though it had failed, because he thought it was needed and because we needed--These things have a momentum of their own and I suppose if we hadn't passed it in '68, he would have sent it up in the State of the Union message in '69, and Nixon would be sending it up maybe in '70. I don't know about Nixon, after what he said in Miami, but it's conceivable that that would be the test of the President's bona fide as to whether he were willing to continue pushing for that. But there weren't many people who had high hopes for it. The man probably most responsible for securing support for it, that happy warrior Clarence Mitchell of the NAACP who is a tireless and very effective advocate for civil rights on the Hill, a good friend of the President's and used to be an enemy of the President's back in the '50's and has since become a devoted ally. But the King assassination got the bill out.

It's interesting that King's march at Selma got the Voting Rights Bill and King's activities around Birmingham and the response of Bull Connor got the '64 act through. So King was associated with three major acts of violence, which resulted in civil rights laws in the country. It has a kind of Good Friday and Easter cast to it, you know. One must go through that sort of agony.

B: Did your job as Special Counsel involve liaison between the President and the Justice Department?

M: In part, although I did in the fields of civil rights and some other associated fields, and I did a good deal of work with the various Attorney Generals on issues that got referred to them for some kind of quasi-judicial response. For example, the textile workers union and George Meany came in one day and gave the President hell for continuing to do business with J. P. Stephens, because J. P. Stephens has an absolutely outrageous anti-labor record and had been hauled up and severely condemned before the National Labor Relations Board, but continued to conduct anti-union activities and to fire union organizers and to discourage any attempt to organize in any way. And yet they continued to get many millions of dollars of government defense contracts every year. So they wanted it stopped. A very appealing case except that when you got down to it, you found that there was no authority available to the Administration to do that. The General Accounting Office had said precisely the opposite. It said that you didn't have the authority. You had to take the lowest responsible bidder and you couldn't call anti-union activity irresponsible in that sense. But you had to go for the

lowest buck.

We had a number of meetings in the White House with the textile workers. Mr. Stephens came in to see me one time and made a wild speech about what a great patriot he was, how he was being persecuted and hounded by these guys. I sent the President a memo and told him that at the end I had told Stephens there was nothing I could do for him, and I really thought he ought to do better by the unions than he was doing. The President sent it back, saying, "What do you let that guy in here for anyway?"

Anyway, we had a lot of meetings with the textile workers and it was finally resolved against them in a meeting in Ramsey Clark's office, with me and Ramsey, in which we just said, "There's nothing we can do. We've searched the law and it's clear that, under the present law, we don't have the authority. The only thing that could be done is to go to Congress, and the most unhappy part about that is that would require an amendment of the Armed Forces Procurement Act, which is handled in the House of Representatives by the Armed Services Committee and chaired by Mendel Rivers, and you can imagine what sort of response it would get." We suggested that they go find themselves some guys on the Labor Committee who would hold hearings and at least expose the situation, which they've done in the last six months. They've gotten Frank Thompson and others to hold some pretty rough hearings.

But things like civil liberties, the problem of Communist veterans being buried in Arlington Cemetery, riots of one kind or another, civil disturbances, protection of the President, and civil rights were my general bailiwick with the Justice Department; the two areas in which I had no dealings--I had some with the Land Division and the Civil Division and on pardons--but I had none to do with judges except in a capacity of one passing on a lot of recommendations that I would get or a lot of information. Larry Temple, who was also a Special Counsel to the President and was one of his sort of daily men, one of the guys who worked the phones and handled appointments and so on, did that.

As to the President's relationship to Justice on business matters, anti-trust if any, it was personal between him and Ramsey.

B: Were you in the White House when Katzenbach left?

M: Yes.

B: Clark became Acting, then regular, Attorney General?

M: Yes.

B: Any special circumstances involved in Katzenbach's departure? I guess departure is not the right word. He was moving over to the State Department.

M: Frankly, I don't know. I was the recipient of only the standard Presidential explanation of that, and I heard it four or five times from various groups. It was always done with tremendous praise of Nick for leaving the Cabinet to go to a sub-Cabinet position, even though Under Secretary of State is virtually a Cabinet position. Nick said he would be willing to be head of the CIA or Under Secretary of State or whatever the President wanted him to do--as the President put it. And I don't know, frankly, what the reason was.

B: Was there any particular reason why a new Attorney General was not named immediately?

M: Well, it was the problem of his [Ramsey Clark's] father on the Court. There was also the serious question in the President's mind as to whether Ramsey was the Attorney General he wanted. The President loved--and as far as I know--loves Ramsey. He has known him all his life, and has tremendous respect for him, for his moral character, for his capacity to speak succinctly and powerfully, to wrap up a tremendous amount of information. I remember when Ramsey was over at the White House reviewing with the President the accomplishments and disappointments of the last five years. He had all the Cabinet officers in at various times to do this. Ramsey spoke for, I guess, half an hour without stopping about the problem of crime, and the President said what was the truth: that it was the most brilliant, cogent, coherent, knowledgeable description of any problem that he had heard from any Cabinet officer. He thought Ramsey was too young; that he was wet behind the ears; thought he had little understanding of how to get along with Congress, an area in which Nick had been a master. He probably anticipated some of the problems he later had with Ramsey which were occasioned by Ramsey's mustang independence.

