

William L. Slayton Oral History Interview—JFK #1, 2/3/1967
Administrative Information

Creator: William L. Slayton
Interviewer: William M. McHugh
Date of Interview: February 3, 1967
Location: Washington, D.C.
Length: 47 pages

Biographical Note

William L. Slayton (1916 - 1999) was the Commissioner of the Urban Renewal Administration between 1961 and 1966, and later became the executive vice president of Urban America Incorporated. This interview focuses on John F. Kennedy (JFK)'s stance on urban renewal, concerns and resistance to federal assistance, and Slayton's role as Commissioner for Urban Renewal, among other issues.

Access Restrictions

Open.

Usage Restrictions

According to the deed of gift signed November 9, 1972, copyright of these materials has been assigned to the United States Government. Users of these materials are advised to determine the copyright status of any document from which they wish to publish.

Copyright

The copyright law of the United States (Title 17, United States Code) governs the making of photocopies or other reproductions of copyrighted material. Under certain conditions specified in the law, libraries and archives are authorized to furnish a photocopy or other reproduction. One of these specified conditions is that the photocopy or reproduction is not to be "used for any purpose other than private study, scholarship, or research." If a user makes a request for, or later uses, a photocopy or reproduction for purposes in excesses of "fair use," that user may be liable for copyright infringement. This institution reserves the right to refuse to accept a copying order if, in its judgment, fulfillment of the order would involve violation of copyright law. The copyright law extends its protection to unpublished works from the moment of creation in a tangible form. Direct your questions concerning copyright to the reference staff.

Transcript of Oral History Interview

These electronic documents were created from transcripts available in the research room of the John F. Kennedy Library. The transcripts were scanned using optical character recognition and the resulting text files were proofread against the original transcripts. Some formatting changes were made. Page numbers are noted where they would have occurred at the bottoms of the pages of the original transcripts. If researchers have any concerns about accuracy, they are encouraged to visit the library and consult the

transcripts and the interview recordings.

Suggested Citation

Slayton, William L., recorded interview by William M. McHugh, on February 3, 1967, (page number), John F. Kennedy Library Oral History Program.

File

GENERAL SERVICES ADMINISTRATION
NATIONAL ARCHIVES AND RECORDS SERVICE

Gift of Personal Statement

of William L. Slayton

to the

JOHN F. KENNEDY LIBRARY

I, William L. Slayton of Washington, D.C., do hereby give to the John F. Kennedy Library, for use and administration therein, all my rights, title and interest, except as hereinafter provided, to the tape recording and transcript of the interview conducted at Washington, D.C. on February 3, 1967 for the John F. Kennedy Library. The gift of this material is made subject to the following terms and conditions:

1. The interview is to be opened to general research at the discretion of the Director of the John F. Kennedy Library; his decision to be based on such considerations as potential embarrassment to living persons or their immediate successors, the interests of national security, or potential prejudice to the friendly relations between the United States and foreign nations.

2. Researchers who have access to the transcript of the interview may listen to the tape; however, this is to be for background use only. Researchers may not cite, paraphrase or quote from the tape.

3. I hereby assign literary property rights in this interview to the United States Government.

4. Copies of the interview transcript may be provided upon request to any researcher.

5. This agreement may be revised or amended by mutual consent of the parties undersigned.

William L. Slayton
William L. Slayton
Oct 9, 1972
Date

James B. Rhoads
Archivist of the United States
November 9, 1972
Date

William L. Slayton—JFK #1
Table of Contents

<u>Page</u>	<u>Topic</u>
1	Slayton's appointment as Commissioner for Urban Renewal
3	John F. Kennedy (JFK)'s Task Force on Housing and Urban Affairs
6	Requirements of the Workable Program
6	Eisenhower and Kennedy administrations on urban renewal program
7	Effectiveness of the 221 (d) (3) program (moderate income housing program)
16	Characteristics of Kennedy administration
20	Albert Rains' hearings on urban renewal
25	Concerns regarding relocation and rehabilitation
39	States' resistance to federal urban renewal assistance
42	Distribution of municipal services/standards in cities

Oral History Interview

with

WILLIAM L. SLAYTON

February 3, 1967
Washington, D.C.

By Willaim M. McHugh

For the John F. Kennedy Library

SLAYTON: This relates to the Administration, not just to Kennedy, you mean?

McHUGH: Well, yes, this relates to the Administration. It relates somewhat to Kennedy, but we are interested in the Kennedy Administration and we are getting involved in the operations of various departments under Kennedy. We assume that this will be of interest to historians in the future, and we hope they will get an idea of what the, how these agencies operated during his Administration. I should introduce this interview. This is an interview with Mr. William Slayton, who was the Commissioner of the Urban Renewal Administration during John Kennedy's Administration. Mr. Slayton is currently the executive vice president of Urban America Incorporated. This interview is taking place in his office at 1717 Massachusetts Avenue. Mr. Slayton, how were you first invited to fill the position of Commissioner for Urban Renewal?

SLAYTON: Well, I was invited by Bob Weaver [Dr. Robert C. Weaver], now Secretary Weaver, who called me over one day before the inauguration and

said he would like me to be the Commissioner of Urban Renewal. That was an appointment by the Administrator of HHFA [Housing and Home Finance Agency] and not the President.

McHUGH: Oh, I see, this was not from the President.

SLAYTON: It was selected by the President, but this goes back to the history bit of the HHFA legislation when the urban renewal program was established. There was concern that the FHA [Federal Housing Administration] and the PHA [Public Housing Administration] were really acting too independently, and the one way of providing some control over the constituent units of HHFA was to have the Director, or the Commissioner, appointed by the Secretary -- I mean, not the Secretary, by the Administrator. So the Commissioner of Urban Renewal and the Commissioner of Public Housing and the Commissioner of FHA were appointed by the President.

McHUGH: Oh, I see. I see. Were you particularly aware of Kennedy's stance on housing during the campaign?

SLAYTON: Oh, yes.

McHUGH: Did you feel that he was generally informed about the problems?

SLAYTON: Well, a few of us got together: Ed Logue [Edward J. Logue]; Hugh Miels, Jr.; myself; and Bill Wheaton [William L. Wheaton]; Bob Hagen [Robert Hagen] -- can't remember whether it included Bob Wood [Robert C. Wood] then or not.

McHUGH: Some of these people were from New Haven at the time, is that...