B: Was Mr. Clark's outspoken attitude on law and order a source of some dismay to the President?

M: The President essentially agreed with what Ramsey had to

say. He thought he was foolish for saying it quite as he did, and he came to regard Ramsey, as everyone else did in politics, as a political liability, a serious one. I felt that Ramsey was not so foolish in what he said as in what he didn't do. And foolish is perhaps too strong a word. I thought he made the wrong judgment, although it was a very narrow judgment either way, on not prosecuting some extremely violent militants both in SDS [Students For a Democratic Society] and among Negroes. He felt that it would merely exacerbate the situation, especially if they were acquitted. And he had the entire Justice Department virtually, even guys down in the Land Division, researching the record on Rap Brown and on Stokely Carmichael, trying to find definitive evidence that they had in fact incited to riot; that is, that intimate relationship between the incitement and the riot. And he couldn't find it. And his lawyers, he said, couldn't find it. And he was afraid that he would haul them up in Court and any competent judge, or certainly a Court of Appeals, would reverse or acquit them. And yet I felt that it should have been done. I felt that Ramsey had so intense a concern that he not be regarded as an anti-civil libertarian that he was letting go of one of the main reins of power that the public expects an Attorney General to exercise, which was the prosecuting function. He is a judge, but he's also a prosecutor. And I felt that Ramsey was being a libertarian member of the Supreme Court and not a guy who was determined to enforce order and law; that is, he lacked in the public's mind and, as a matter of fact, in truth any real D.A. sense. One can talk all one wants to about the abuses of power by district attorneys and by law enforcement officials generally, but we'd be in a hell of a mess if they didn't exercise it. As it turns out, they're right about ninety-five percent of the time in the people they go after. And I felt that Ramsey should have shown that he was really after these birds, but he conveyed exactly the opposite impression.

- B: Did the President ever suggest to Mr. Clark that he should either take a more aggressive stand or, at least, not talk so much?
- M: I'm sure he did. I never heard it. I know that they talked a lot on the phone and sometimes I would talk to the President after he talked to Ramsey, and he would be sighing, thinking about Ramsey maybe or some other job.
- B: In resignation more than anger--his sighs?
- M: That's right.

- B: Were there other areas in which the Attorney General was independent?
- M: Well, he certainly was at the end in anti-trust. The President asked the whole Cabinet not to do anything extraordinary in the last couple of months of the Administration, because he said he considered that a real abuse of Presidential power. He had always been offended by it in other Administrations. The last couple of months was wild. Guys went out all over the place.
- B: The anti-trust suits against IBM and others?
- M: That's right.
- B: That was Mr. Clark's own idea, not the President's?
- M: Yes.
- B: Had they been working on them for some time?
- M: Yes.
- B: But did they also institute them then on the theory that if they didn't do it, the next Administration might not?
- M: That's my impression.
- B: Pardons and paroles you were involved in?
- M: Yes.
- B: Did Mr. Johnson have any fixed philosophy in that area?
- M: No, he was very good about it until about a year before he left office. And then John Williams of Delaware, the Senator, and several other Republicans began to root out data that showed that Johnson was pardoning people at a faster rate than any President in modern times, and was therefore cleaning out the prisons and throwing these people out on the streets. Well, you know, it's a lot of bull--a pardon does not clean out anybody. The commutations were at a very low level. Pardons are merely granted to people who prove in life outside of prison that they should be pardoned and treated like ordinary citizens--that they have paid their debt to society and that they ought to have the onus of criminality lifted from them. But nevertheless it scared him and so we didn't issue any pardons the last--oh, for many, many months.

But he was extremely forthcoming. He pardoned several people of considerable note, and one got in trouble with one of them--a steamfitters man, I think, or a teamsters man in St. Louis, who had been very big in Senator Edward Long's campaign. He pardoned Frank Boykin, as he was asked to do by Bobby Kennedy. He pardoned Sterling Tucker of the Urban League. He was good about it. I maybe recall one or two occasions when he resisted a particular pardon. We would put them on a pardon list, when Cliff Alexander and I were doing them, which was about two or three years. We would single out ones in which we had had some doubts ourselves, but which we resolved in favor of the pardon. On a couple of occasions he felt the other way, but by and large he was quite generous.

B: How did Mr. Johnson get along with Mr. Hoover of the FBI? Did they have any direct relationship?

M: On occasion. It was a curious relationship. I think that like Kennedy, Eisenhower, Truman, Roosevelt, Coolidge, he was somewhat intimidated by Hoover--by his standing in the community. He depended on him for a lot of information, didn't really [like] the business of getting into FBI files and stuff like that. He did not enjoy that, as any man of conscience would not. It's an unsavory business, by and large, but I suppose the short answer is they got along all right. I don't know of any--There were times when he thought Hoover had done foolish things, had spoken out foolishly, taken on people that he didn't need to take on and was fighting personal vendettas as with King.

Hoover was particularly aggressive in pressing Mafia information on the President. I was there on a couple of occasions when he went over a lot of stuff that they had on the Las Vegas-Bahamas operation, skimming operation, gambling.

B: Were you involved in the drafting or passage of the Omnibus Crime Act of 1968, the Safe Streets Bill?

M: Yes, I was. That came out of the Commission on Law Enforcement work. There was a lot of argument about it. I think, within the government, the chief argument was over whether there should be block grants to states or whether there should be spot grants from the government to cities for particular purposes. That is, the degree of control that should be exercised in the making of grants by the federal government, whether it should just make a lot of money available to the states for law enforcement purposes

or whether it should say, "Money is available for the following purposes."

B: This argument existed at the drafting stage?

M: Yes. And we went up with a bill that came down, and rightly I thought, on conditioned grants not on block grants. It was amended by the House to block grants and he [Johnson] signed it anyhow. The President had deep misgivings about one portion of it and to some degree about another. The portion about which he had the most misgivings, of course, was wire-tapping, where he had an almost violent feeling about that position.

B: He disliked the part of the bill that allowed wiretapping under certain circumstances?

M: That's right.

B: What was the other part he had misgivings about?

M: It was a part that dealt with one of the recent Supreme Court decisions, either Miranda or something of that sort. I'm afraid that at the moment my memory is clouded--I don't recall.

B: Mine has too. I was just trying to think--It's something about confessions or--

M: It's a procedural matter in some way, and the Congress took the conservative position.

I should say about Lyndon Johnson that, while he is not a lawyer and while he's not someone who goes around with an ACLU heart on his sleeve, he has been extremely good all his life on civil liberties. As a matter of fact, about as good as you could get, very tough and good! Whether he felt that in his bones or whether he felt that that was a necessity for a liberal politician, a progressive politician, I don't know. I think it's probably a combination of both. He had a certain contempt for the cops as a class, which always struck me as something that I wish I could have conveyed to the youth of today, who think of him as the supreme authority figure. But he used to tell hilarious stories of the stupidity of policemen that he [had] known, and especially the Secret Service in the White House.

B: I'll bet those would be good. You said you were involved in the protection of the President also?

M: Well, only so far as the White House grounds were concerned, and the continuing argument that went on all through '67 and '68--dozens of memos and conversations between a lot of us and the President on the question of his exposure. I felt that he was going down in flames unless he did expose himself to the people, that he was a prisoner in the White House--he could not go anywhere. The only places we went were military bases, and I thought that was disastrous. The Secret Service felt just as strongly that he must not go. On the basis of what happened to him politically, I think I was right. On the basis of the fact that he is alive and might well be dead if he had followed my advice, I think they were right.

B: I suppose the Secret Service in the Lyndon Johnson years was remembering daily the Warren Commission Report.

M: Oh, God! I think I told you on another tape the conversation with him as we two days after the assassination in the church when I felt the strong elbow and heel of a Secret Service man in to me. They were panicky for a long time. They were desperate.

B: Can a President pretty well disregard their wishes if he wants to though?

M: Of course, he can.

B: The ultimate decision is with him?

M: Of course, he can. For a long time, the President would walk about the grounds and walk over into a great mob of people. Of course, that's pretty safe, because it comes as such a surprise that no one has time to prepare any mischief against him. But later I think it got to him--the reports of threats that were made against his life of dangerous people who were at large. During the last year, I believe, twelve or fourteen people were found in the White House grounds, having jumped the fence or got through in some way or another. Heaven knows, what they had in mind! And there were two or three thousand anonymous letters, telephone calls and other things threatening his life. I suppose it gets to you after a time, and you decide that "I'm going to get out of here one day, and I'd like to live at the Ranch above ground."

B: I've got a whole long list here--well, its not all that long--of odds and ends in which you may or may not have been involved. The formation of HUD, Model Cities, foreign

trade, overseas airline routes--

M: Well, let's start with HUD. I was the White House staff man for the task force that came up with the idea of HUD--not of HUD, but of Modern Cities. It was essentially a Walter Reuther idea, and we had a good task force. Bob Wood, later the Under Secretary of HUD, was chairman. Charlie Haar, the Assistant Secretary of HUD, was on it; Walter Reuther; Whitney Young; Ben Heineman; Bill Raskey, who is down at Columbia. A very thoughtful and good group. And they met very frequently and they were much more assiduous than most task forces and produced a bill and program on the idea of Model Cities. And I wrote the message. It's a very literary message. It was the first message I ever wrote for the President, and it sounds about as much like him as the Dalai Lama speeches would sound like him. It's far too arty, but nevertheless it was an exciting period in which we were creating the Model Cities Program.

It was kept out of the mitts of the to-be HUD for a long time. The task force, incidentally, proposed an organization for HUD, considerable parts of which were taken. But Bob Weaver knew almost nothing about the task force nor what it was proposing for a long time. That was in order to maintain secrecy about it and to keep it from getting chopped up by the small print people at HUD. HUD, at that time, was almost entirely an agency with experience in brick and mortar and with non-social programs. I suppose the most important social program they had was public housing, and that was in the dumps. Otherwise, they spent their time on FHA mortgages and relations with "Fanny May" [FNMA] and so on. So it came as--Weaver was unhappy during this period because he was being kept in the dark. He was shown the report very late in the game, and the program went through. That whole period--there's something you ought to ask Joe Califano about, because he did the work on the Hill with Muskie and others to get the bill through. The famous name-change from "Demonstration Cities" to Model Cities, which was occasioned by Congress' fear of demonstrations and of the word demonstration, and the severe cutback in total funds that we were talking about. I don't know what the Republicans will do with it.