SLAYTON: Yes, Ed Logue was from New Haven; Bob Hazen was from New Haven; Bill Wheaton was a professor at Harvard. I was working for Bill Zeckendorf [William Zeckendorf], vice president of Webb & Knapp. This was in 1960 during the campaign, and we felt that there ought to be

[-2-]

a pretty strong statement on housing. So we worked pretty hard on such a statement that we hoped that Kennedy would make, and used his meeting in Pittsburgh as the vehicle for it.

McHUGH: At what time was this now?

SLAYTON: I'm trying to remember the date that he gave the speech.

McHUGH: Well, approximately.

SLAYTON: Well, this was during the summer of 1960 that we engineered this idea. I think you have to give Ed Logue the credit primarily for this.

McHUGH: You mean originating the idea of having him incorporate that statement?

SLAYTON: Yes, because we were afraid that during the campaign there would not be a strong statement on the importance of urban renewal, the importance of housing. And the speech that President Kennedy gave in Pittsburgh was a great speech on the subject.

McHUGH: So he did use the idea that you gave him on that?

SLAYTON: Yes, he did.

McHUGH: I see. Were you involved at all on the task force on housing that...

SLAYTON: No, I was not.

McHUGH: I see. What about the recommendations? Did you feel that their recommendations were ones that you would go along with generally?

SLAYTON: Now which recommendation are you talking about?

[-3-]

McHUGH: Well, substantially, they were, I think, most of them were incorporated in the President's special message to Congress in 1961.

SLAYTON: Oh, yes, yes. We became involved in them, and when I was Commissioner -- although just to go off that subject for a moment and go back to my appointment, there are some interesting political developments there that I think you ought to know about. Bob Weaver did ask me to be, as I said, Commissioner, and this was before January 20, 1961. Well, on the day of the inauguration he called me and said there had been a little hitch and that my appointment couldn't be announced for a while. And I asked him why. He said, well there's someone else in the picture, and they had to get that kind of cleared away. Well, that someone else was the former Mayor of Baltimore -- his name will come to me in a minute -- who, presumably, had been promised the position of Commissioner of Urban Renewal by President Kennedy.

McHUGH: Oh, is that so?

SLAYTON: And it got to be -- and he was a former mayor, and the mayors kind of liked the idea of the mayor being in there, although, quite frankly, they had some

reservations about his capacity in this job, in his knowledge of the field.

McHUGH: I see.

SLAYTON: So there was a lot of political jockeying going on within the Democratic Committee, the National Committee, and it got to be a pretty involved and harrying experience. The papers had this, there was a good deal of speculation in the papers, and for a while it looked as though neither the former Mayor of Baltimore nor I would become the Commissioner. But finally it was decided, and this was the latter part of March, and I was sworn in on March 28th. So it took a little while.

[-4-]

McHUGH: Do you know what was instrumental in swinging the decision to you?

SLAYTON: I would say that David Lawrence, former Mayor of Pittsburgh, former Governor of Pennsylvania, very active in the National Committee, the Chairman of the Redevelopment Authority in the city of Pittsburgh, he felt very strongly that there ought to be a "pro" in the field in that position, and he personally talked to the President about it.

McHUGH: And was able to persuade him.

SLAYTON: And others talked to him, too. But I think probably Lawrence was the most influential person in this respect.

McHUGH: One of the things the task force had asked for was a national housing code. I don't think that was included in the special message, but did you think that was a feasible goal?

SLAYTON: Well, I don't recall asking for a national housing code, as such, being concerned with housing code standards and this sort of thing. I've forgotten...

McHUGH: Moving back to the task force report, not the special message.

SLAYTON: I understand.

McHUGH: And that was the last item, as a matter of fact, that they asked for in the report. Otherwise it was almost parallel to the special message.

SLAYTON: The idea of a housing code, of a national housing code, has lots of problems. Well, the great variation in climate and requirements and availability of materials, the cost of materials, this sort of thing. I think some national standards on

[-5-]

performance would be something else again, you know. Performance, the fire rating of certain things, being able to maintain that house at a certain temperature, and this sort of business, would probably be a pretty effective instrument. But a national housing code would be pretty difficult, I think, to write.

McHUGH: Because of regional problems?

SLAYTON: Yes. Well, here, of course, too. This is a state area. It's a police poser, and this is a police power function. It's a state function. They have the authority. So I can't see how the federal government, except through some grant-in-aid program where you have a requirement, could establish some national standards. In effect, you know, the Workable Program was required initially under the urban renewal program -- now required of other programs -- does require that there be a housing code, and in effect, HHFA now has, did establish, housing code standards. So in this sense they have a national housing code.

McHUGH: We'll get in a discussion of that a little further on. Did you feel that there were any new idea, particularly before the Kennedy administration came in? What did you feel were the overall priorities?

SLAYTON: Well, it was a great shot in the arm to the urban renewal program. Under the Eisenhower [Dwight D. Eisenhower] Administration there had not been great sympathy toward the urban renewal program. The amount of funds had been cut back, and two housing bills had been vetoed. We in the field were really pretty distressed about the lack of funds. So here President Kennedy, right out of the box, proposed a major funding for the urban renewal program. Initially, it was going to be two and a half billion dollars for four years, and then it became two billion dollars. They used five hundred million for advanced public works. But there was two billion dollars, which was the total amount authorized from 1949 up to 1961. So

[-6-]

here was a doubling of the size of the program and the assumption that these funds be used over three years, and the funds from the previous two billion being used over a period from '49 to 1961, twelve years. So this was a tremendous shot in the arm to the urban renewal program. Tremendous impact.

McHUGH: Do you remember what the first weeks of the transition to a new Administration were like?

SLAYTON: Let me just add a couple of other things.

McHUGH: All right. Sure.

SLAYTON: I think one of the other things that the President proposed, and which was adopted, is now known as the 221 (d) (3) program, which is a moderate income housing program with an interest rate below the market rate, originally tied to what it costs the federal government to borrow money. Now it has been amended to make it a flat 3 per cent. But this was the first time there was a meaningful housing program for middle income families. They had had public housing for low income families, the FHA for people with sufficient money to buy or rent in the regular market, but this was the first time that a middle income housing program was established. This has been an extremely successful program. And that wasn't all, we got open space land, the idea of acquiring undeveloped land and keeping it as open space for parks, and that sort of thing. We got mass transportation, the initial mass transportation legislation for demonstrations and some grants and loans. It was a tremendous boost in 1961 on the new programs. And, of course, there was the reinvigoration of the public housing program, getting additional units for public housing. It was quite a year.