B: I've heard it said by others in government that HUD was a very difficult department to work with.

M: Well, Weaver was kind of strange to work with. Weaver is a supreme Negro bureaucrat and because he's Negro, I think, he's more bureaucratic than almost any white bureaucrat you

want to find, "more Catholic than the Pope," you know. And yet, when you're with him on a social basis, he's very loose and gutsy, but he's really up tight when he speaks in a bureaucratic context. The President used to tell me, when I had written something or permitted something to be sent to him for speaking that was heavily loaded with governmentese, that I had obviously gone over and "qualified the condition" or something like that with Bob Weaver. Such phrases came quickly to Weaver's tongue, "Qualifying," "conditional," and "criteria." "Criteria"--that was a favorite word.

But Bob Wood was more to the President's liking. He was also something of an obscurantist, I thought. But they had some good people there. They weren't too strong below the top level, but they had Charlie Haar and Ralph Taylor and Don Hummel. Anyway, good people, intelligent ones.

It was a terribly unwieldy operation and difficult for them to transform it from a brick and mortar into a social agency.

- B: Does that circumstance mean that White House staff has more influence than in other departments?
- M: Yes, I think that's probably true. You'd have to ask Joe about that, because he was the principal dealer with HUD, but I think it's probably true.
- B: How about the foreign trade area? Did you get to play with balance of trade, balance of payments?
- M: No, I didn't do much of that, but I did handle a lot of tariff stuff, including one exciting episode that I'm proud of for Lyndon Johnson. In 1954 Eisenhower had substantially increased the tariff on watches, and the Swiss were complaining about it bitterly and were saying that they weren't going to play ball with us in the common market if we continued it. A little later a heavy tariff had been put on sheet glass, window glass. The Belgians and others complained about that. Finally there was something called Wilton and Velvet Carpets there, figured carpets, made in Belgium and to some degree in this country. They are being replaced rapidly by tufted carpets, which are cheaper and just as good. But there's a substantial Wilton and Velvet industry in the South. It seems very often when you start to make changes that are required by common sense in government that they run afoul of interests in the South. It's curious, but the South seems to be the home of a great many intractable interests in the textile world, in the

military bases, all sorts of things. They always seem to be the people who are screaming at the White House. The rapidity of movement on Title VI of the Civil Rights Act [of 1964] everything seems to land on them and to create Congressional pressure.

B: In the case of textiles, there are many Southern towns where the main or only industry is a textile mill.

M: That's right. One of my chores was to be the White House member on something called the Cabinet Committee on Textile Policy, which was a constant scrap with the Departments of Commerce and Agriculture, and sometimes Treasury on one side and State and the special trade representative, who was Ambassador [Christian] Herter and later Ambassador [William M.] Roth, and the White House representative on the other. And we in '66 and '67 did a great deal of turning the faucet up and down on imports in a lot of stormy meetings.

Incidentally, when you talk about these areas, you're talking about a situation in which leakage is beyond belief. We would have meetings on textile policy in the Commerce Department and if I were so foolish as to walk back to the White House on a nice spring day after the meeting, I would have two or three telephone calls on my desk from industry representatives who were complaining about what had been decided in the Commerce Department; and the leaks came almost entirely from Commerce. They see themselves essentially as industry's representatives to government and are very intimate with industry representatives.

But on the watch and glass tariffs and the Wilton and Velvet carpet tariffs: in total United States foreign trade, they don't amount to much, but symbolically they were terribly powerful and terribly important. At least, the first two--glass and watches--with the Swiss and the Belgians and the Japanese to some degree. I had about ten meetings with representatives of the glass industry and God, what a melodramatic set of meetings! The companies that were in trouble were all located in West Virginia, in areas where there was already twenty percent unemployment, or in places like Fort Smith, Arkansas, represented by Wilbur Mills.

The American watch people, Bulova and others, were represented by very high-powered counsel here in town. They brought in General [Omar] Bradley; had Timex to make their case for them with the President, and that, you know, was like calling on the deepest reserves of human talent.

Terrific heat on it to resist a roll-back. [Senator] Jennings Randolph, his old friend from West Virginia, was in just on his knees begging "Don't do it!" And the Southerners were saying, "When we voted for the 1962 Trade Act, we received a firm promise that there would be no roll back in Wilton and Velvet carpets." Well, on Wilton and Velvet he extended the tariff at a reduced rate for a period of two or three years to enable them to get out of business and said that in his announcement. Sam Stratton, a friend of the President's and staunch fellow from New York, was the most active of all on carpets. But on the others, by and large, he cut out the increased tariffs. Very brave thing to do politically and as often happens in a situation in which you fear a political bonfire, there was a tremendous acclaim in the free trade papers among those interests and not much problem at all among the protectionists and people who had a stake in the industry. He was a free trader and very proud of what we brought back from Geneva in the Kennedy Round, gave instructions to be as forthcoming as we could humanly be without jeopardizing the national security and our interests in our own economic growth.

B: How deeply does the President get into that kind of thing? How much of his time does it take?

M: Well, on the Kennedy Round, Francis Bator and I had about a two-hour session with him. When you've got a real conflict between departments in which maybe the State Department and the special trade representative feel very strongly that our foreign policy requirements demand that we take a certain action, and you have Commerce and Agriculture (Labor usually got on the other side) taking an opposite position, usually the Council of Economic Advisors would be weighing in with State and Special Trade. They are for anything that will keep the price down and more consumer choice. And you have Congressmen almost invariably on the protectionist side; occasionally, a man like Dirksen writing within a period of two weeks strong letters on both sides, having forgotten that he had written the first one obviously, and having been visited both by the importers and the home industry representatives. There are several of them filed in the White House.

Then the President says, "Okay, fix a time and come on in and see me about it," and he really listens.

B: And understands the complexities of this kind of thing?

M: Oh, yes, absolutely. As far as I could tell, the answer is

yes. And it comes from just such a colossal amount of exposure; he has been, after all, voting on bills like this and hearing Congressmen and Senators and others make desperate representations for thirty-five years. And if you're an intelligent man, as he is, whether or not you have a particular interest in exploring the pros and cons of the issue, you can accumulate an awful lot of information. So he would ask some very intelligent questions and, when somebody had just finished a passionate presentation, turn to the other guy and say, "What you got to say about that?" And get him. And, "All right, what do you say?" and so on. And if you turned out with a four to two vote, he would go with the four by and large while excoriating the four because they had not been able to bring along the two, and telling them to go out and do all sorts of things either to soften the blow on those who were going to be hurt by it and/or to develop public support for what he had done, which meant calling newspaper people and so on. Those steamy and congratulatory editorials that were in the Times and the Post and the rest of them after the watch and glass tariff actions, were generated by that. A lot of telephoning from the White House. You do that. You call people and say, "Here's what I've done. Let's have an editorial in support."

B: You mean you would do the calling?

M: I would. Francis Bator, Ambassador Roth. We'd break it up, decide who'd call whom, and we'd spend the next five hours calling a list of eight or ten people apiece and going through the whole thing, talking about the terrible pressures the President had been under, but bravely he picked up his Excalibur sword and lopped off the tariffs.

B: Whom would you call? That is, who at the newspapers?

M: Sometimes on papers like the Times and the Post, both an editor with whom you were particularly close just to check in with him and tell him that you wanted to talk about this and ordinarily he would say, "Talk to our economic editor." And you would get down and talk to Bart Rowan, or Ed Dale of the Times, or Eileen Shanahan--someone like that.

B: Does that kind of thing involve an explicit or implicit quid pro quo?

M: You mean are we obligated to do something for them if they print an editorial? No, it's part of the general relationship. You know, there's a symbiotic relationship

which sometimes breaks down and sometimes comes back to haunt you--a symbiotic relationship between Government and Administration, the Executive Office, and the press. You're constantly trying to get them to tell your story, and they're constantly seeking as much information as they can. I've never had the feeling that anyone of them was ever saying, "Now that I've done that for you, how about telling me so-and-so?" It's a continuing kind of relationship in which you tell them what you trust yourself to tell them; what you think they can be trusted with. And they print what they have the heart and the will to print. A good newspaperman won't print something that you just call up and say, "How about doing?" unless he feels it. And he won't stop the presses when you want him to unless you're able to prove to him that the national interest and not just your Administration's personal interest would be hurt by it.

B: How about the relations between the White House and the regulatory agencies?

M: I don't really know much about that. I had some conversations with them over the four years, but with the exception of the CAB I didn't do much work with them.

B: Did you participate in the overseas airline decision?

M: Yes, all except the Trans-Pacific case. I took myself out of that whole operation in the early fall of '68 before the decision had left the board, because I thought the chances were pretty good that I would come here to this firm [Verner, Liifert & Bernhard], and we represent one of the major applicants in the case. And I thought that would look bad so I told the President I thought I ought to leave the White House before the decision came. He thought otherwise but agreed that I should write a letter to him saying that the press of other duties was such that I should get out of this field and should pass tie responsibility on to someone else. I did so.

B: Nonetheless, there was--after the awarding of the Trans-Pacific contracts--there was criticism of the awarding, not involving you personally, but on that grounds.

M: Yes, and I think it was a misplaced criticism, and I think this [Nixon] Administration has now realized it. The one thing that Johnson did in that case was to knock out the airline of an old friend of his, American Airlines, which had been run by C. R. Smith--to knock them out of Japan. He did that because the State Department said that our

relations with Japan would suffer by imposing a third United States carrier. But I think they now have discovered that the decision is a good one and the papers are in order and that there is no evidence of intervention by the White House.

B: There was some criticism of the award to Braniff, an airline which also has Texas connections.

M: That's right. There was. You know, there are going to be losers and winners in any of these cases, and the Administration now--the Nixon Administration--has been trying to figure out a better way of handling this stuff so they can avoid the criticism that comes their way. And it's awfully difficult, so long as the President is in the field. And the President is in the field because of foreign policy and national security consideration.

B: Did the Johnson Administration ever consider removing the President from these decisions?