McHUGH: At the beginning, what did you feel were the first priority things that you had to -- that took your attention?

[-7-]

SLAYTON: Well, I had a great concern for relocation. And I remember the first speech I gave, which was in Pittsburgh, emphasized the importance of relocation. What we tried to do in this -- you know, the people who carry out renewal programs are not federal employees and are not federal agents. They're local authorities. And so there's not a direct line of common, you might say, so you have to devise administrative measures to persuade, cajole, and sometimes threaten in order to get certain policies carried out. So we spent a lot of our time trying to get the cities to recognize that the relocation program was an opportunity and not just a federal requirement that had to be met, but here was...

McHUGH: Were they worried about losing constituents?

SLAYTON: ... to locate that family in a new environment, to help that family with its social problems at that time, to make sure that it really received, and the family received, the kind of attention and assistance that it should. And over the period of the program we were able to get legislation changed to increase the benefits to families displaced, to provide more moving expenses, and greater payments to take care of special costs. And, of course, the 221(d)(3) housing program helped a great deal in providing additional housing. So the first thing we did was to concentrate on the relocation question.

McHUGH: Did you find that cities -- how did cities accept this new emphasis that you were putting on this thing? Or did they accept it?

SLAYTON: Well, I think you have to read acceptance in terms of some other things I was doing. I had felt that we were, that the Urban Renewal Administration, was not really giving sufficient review to the applications and that many cities were coming in with applications for urban renewal projects when they really didn't have the capacity in terms of staff, or in terms of relocation resources, or in terms of just time to carry out all the things they said they wanted to do. And so that,

[-8-]

therefore, we ought to begin to relate what they proposed doing to their capacity to do it. Initially, I reviewed every application myself. I got the reputation of, among some of my local constituents or clients, that an application had to be perfect before it would go through. I was really tightening up, and I did tighten up very heavily, and there was some considerable resentment on this. But I did this through my regional directors, and I brought in some new regional directors. Then I relaxed after we established what I thought was a new level of standards. Then it went along pretty well. My interest was in trying to get this money to the cities to get the projects underway, not to hold back. But I didn't want to set aside money for those cities when they really couldn't use that money right away.

McHUGH: So relocation was the major problem there?

SLAYTON: Relocation has always been a major problem in any urban renewal project, and there the emphasis was on doing a much better job in making sure that housing would be available, and then in the process of families being relocated, that they really were given the services and relocated to standard structures. And, in fact, we really made an impact on the relocation statistics. Every month each city had to report on what happened to the families who were displaced. And we started out with some, oh, 7 or 8 percent of the families being displaced ending up in substandard housing, and we whittled that down to 2 to 3 percent.

McHUGH: Some of the critics of urban renewal maintain that false information was sent into the agency, excuse me, the administration, on quality of relocation. Do you have any way of verifying the information that they gave you?

SLAYTON: Yes. One of the things we did was to set up special people in each regional office, special, not investigators but -- I'm trying to give the exact names we called these people -- not field reps but.... Well, it doesn't make any difference. What they did was,

[-9-]

they periodically went out and checked on the statistics. They were required to pick up a certain minimum number of cards. Each agency was required to keep a card on each family,

what happened to it. Then they'd go out and interview the family and check the house in which they were living to see if it was standard and all of that. And this verified the statistics. And then in about 1964, I guess it was, Bob Weaver had the Bureau of the Census make an independent check, and the Bureau of the Census' statistics supported the statistics that we had right on the button.

McHUGH: Some of the critics, once again, felt that it was, that one federal agency doing a study of this sort for another federal agency might not be as objective as it could be. Did you consider the alternative of having a university do research on this?

SLAYTON: Well, this was done by Bob Weaver, himself. It wasn't done by me, so I didn't have a chance to consider alternatives. But the big advantage of having the Bureau of the Census do it, was that they had people trained in this field. The problem of having a university is going through the whole training process of getting some people to make these observations without really being very expert in the field. But there's nothing to the business of one federal agency not being objective on the other.

McHUGH: This was a requirement of the Workable Program, as you mentioned. Let me see. I lost the thread of my thought here. I wanted to ask you some more questions on...

SLAYTON: The relocation requirement did not come from the Workable Program.

McHUGH: Wasn't there a requirement in the Workable Program that you have adequate relocation resources of these....

SLAYTON: The Workable Program said that there ought to be housing available for the families to be displaced under public programs. But the

[-10-]

real control was not Workable Program, but urban renewal legislation which required that there be housing available for families displaced, and relatively close to their place of work, and at a price they could afford. As I say, it was the urban renewal legislation that had the relocation requirement. And it was the only program that had any relocation requirement until, finally, in, oh, '64 perhaps, around then they applied it to public housing. And then in 1965, I guess, they applied it to open space land and a few programs like that, but it's still not required in connection with highways displacement, or in connection with federal displacement by federal construction, and it's rather interesting, the disparity here.

McHUGH: You did undertake to do some of the highway relocation, the relocation of highway.

SLAYTON: Urban Renewal, as such, could not, unless the highway were in an urban renewal area. Then the people displaced would be eligible. Many cities set up centralized relocation bureaus and we urged them to do this. Chicago was one of the first to do this, way back, where they would give assistance to families displaced because of highway dislocation.

McHUGH: Did this affect your program substantially, increase your workload, create problems?

SLAYTON: The highway displacement?

McHUGH: Yes.

SLAYTON: No, not necessarily. It hurt our image because people do not distinguish when they're displaced whether it's urban renewal or whether it's highway and anybody who's relocated without assistance or relocated badly because of highways, urban renewal is blamed for it.

McHUGH: Yes. One of the things asked for in the '61 special message on housing was a new Department of Housing and Urban Affairs. How was

[-11-]

that suggestion received in the Urban Renewal Administration?

SLAYTON: We thought it was great, always thought the Department was a very important item to really bring this operation up to Cabinet level, and give it the kind of visibility needed, also, to bring under the direct authority of the Secretary the Federal Housing Administration and the Public Housing Administration, because these are very important components. They've been pretty independent agencies which, only because of persuasion and a little stick that the administrator had -- that was able to bring these into the fold. In the early days, before Kenedy, the Public Housing Commissioner would just refuse to meet with the Administrator, and the FHA would thumb its nose at...

McHUGH: Really? What agencies were the most independent?

SLAYTON: The FHA, I guess, would be the most independent. In the very early days of the urban renewal program -- there's a story there. Ferd Kramer, who's a developer out in Chicago, tells of when he was trying to develop the South Side of Chicago in an urban renewal area. He went to FHA to get a commitment to build what we call 220 housing. This is housing to be built in urban renewal areas. And FHA said that they couldn't insure the loan because it was in a slum area. So Ferd Kramer had to come down and see Al Cole [Albert M. Cole], who was the Administrator under Eisenhower, and

get it straightened out. But that gives an example of the kind of independent operation by FHA in connection with the urban renewal program.

McHUGH: This reminds me of one of the criticisms of FHA, which was that they would much rather insure mortgages in suburban areas than rebuild areas of housing in low income areas. Do you think this is a legitimate criticism?

SLAYTON: Sure. It's understandable. The original FHA was primarily for single family homes, for new homes being built in the periphery...

[-12-]

McHUGH: Oh, this is in the legislation, actually.

SLAYTON: Well, the rental housing, as FHA calls it, was not really much of a program. All FHA had on the books was 207, until after the war it was 608. And this was the rental housing, it was built on the periphery too, not downtown, necessarily. This was the rental housing program, and, of course, they had some difficulties with 608 and this made FHA somewhat antsy about rental housing. But, in addition to that, FHA is like a mortgagee. They are, in effect, concerned about the risks on a loan. And so, here's a house in a slum area. They're concerned with what's going to happen to the value of that house, and if the area is deteriorating the value of the house is going to deteriorate, and so the risk is much greater, and so therefore, they won't insure it. So, in effect, FHA had drawn what some people called the *cordon sanitaire* around the slum areas of the central city -- and this was a fact -- and just wouldn't insure in those areas. There were areas where they just wouldn't insure. And urban renewal came along and the 1954 legislation set up special financing for housing in urban renewal areas through FHA.

McHUGH: I see. Now, to go back again to this Department of Housing and Urban Affairs that was suggested, did the White House back that strongly? Did you feel that you had...

SLAYTON: Well, I felt that.... I wasn't really involved in the lobbying activities for the legislation...

McHUGH: Who was handling that?

SLAYTON: Milt Semer [Milton P. Semer] for the agency, pretty much. The White House was backing it, you know. Kennedy announced Weaver's appointment, said he would appoint Weaver if it went through.

McHUGH: That itself could be a cause of considerable controversy, too, I guess, at the time.

[-13-]

SLAYTON: Yes, it did. And there was -- I've forgotten the details of the byplay, but there was a goof pulled in -- I've forgotten which House now -- the House or the Senate, or the House of Representatives, where the Administration thought they had the strength and they didn't, and they really got clobbered. We certainly had the impression that the White House was strongly supporting it.

McHUGH: Did you feel that they were effective?

SLAYTON: Well, we didn't think they were when they lost in that case.

McHUGH: Did you feel that you could get a hearing for the needs of your agency at the White House?

SLAYTON: You said "my agency," what do you mean?

McHUGH: Well, if you felt that there were particular problems in urban renewal that the backing of the President, well, say for legislation, would help, could you get a hearing at the White House?

SLAYTON: Not I personally. This would always go through Weaver.

McHUGH: I see.

SLAYTON: I would have my hearings by myself at the Bureau of the Budget, make a pitch for what we wanted. But what we wanted was based upon a decision that Weaver and I had come to earlier, and, of course, he always had the final decision.

McHUGH: I see. Was he able to get his case presented effectively at the White House?

SLAYTON: Well, I would say, certainly, in 1961. But I've got to back off just a moment, because there was one time when I was at the White

[-14-]

House and I met with Ted Sorensen [Theodore C. Sorensen] and Dave Bell. And this was the day before I was sworn in, actually, as Commissioner. Neal Hardy [Neal J. Hardy], and I, Milt Semer, met with Sorensen and Bell and Fred Hayes, who was on the Bureau of the Budget staff then, was there, and we were making a pitch for urban renewal money. This was the shaping of the '61 legislation, and talking about the 221(d)(3) program, the moderate income housing program. I felt then that Sorensen and Bell were very

responsive. But that was the last -- well, I guess I was at a couple of other meetings -- but that was the last chance I think I really had a chance to make a pitch myself to the White House.

McHUGH: I see.

SLAYTON: It developed pretty quickly that Weaver's office handled the White House contacts. It didn't involve me, anyway.

McHUGH: I see. Did you have many requests from the White House to place people in jobs?

SLAYTON: No, I did not. The requests were from the Hill. And sometimes, I can remember only one case where I had strong pressure to put someone on, and we did put him on. He was a guy who was in the field. He knew the subject, but we didn't keep him very long. But I didn't have to place people at all.

McHUGH: That was not a problem.

SLAYTON: Absolutely not. And the inquiries from Congressmen would primarily be pro forma. You know, here's a guy who wants a job, and so they write a "Dear Bill" letter and you write back and say, "Well, have him fill out a 57; we'll review it." And then he's done his obligation, and that's about it. I had no problem; quite the contrary. I got good backing to get good people. And we brought in good people.

McHUGH: In the campaign...

[-15-]

SLAYTON: Kennedy's leadership on this was great, because the whole feeling of the Administration was one of -- he kept using the term over and over, and it's true -- of great vigor, and the young guys were really anxious to come in and work. And we worked hard. Half my professional staff would be in every Saturday.

McHUGH: Is that right?

SLAYTON: Sure, Saturday was a major work day, got a lot of major policy things done on Saturday, plus getting the desks cleaned up.

McHUGH: Senator Kennedy, that is, in his campaign, the President had called for an Executive order on equal opportunity in housing. When that finally did come about, did you think it was well timed?

SLAYTON: No. We felt it would have been better if it had come a lot sooner.

McHUGH: Really?

SLAYTON: Yes. We felt that it was something that he had made a promise on in the campaign, a stroke of the pen, a statement that -- it's hard to make a judgment without knowing all the political realities -- but that he probably, if he had moved more rapidly, could have done it, or it would have been accepted better than it was when it was done. It put us in a tough position, not having an Executive order. We didn't have any leverage in this field. Most of the urban renewal projects were open occupancy, except for a few in the South. But this was because of the attitudes of the local renewal agency, nothing that we -- we had no leverage at all to get them to do this.