M: No. And I think it would probably be unwise. The CAB has the responsibility given to it by Congress to promote the United States air carrier industry, and they are single tracked in that determination. They really take it seriously. Problems that the State Department is having with foreign governments involving a whole broad range of issues may be exacerbated by a CAB decision, yet the CAB's concern is with improving American air carriers position; and that's something that requires an oversight from the top.

B: Incidentally, what airline does Verner, Liipfert and Bernhardt represent?

M: Well, Verner, Liipfert, Bernhardt and McPherson is the new name of the firm.

B: I'm sorry, I didn't realize you were on the partnership.

M: Yes. It represents Northwest.

B: We'll just stick that in there and make the old record complete. Congratulations, I didn't realize you were a full partner.

M: Thank you.

B: The campaign of '68, or what was once upon a time going to

be the campaign of 1968--Were you already making plans for Lyndon Johnson's Presidential campaign?

M: Well, we were talking a lot about it, and we were in one way or another making plans. John Roche, who was my partner up on the third floor of the White House, was doing an awful lot of work with Marvin Watson and Larry O'Brien and others. We were both mystified that what we would have expected to be happening was not happening; that the tremendous reaching-out and gathering-in of support was not being done; and that recommendations that the scientist group and the artists and writers group and the businessmen's group and the citizens group and all the rest of it be organized were not being acted on, or were being returned with notes saying, "Don't do anything about this yet."

Roche wrote a column the other day in which he talks about Johnson during this period of late '67 and early '68, and has concluding paragraphs that refer to a conversation that he and I had one evening in the White House, when he came in and said he had decided that there were only two possibilities, either Johnson didn't think he needed the National Committee and the whole political operation to win the nomination and the election again, or that he thought they were adequate as they were. And he said that he felt at the time that Johnson was too smart to feel that the National Committee was adequate, the Committee has never been adequate, and that therefore he must think that he didn't need it. He could win it without all that organizational trapping. And then in a conversation with me, I said there was a third possibility--this was in August of '67--and that is that "He's not going to run." And some other quote. And Roche wrote me and said, "I remember this very vividly as I have written, but why did you think so?" And I racked my brain to remember why I had thought so. And I really didn't think so. I mean, I didn't think that that was right. If I had to bet five dollars, I would have bet he would have run. But I felt at the same time that if I were he, I wouldn't run. But he had reminded me many times that I was not he. I felt that he was probably sick of controversy particularly surrounding him, the vituperation and such. We may have talked earlier about this curious feeling which people have, this curious insensitivity, lack of empathy for a President, for all that's written about him. There's a feeling that personally he can take anything. You can call him maligned, a thieving pederast and somehow that's not supposed to affect him. He's not supposed to get angry, be resentful about it. He's supposed to let it fall off his back like water off a duck's back.

But this had gotten to Johnson really; he was tired of being the target of all enmity.

B: Did the staff ever try to keep that kind of thing away from him?

M: No. On the contrary, several of us would write him when we heard particularly [a bad one].

[End of Tape 2 of 3]

INTERVIEW V

DATE: April 9, 1969

INTERVIEWEE: HARRY McPHERSON

INTERVIEWER: T. H. BAKER

Tape 3 of 3

B: This is a continuation of the interview with Harry McPherson. What about the rest of the political activities of 1968 after the withdrawal?

M: I don't know what his [Johnson's] immediate conversations with Humphrey were, but everybody assumed right off the bat that Humphrey would run and that he would be Johnson's candidate, as indeed he was. Johnson, as much as he disliked Kennedy--Bob Kennedy--and as much as they despised each other, as a matter of fact, as hipped on the subject of the sedulous Kennedy operation moving about and moving in politics everywhere as he was, Johnson didn't seem to fear in any passionate way the Kennedy Presidency. I think he would have been resigned to it in a curious kind of way. He was terribly agitated after Kennedy's shooting. That day before Kennedy died he would listen to the account in the Ambassador Hotel over and over. He had floods of information coming in from the Justice Department and other places about Kennedy's condition. I don't know--he must have been filled with a hundred competing emotions.

His main contribution to the campaign was to make it clear that the delegates' support that would have gone to him would go to Humphrey, and it did. All the delegates who derived from old Democratic strongholds--labor, city machines, Negroes, ethnic groups, businessmen, lawyers who had enjoyed relationships with the Johnson Administration--all that Establishment was put into the service of Humphrey. Two or three months before the--maybe not that long, maybe a month before the convention--Larry Levinson, Ed Hamilton and I went to California and completed making a film with a studio out there about Johnson, which was to be shown at the convention--good film, I thought. And it was never shown.

B: Why not?

M: Because the response would have been violent.

B: Johnson himself make that decision not to have the film shown?

M: I don't know. I imagine he did. Throughout the period of the preconvention and the post-convention period, he was, I think, of two minds, maybe of several minds, but at least two minds about how Humphrey should relate to him. There were people who, of course, were telling Humphrey that he had to dissociate himself from Johnson, from the Administration. I thought they were right insofar as they were talking about helping Humphrey become visibly an independent man. I thought they were wrong insofar as they thought Humphrey could dissociate himself with policies that he had supported for, lo, so many years--that Humphrey would convey the feeling of a wishy-washy, flip-flopping, various and insubstantial man. I think that's the impression he did convey, unfortunately.