McHUGH: How were the public housing people on this? Were they generally...

[-16-]

SLAYTON: I think in certain cities there was segregation, even in the North.

McHUGH: Did it make any headway in changing the point of view of these people, that you were aware of?

SLAYTON: Well, I don't know if it changed their point of view; it changed their mode of operation.

McHUGH: They were able to...

SLAYTON: I didn't have a public housing program, you know.

McHUGH: But you...

SLAYTON: They were able to insist that the housing be made open occupancy housing. There were some, particularly in the South, that were dragging their feet pretty heavily. But also the agency moved in and hit them pretty hard.

McHUGH: In any case, in relocation, because there were a large number of Negroes involved, you did have to use public housing. Did you find that they resisted accepting Negroes in the projects?

SLAYTON: No, because generally the projects were Negro projects.

McHUGH: In the North, too, was this true?

SLAYTON: Well, you know, *de facto, de facto* very heavily Negro. Like most of the public housing in Washington is very heavily Negro. But an interesting aside on that,

not an aside, but bearing directly on it -- this was even after we had the Executive order -- we put out a policy statement that no family could be referred to a housing accommodation if it were segregated. It had to be open occupancy. Now this created a lot of consternation over in public housing because that meant that the housing

[-17-]

had to be open occupancy housing. And all of it wasn't open occupancy housing. So this created a problem for our sister agency, PHA, and the implementation of that was held up for over two years.

McHUGH: Is that so? Where did the initiative for that come from?

SLAYTON: From me. Well, a little more background on that. I went up to, very early in the time I was Commissioner, to a special meeting held at Princeton. It was financed by the Ford Foundation to bring together the leaders in an organization called the National Association of InterGroup Relations Officials, NAIRO, and the home builders. And "Bucky" Buchanan was there, and a guy by the name of Harold Fleming who runs the Potomac Institute, which is funded by the Taconic Foundation, and whose field is intergroup relations, was there too. So here was the confrontation between the builders and the people who were interested in open occupancy. And it was a very interesting development. And my story is not to describe that meeting. But this is where Harold Fleming and I came to know each other pretty well, and coming back on the train I began talking a good deal about the kind of difficulty I was running into among Negro groups and civil rights groups on their opinions toward the urban renewal program because of "Negro removal" and all of this. And he said, "Bill, what we ought to do is to set up some kind of urban exchange so those guys could talk to you and you could talk to them." And so we did that in his office. We'd meet about once a month, or once every two months, and I'd go through and describe the programs of urban renewal, all our regulations in great depth. They were very surprised that we had so many requirements on relocation. They just didn't realize it. And then they would come back at me and suggest things that we ought to do. Well out of this -- it was a very interesting exchanges; I learned a lot, and they did too -- came to the idea: Why don't we require that not family be referred to a house that is not open occupancy? So that was the generation of that policy, which was in about 1963, and it was not until

[-18-]

1965 that the regulations were put out implementing it. But it was announced at the NAACP [National Association for the Advancement of Colored People] meeting in Chicago in 1963.

McHUGH: Were there any immediate effects?

SLAYTON: No.

McHUGH: So, you say, it took two years before anything really happened.

SLAYTON: Before it could be implemented by specific regulations. It was a statement of policy. And I cleared it with Weaver, but then, as I say, we got into this problem of PHA objecting, and some attorneys over at Weaver's office objecting, and it just didn't get up...

McHUGH: On what basis were they objecting?

SLAYTON: Well, here we had the segregated housing in public housing, and so this could force that issue. Secondly, there's always legislation up and what impact would this have on some votes, on some legislation. I'm being very candid about this, but it doesn't take much deduction to determine that.

McHUGH: What did the attorneys, in general, in Weaver's office feel? What did they feel the problem was?

SLAYTON: Well, that we would be taking a policy action that would have an impact on PHA, on the public housing projects under PHA's jurisdiction, and the fact -- without PHA having the same policy, without requiring the open occupancy; and then secondly, the political problem, as I said, of the impact that this would have on legislation.

[-19-]

McHUGH: So they felt that if you took this stand it would just be impossible to get further legislation in this area then.

SLAYTON: I think that's overstating it. They thought it would throw in a negative factor.

McHUGH: I see.

SLAYTON: And our legislation never passed by overwhelming majorities.

McHUGH: Did you feel that you had good relationships with the committees that you had to work with on legislation?

SLAYTON: Yes. Yes, I felt we had excellent relationships, particularly, with Congressman Rains [Albert Rains]. He arranged for a hearing on urban renewal, two weeks of hearings, and I ended up testifying the last day, which was two days before Kennedy's assassination. And this was the first time we had had a chance to present the complete story on urban renewal and have the Congressman really ask in-depth questions, continuing questions for hours and hours and hours. And it came off extremely well -- a very excellent relation with Rains, excellent relation with Sparkman [John J. Sparkman], with the

members of the Committee, with our Appropriations Committee. Congressman Albert Thomas was a tough customer, but he'd respect a guy, a federal official, who knew his program and who would stand up for it. And he used to cut us, but we got along relatively well.

McHUGH: Did you have a feeling that your testimony had any effect on subsequent requests for legislation?

SLAYTON: Yes. Sure. Yes, I think being able to explain the program, and how it operated, and what the benefits were, and pointing out what had happened under urban renewal, and what new development had been generated, and the kind of housing that had been built, and

[-20-]

how families were displaced, gave considerable support to the program.

McHUGH: Did any specific legislation come out of those hearings?

SLAYTON: Well, of course, the Rains hearings were special hearings, not to generate legislation but to review the program. This was in the fall, and he wanted to get the flak out of the way before the legislation came in after the first of the year. He wanted to create a climate that would be more acceptable, create a favorable climate for legislation that would be proposed.

McHUGH: Did you feel that it served its purpose?

SLAYTON: Yes. It helped immeasurably in getting the congressmen to understand the program, to feel that it was being run pretty well. The minority members, of course, are critical, and you expect them to be critical. A ranking minority member, Congressman Widnall [William B. Widnall] of New Jersey, quizzed me pretty vigorously and very critically. But basically, I think he supports the program and has supported the program and, in fact, has proposed legislation which was passed and has helped the program considerably.

McHUGH: Who did you feel was your most effective opposition in seeking legislation?

SLAYTON: If Widnall wanted to be in opposition, he'd be the most effective in the House.

McHUGH: How about the lobbies that were against urban renewal? I suppose the National Chamber would be preeminent.