The thing that really racked Johnson up was Viet Nam and Humphrey's attempts to go both ways. He was pleased with the Salt Lake City speech that Humphrey made because it didn't seem to say that one would stop the bombing independently of any action on the other side. Then Humphrey said at Kansas City, "I would stop the bombing, "period," and then some more stuff. Johnson got furious with that! Humphrey, at Houston: "so many thousand troops are going to be pulled back from Viet Nam." There were no plans to do that, and Humphrey had misread a news story about a Marine landing team coming back. So Johnson went to New Orleans and spoke to the American Legion and blasted the idea that troops were coming back as irresponsible and so on. Terrible! Just awful! And as a matter of fact, on several occasions he rubbed Humphrey's nose in it.

B: Who was writing those speeches?

M: I don't know. I know that I criticized them and went through several chilly periods with him.

B: Was the White House staff directly involved in the campaign--in assisting the Humphrey campaign?

M: To some degree. We didn't do anywhere near as much as the White House could do, at least I certainly wasn't aware that we did. There's such power, such informational capacity in the White House, available to the White House, that were used in '64 and are used in every Presidential campaign, but they weren't used, as far as I know. That is, the kind of delicate information that is available to a President, was

not made available to the Vice-President in his race.

Johnson made a few speeches, one in New York to the ethnic groups, which was a good occasion. Jimmy Breslin said it was the best political show of the campaign. He made several television appearances and several radio broadcasts. They were good, but not too--I'm sure not very effective in the campaign. They should have been made much earlier, and there should have been other occasions. I think he felt genuinely that he had taken himself out of politics in March and that he shouldn't get back into full-scale. I think he felt that he would jeopardize any opportunity he had for ending the war if he were to take a completely absorbed role in the campaign, because he had to be kind of a high statesman above it. I don't know whether that's true or not, but I think he felt that. And I think he felt very practically that Nixon was likely to win, and it was therefore probably unwise to get himself into a posture of total and violent opposition to Nixon.

B: Had you ever heard Mr. Johnson express an opinion about Richard Nixon?

M: Yes, both favorable and unfavorable. I've heard him suggest that he didn't think he was very smart. It's an interesting point of view since most criticism of Mr. Nixon used to be that he wasn't moral--the President didn't think he was very smart. I think he really didn't think he was much of a figure for a long time. He thinks that he made a serious mistake back in '67 some time; in a press conference he really let fly on Nixon. Nixon had said something critical about the Administration and was clearly headed for the New Hampshire primary and Pennsylvania, and Johnson called him a two-time loser and stuff like this, you know. And it was done beautifully, and Democrats took a lot of pleasure in it. I did. Almost at once, he felt that he had made a mistake because he had singled out Nixon from the crowd and had given him a special standing by being the target of a Presidential attack.

Later he was impressed by Nixon, especially because Nixon said he wasn't going to make the war a big issue. War was everything! What you felt about the war was more important than what you felt about anything else. I think you could even dislike Lyndon Johnson and support the war and that would be fine. You'd be on his "A" list. And when Nixon said that he was for it, or for not doing anything to shake it up or jeopardize the business, he thought that was very statesmanlike.

B: You said that during the last stages you have reason to believe that at least some people in the Nixon camp were in contact with the people in Saigon about the bombing halt. Did Mr. Johnson know of that too?

M: Yes.

B: One would think that he would bitterly resent that kind of thing?

M: He did. There wasn't anything he could do about it. You couldn't, without jeopardizing the whole ball of wax; couldn't surface it. He'd be in terrible trouble. The country would be in terrible trouble. "One of great parties is holding up the possibility--" What would it have done to American opinion about continuing the war in Viet Nam?

B: Could it not even have been mentioned in the briefings he held with the candidates?

M: Yes, he did mention it in a very subtle way, and it shivered Nixon's timbers!

B: After the election, how went the transition?

M: Smooth as glass. There was a real effort made to provide the new Administration with everything it needed. Huge briefing books were prepared, the President saw all the new Cabinet people. We all had strict orders not to do any partisan things and speak in a partisan way; to do everything we could to cooperate.

It was the pickup on the other side that left something to be desired. Alan Boyd told me that on the last day of the Administration--I asked him if he had had a lot of sessions with new Secretary Volpe of Transportation. He said that he had had precisely two questions asked of him by Volpe. One was how frequently he thought it was advisable to use the Executive limousine and secondly, how large was the expense account for the Secretary? Not a word about mass transit, about the SST, about any of the huge things under the jurisdiction of the Department of Transportation. So the baton was there in the hands of the last runner, but sometimes the new runner was standing stock-still.

B: How about your own replacement? Did each individual White House staff member brief directly his replacement?

M: Yes. I had a long session and lunch with John Ehrlichman

who was to be the Counsel, and I had a session with Mr. [James] Keogh, who is, I think, at least doing the organization job for writing--the job that Charlie MaGuire did essentially for us, to make sure the speeches got in on time.

B: Were you pleased and surprised to see your friend Mr. Moynihan show up on the new staff?