SLAYTON: I didn't think the Chamber was effective at all.

McHUGH: Is that so?

[-21-]

SLAYTON: Their testimony was so absurd. Really. They were living in the nineteenth century. They've changed considerably in the past year or two, I might add. But we didn't think their anti-renewal testimony was effective. We thought that perhaps the real estate boards' testimony that felt there ought to be loans for downtown development created some problems for us. This is a very difficult thing to understand, why there should not be loans. It generates a lot of -- it generates increased taxes and this sort of thing. And I won't go into the substance of the arguments here. But we felt that that was a difficult argument to overcome, and it had some impact. But, generally, the testimony was pretty much pretty heavily oriented in favor of urban renewal. The demand in the cities for it is very great. The private developers feel that it is good. Civil rights groups don't want to kill the program. They want to make some changes in concern about what happens to Negro families and be sure that protections are built in and this sort of thing. Congressman Dowdy [John Dowdy] of the District Committee was a vigorous opponent, but he turned out to be -- he gave us a lot of trouble -- but he wasn't too effective.

McHUGH: We were discussing the Chamber of Commerce. Did you find that their argument had much effect on the Congress?

SLAYTON: No, not really. I keep forgetting that that doesn't record a head shake. No, it was -- well, let me back up a little bit on that -- there was a man by the name of S. Howard Evans. I'd almost forgotten about S. Howard Evans, he died a few years ago. But he used to work for the Urban Renewal Administration years back and became a vigorous opponent of urban renewal. He went with the Chamber of Commerce and developed a kind of a, what he called a self-help program, for cities, and what they ought to do without federal assistance. He was very anti-urban renewal, anti-federal assistance. So he generated a considerable amount of opposition to us, went around the country making speeches. We debated a couple of times, or at least once anyway, on a TV or a radio show.

[-22-]

And that was a thorn in our side. It was something we had to keep answering all the time, and that did create some problems.

We also had some problems when Congressman Dowdy -- that requires a little explanation, too, I guess -- I can't go into all the detail. But Congressman Dowdy is on the District of Columbia Committee. He became Chairman of the Committee on redevelopment, or the Committee concerned with redevelopment. And there was a project here called Columbia Plaza, which is pretty well finished in construction now, a long involved history that I won't go into. But he took particular exception to that project and had hearings after hearings after hearings on it, and they were very unpleasant hearings. And he finally had me down to testify, and we had quite a set-to on it. In fact, he did some things in that kind of Star

Chamber meetings with me that his committee didn't know about that they objected to very strenuously.

He wrote an article for the *Reader's Digest* on urban renewal which was an inaccurate attack on the program, we felt. So we took the article and we replied point by point. This made him madder than ever, and so he took to the Congressional Record and had nineteen pages of anti-urban renewal and anti-Bill Slayton for nineteen pages. And that was somewhat disquieting. I was a little concerned about that but a friend of mind, Senator Gaylord Nelson, wrote me a note after he saw it and he said, "Congratulations, Bill. Tell me how you can get nineteen pages on you in the *Congressional Record*?"

McHUGH: Did the *Reader's Digest* print your rebuttal?

SLAYTON: No. No, the *Reader's Digest* really doesn't do that sort of thing.

McHUGH: I know that. I recall they did carry a series of articles which expressed what was termed "self help" in this area, and wrote about these very small towns, it seemed mostly, that had been able to do this. I wondered whether the problems would have been also much less complicated in those places that they wrote about in terms of, as compared to say, to the big cities of the East and North?

[-23-]

SLAYTON: There were lots of small towns in the urban renewal program. A little urban renewal help could do a great deal for a small town, just by helping them build a parking lot for downtown.

McHUGH: Did you have the impression that they were hesitant to get into urban renewal because of the complexity, the paperwork and so forth? Or misunderstanding of the program?

SLAYTON: Cities?

McHUGH: Well, in small towns, particularly?

SLAYTON: No, not hesitant, really. They were concerned about the paperwork load. Generally, they would have a consultant that would handle the details, because it is complex. A great many felt that we ought to have simpler procedures for smaller cities. We played around with that for a long time trying to do something, but we were never able to do it.

[BEGIN SIDE II TAPE I]

McHUGH: Did they generally have the technical capability and the understanding necessary, or is this something that had to come with working with the

program?

SLAYTON: Well, they didn't have the technical ability. They couldn't hire a staff, a competent staff. They depended pretty much upon the mayor being able to understand and push for the program. But they could get in consulting firms who could give them this assistance. They knew generally what they wanted to do, and they could get some economic advice and some planning advice. So they could operate this way.

McHUGH: What aspects of your program were of most concern to Dr. Weaver?

[-24-]

SLAYTON: Relocation.

McHUGH: Relocation. I see.

SLAYTON: Relocation was the major concern. Then rehabilitation. Rehabilitation is a very, very difficult operation. The rehabilitation aspects of urban renewal were put into legislation in 1954 as a result of President Eisenhower's Special Committee on Housing which Albert Cole headed. And the report came out for a strong emphasis on rehabilitation, making this possible. But the difficulty of -- it was so difficult that not many cities really did much in the way of rehabilitation. You're dealing with lots of pieces of property. You have to persuade a homeowner to spend money to fix up his property, and the financing tools for it were not very good. So one of the things that we did, and I felt that we made some progress -- Neal Hardy, who was then Commissioner of FHA, and then subsequently Phil Brownstein [Philip N. Brownstein], who is now Commissioner of FHA, as well as Assistant Secretary -- FHA and Urban Renewal staffs worked very closely to develop a program that would assure financing in rehabilitation areas or urban renewal areas. And we worked it out so that FHA and URA and the city would all agree upon the standards that would be established in a particular area for rehabilitation. And once those standards were agreed upon, FHA would agree to insure mortgages for rehabilitation in that area as long as the property owner could afford the payments. And then we got some legislation adopted which changed the way of vaulting the property so that a homeowner could get funds to rehabilitate his property. And then Widnall, bless his heart, came through with special low interest loans to families that couldn't afford rehabilitation -- not loans, loans and grants. And this, I think, if we'd have proposed it, it would've been killed, but Widnall proposed it on the Republican side and fighting for it vigorously, got it. And this was a big help.

McHUGH: Was this amount of money given substantial, so that it could be used on a widespread basis, or...

[-25-]

SLAYTON: Well, it was limited to fifteen hundred dollars per dwelling until by the grant,

and the loan was limited to ten thousand dollars per dwelling unit. The amount of money authorized was limited, but it's being increased. It's always a small amount in the initial stage of a program. And it takes a little while to write all those regulations and requirements for someone who's going to receive a grant or a loan. So you can't use in the first years a great deal of money. But Dr. Weaver's very much concerned with rehabilitation and pushed us hard to try to do more in that field.

McHUGH: Was this part of his -- well, he had certain non-delegable functions?

SLAYTON: The non-negotiable functions were the approval of the Workable Program, and the 105(c) determination, which was the determination that there was housing available, or housing would be available in sufficient quantity, *et cetera*, to meet the needs of the people displaced because of renewal.

McHUGH: Do you think that this was a difficult or -- some people felt that this was an impossible requirement, to foretell the future and to say that there would be housing, and that it was, in effect, forcing the LPA [Local Project Authority] to submit false statements. So you think that was so?

SLAYTON: No, the idea was to -- of course, you can't always foretell the future -- but the idea was to take a look at the existing housing supply and make some computations on past experience, on what vacancies would be developing at rents these families could afford, and then if there was a lack of housing, for the city to program some public housing. AND if public housing were needed we wouldn't go ahead with the renewal project unless PHA had agreed to some public housing; and then when we had the 221(d)(3) Program to program some moderate income housing to meet these needs. And it's very difficult. I think that our administration of it made it more difficult, that we acted as though one could project the precise relocation needs and the precise housing that would

[-26-]

be available.

McHUGH: What about the problem of the increased rents when these places were rehabilitated? A lot of people, well, presumably, were paying as much as they could afford, assuming they would live in better circumstances if they could.

SLAYTON: Well, you raised a very fundamental problem, which is not a problem of urban renewal or, really, it's a problem of increasing the housing supply at rents people can afford or at prices that they can afford. When you enforce the housing code, it's the same thing. You enforce the repairs to be made and the problem is that you increase the rents because the landlord has to increase the rents in order to pay for increased costs. The same thing on rehabilitation. You know you've got to think of

rehabilitation in two ways. There's the Georgetown type of rehabilitation, which is really a displacement of the people who are there, and fixing up the houses for a much higher income group. We were concerned with rehabilitation that would improve the houses, the housing conditions for the people who were living in the houses.

McHUGH: And enable them to live there at the same time?

SLAYTON: That was the intent. It's not always possible. But one thing we discovered, and we pushed pretty hard, and it's pretty effective, we found that -- and this applies primarily to property that's owned by the occupant, owner-occupied property -- that they would have two or three mortgages on the house, that the second and third mortgages would be at a high interest rate and for a short term. We worked out with FHA a system of recasting those mortgages, which would include refinancing of the existing mortgages, plus the cost of rehabilitation, and one new mortgage that would run for twenty, twenty-five years. And the result was that the monthly payments of those families went down rather than up.

[-27-]

McHUGH: Was this true in a substantial number of cases?

SLAYTON: Yes.

McHUGH: What about people in these areas, in some of these low income areas? The owners would be elderly people. You might have a substantial number of elderly people. What could they do?

SLAYTON: Housing for the elderly, particularly those who -- here's a couple that's on a pension, and they really have just about enough for their beans and a few clothes, and no money to pump into the house. This is one of the most difficult problems we ran into, and we tried to devise all sorts of schemes to get at that. The scheme that we finally ended up with was the direct rehabilitation grant of fifteen hundred dollars to make it possible for that family to improve its home.

McHUGH: Was that enough to do a dwelling unit, generally?

SLAYTON: Well, unless the house was completely without water and sanitation, which means it should have been torn down, unless the structure was a sound structure, and it was worthwhile putting these facilities in. Basically, it was because it meant fixing some wiring, doing some plastering, putting in some new flooring, maybe fixing the toilet, fixing the furnace, something like that. Generally, fifteen hundred dollars would be sufficient, not to create a mansion, but to create a standard housing unit.

McHUGH: At today's prices fifteen hundred dollars doesn't seem like very much. Labor

costs are very high.

SLAYTON: Well, yes, it's true. But these aren't great repairs. We tend to think of rehabilitation as ending up with a structure that looks like a redone structure in Georgetown. And these rehabilitated

[-28-]

units, if they are going to be kept for low income families have some characteristics that we wouldn't like very well. But, you know, the plastering may be kind of rough. You still keep the bathtub with the legs. You don't have a dishwasher. You try to make use of the equipment that is already there. So it's housing that is not the standard of new public housing.

McHUGH: What would you do if, say, some of these old houses would have structural problems such that probably you could spend the whole grant right there just on one item. What would you do in that case?

SLAYTON: Well, what you're asking, the question is: What do you do when the fifteen hundred dollars isn't enough? The answer is that you do what you can with fifteen hundred dollars and you don't enforce the code as rigorously as you might otherwise. You're trying to solve a problem, you're not trying to -- you're trying to improve the living conditions of the people there within the capacity. The alternative is to move the family out to public housing, and frequently, families didn't want to move to public housing. So you try to fix up that structure to the extent possible, within the financial limitations of the family and the money available through our program.s

McHUGH: Do you feel that people generally understood your intent here? I think there was a lot of fear of urban renewal.

SLAYTON: Yes, there was. There's always been. There's fear of a program that's going to displace you. You don't know when your house is...

McHUGH: Your house, perhaps...

SLAYTON: Your house. You don't know when your house is going to be taken. First, you don't know whether your house is going to be taken. Here's an area; there's going to be some clearance and some

[-29-]

rehabilitation; you don't yet know when they say they're going to prepare some plans for this area, and the city doesn't know, which house is going to be taken. This creates concern. Then, they wonder about what they're going to have to pay for a new house if their house is taken, when they ought to move, what about the kids' schooling, will they go to the same

schools? There are all sorts of these questions that are not urban renewal questions. They're questions that come about because of taking property and demolishing it. And it doesn't make any difference whether you're taking it for renewal, or highways, or whatever. And it's a very difficult problem, I think, though some effective programs were established to deal with it. Jim Banks, here in Washington, handled relocation in Southwest; and then he handled relocation in Northwest. And they began to develop in Northwest an organization of citizens that were concerned with the area while they were still living in it, and trying to keep the area together, so to speak, and wanted to know more about the possibilities of where they would live, and the housing to be available, and the kind of assistance they would get. Each city tries to provide this information, and if there's a citizens' organization there that is anxious to receive it, well, here's a mechanism for getting it across much better.