M: Yes, I was. I wasn't as surprised as I might have been because we had had a lot of conversations about Nixon and a lot of hot letters about it. He kept talking about how Nixon was very interested in his ideas, seemed genuinely interested. And Nixon, I think, in some part to show that he was au courant with the most advanced thinking of the day on urban problems, would quote Pat in his speeches. And that was very flattering to Pat. Pat was so bitter with us that I think he was susceptible to that kind of treatment and to the much greater concern for his views that Nixon showed than we had showed in recent years.

B: Does that bitterness date from the reception of the Moynihan Report?

M: It dates back to the widespread knowledge around Washington that Pat had written Johnson's Howard University speech or been responsible for it and was really the director of the policy and that sort of thing. Johnson hated to have it known widely that anybody was doing something, was running something really that was supposed to be run by the President. He didn't mind, after a long time--in the last year or so, he didn't care whether people said, "McPherson wrote the speech," because by that time we were both old and tired and I just did that job for him and he really had given up caring.

But he didn't know Pat very well and Pat was doing a lot of the broadcasting. Pat was devoted to Jack Kennedy and was not so devoted nor on such terms with Bobby Kennedy; but nevertheless was drawn to the Kennedys. The President foolishly, in my mind, cut him off because of that--considered him somebody in the other camp, an enemy. I was looking the other night at a four-page memorandum about Pat Moynihan that I wrote the President, saying, "For Christ's sake, with him and with other people, just because they are friendly with Bob Kennedy does not mean that they are unfriendly to you, and that you ought to use them and develop their loyalties as best you can, although many of them will never give their total emotional loyalty to you as

they gave it to Jack Kennedy. You're very different people, and they're different people--they're different from you." His reception to that one is what earned me my invitation to go over and be chairman of the Equal Opportunity Commission.

- B: You've mentioned that episode before. I've heard that at the very last Mr. Johnson was angry at some of his Cabinet members and they didn't get invited to the last luncheon. Is that true?
- M: I don't know about not getting invited to the last luncheon. I know he was sure as hell angry with some of them. He was furious with Stewart Udall. He was furious with Wirtz for about two months before he quit and was pretty sore at Ramsey.
- B: The other two have been pretty well publicized, I think. Was there anything about Clark over the IBM--?
- M: Yes.
- B: What's it like not to be there any more. Do you feel that loss of relevance you mentioned?
- M: Well, I'm without a car, which is a terrible loss. And I'm without constant telephone calls, which sort of makes you wonder whether you really count in the world any more. I don't have the access to the White House operators, which was one of the great benefits of working there, you know. If you remember that someone's name was either Brunhoff or Brownstein and he lives some place in New York and he was in the watch importing business, it might take them twenty minutes to get him on the phone at his summer cabin in the Catskills. They were fantastic, and you don't have that any more. When you don't know exactly where somebody lives, you just have to give up on them. I would have wanted to leave, even if Humphrey had won, even in the event I had been asked to stay, because I'd been in long enough. I was developing a Pavlovian response to a lot of issues, and therefore not serving the Administration well any more. You really have to get out for awhile and you begin to see things--I'm much more open to information and to points of view now than I was three months ago. [In the White House] you tend to view everything in terms of whether it hurts your Administration, your President and that sort of thing; or helps. You look at almost nothing from the point of view of whether it's true or not. It's only the sort of P.R. sense: what effect it will have on public support or lack of support of your Administration. And that's a terrible way to get. It makes

you very efficient. You become very quick. And you become very good at offering advice on what your principal should do instantly. But you may miss the boat badly, because you haven't really understood and taken in what the concern of the country is. I'm glad to be away from Johnson at last, after so many years with him, because I need to develop my own maturity; that is, to be my own "daddy," to a considerable extent, so far as one can be one's own father. He has been an overpowering influence in my life, one whom I had to fight to keep from utterly dominating me. He is consuming to be with. His preoccupations become yours. Whatever he happens to be working on becomes the only thing that anybody works on around him, or thinks about.

B: Has he left you alone since the end of his Administration?

M: Yes, I think he's probably sore at me right now. We were very close at the end. That last night, on January 19th, we had a party here for the staff in the Mansion, and I made the speech on behalf of the staff to him. We were very close and had an emotional goodbye out at the airport with my kids and all that. And we talked about ten days or two weeks after he was down there and a long, extremely relaxed talk. He sounded wonderful, more genuinely relaxed than I'd ever heard him. Not with his phony, "I'm really relaxed, they haven't laid a glove on me, and I don't have a nerve in my body" kind of way which usually means he's about to go through the ceiling. But really relaxed. But then the [New York] Times and the Newsweek story on March of 1968 hit. And I suspect that he is resentful of both me and Clifford for talking to the press about this and giving what turned out to be a very one-sided view of the story, what happened in March of '68, a view that one can say would have been other-wise if he had chosen to participate, if he had chosen to give his side of it to them as well. But he chose not to; and Walt Rostow gave his typically hallucinatory optimistic reading of the whole thing and they didn't use much of it. So I suspect that I am getting what his kooky drunken brother Sam would call the silent treatment right now, and will for a time. But I expect it won't go on forever. We'll get to know each other or see each other again some time. I hope so, because he's a friend after all this and did a lot for the country. And I'm proud of my time with him.

B: That sounds like an appropriate ending. Is there anything else you'd like to add for this record?

M: I think not.

B: Thank you.

M: Thank you.

[End of Tape 3 of 3 and Interview V]