McHUGH: Well, do you think there were -- what about cases that the city just felt that it couldn't or maybe didn't want to provide housing for low income people? They just weren't, you know, weren't inclined to do this sort of thing.

SLAYTON: They didn't have an urban renewal project.

McHUGH: Did you find that some cities were accepting the money and just hoping that these problems would sort of solve themselves?

SLAYTON: Well, no. Some cities would go ahead with a project, and then run into a very serious problem which would hold up the project.

[-30-]

McHUGH: You mean the difficulty -- what would be your problem with the public? Finding housing, or that people wouldn't move?

SLAYTON: No, not the problem about the people not moving, so much as having special, in the field of relocation, special problems -- large families, for instance. In Southwest, Washington, for example, the large families -- this is true in any renewal project -- the large families are the most difficult to find new housing for since their demands for space are great, and since the rent...

McHUGH: The wear on the building, too.

SLAYTON: What's that?

McHUGH: The wear on the building...

SLAYTON: The wear and tear on the building is considerable, and most landlords don't really welcome eight or ten kids. So this requires really special searching out.

And one of the things, you know, that has developed, is this leasing program that the Housing Authority in Washington has been practicing. They've practiced it under a demonstration program, and now it's part of the legislation, where the Housing Authority goes out and leases from a landlord a large house, and assures him of rent for three years, or something like this, if he agrees to improve it to certain standards. And this has provided a tremendous recent development. It's provided a resource for large families that just wasn't available before.

McHUGH: Has this been effective in other cities, have you been able to use this?

SLAYTON: Other cities are beginning to use it. It was put in the legislation in 1965, and it has lots of potential. You keep running into these problems and you try to think of ways to solve them and you keep adding to the legislation and the requirements.

[-31-]

McHUGH: Do you think the cities did an effective job in informing the people, or the agencies, in informing the people what to expect?

SLAYTON: Well, there's a difference here among cities, and there's a difference in time. I would say in the early days of the renewal program, this was the first time there had been any relocation requirement, that, not an effective job was done in notifying families. But it became clear, certainly, in more sensitive cities that it was very important to notify the families in the area about what was going on. And so cities developed information pieces. They would have these pamphlets. We had a collection, a stack of them, and we would circulate them around to other cities so cities would see what other cities were doing in this. They would have people call on the families, distribute these pamphlets. They would say, "Don't move without seeing the relocation officer," and all of this. It began to develop -- it did develop in a good many cities, as a pretty effective device. But there were some cities that needed jabbing.

McHUGH: What were some of those cities?

SLAYTON: Oh, golly. We had some pretty bad experiences in St. Louis County, outside of St. Louis. I guess that's the name of the county where they were really using the, we thought, renewal program to get rid of the Negroes in the County. And their idea of relocation was to move them to public housing in the city of St. Louis, which already had a high concentration of Negro families. And we halted relocation there until they built housing in the area for the families being displaced. We had a problem up in -- what's the town in New York where they had that City Manager who a...

McHUGH: Oh, yes, Newburgh.

SLAYTON: Newburgh, yes.

McHUGH: Mitchell [Joseph McD. Mitchell], was the City Manager?

[-32-]

SLAYTON: Yes. We had, as you might have expected, some problems in Newburg. These aren't the only places we had problems. I'm just trying to think of some examples.

McHUGH: Sure, I understand, some of the outstanding ones.

SLAYTON: But the big cities, of course, did a, generally, I thought, a very good job.

McHUGH: Did you find that the people that the agencies were involving, the people -- there was a requirement that the Workable Program required a citizens' advisory council. Were these people involved in the planning, or were they presented with an accomplished fact? And this varied too, I supposed.

SLAYTON: There was a requirement that there be citizen participation in the Workable Program, which was concerned with the city as a whole. And there was not requirement that there be citizen participation of families in the area in participating in the planning. In a rehabilitation project there had to be a considerable amount of rapport with working out the plans for the area, working on the plans for the area and involving the people in the area, because you really couldn't get a project accepted if the people in the area were really basically opposed to it, a rehabilitation project. On clearance, when you have a slum area that has to be cleared there's not much -- the involvement of the people in the area is to make sure that they understand the kind of rights they have and the kind of assistance they're entitled to receive in moving to standard housing. And in that sense we had the requirement that there be this association of the renewal agency with the people in the area, a very close association.

[-33-]

McHUGH: Did you ever consider the alternative of having the approval of the people in the neighborhood? I would think that if the people were against it, you wouldn't get cooperation in rehabilitation. I would think that they could stop your work rather effectively.

SLAYTON: Oh, yes, they could. Generally, in rehabilitation there's not much problem on renewal projects where you're going to undertake rehabilitation. There's some concern, say, there would be initial concern. "What does this mean? What are we going to have to do to our house?" and all of this. "Have to spend a lot of money. Maybe it means we're going to be cleared anyway." There was a lot of this concern. But the only

way you could get rehabilitation in an area is just to work with the homeowners, and work out the specifics of what could be done for his project. We did several things in rehabilitation areas in terms of community organization. One, we would permit money to be paid to a citizens' organization for staff, so that they would have some resource in organizing, in assisting, in participating. And then we provided a considerable financial assistance as part of the administrative costs of the agency, the local renewal agency, in providing technical staff that would meet with each individual homeowner and go over his whole budget, and find out what he could afford, to inspect his house, of course, to see what had to be done, to help him work up the improvements that had to be done, to give him a cost estimate, to help him deal with the contractor. Frequently, there would be an architect on the staff to draw up some sketch plans, what ought to be done, what has to be done. This is the only way when you have homeownership in a rehabilitation area that you can have effective rehabilitation.

McHUGH: What could you do in areas, some of the low income areas where the people undoubtedly, a lot of the people, have poor credit, temporarily unemployed, or...

[-34-]

SLAYTON: Well, the credit problem was, of course, this is a serious problem. Here we would have, the renewal agency would have to persuade FHA that they were a good risk, or a savings and loan association that they were a good risk.

McHUGH: I would think that would be a pretty impossible job.

SLAYTON: Not necessarily. FHA did some experiments with a guy who, under which he had an insurance program in effect for payments on mortgages for these low income families to demonstrate...

McHUGH: Was it a private individual?

SLAYTON: Yes. This was a demonstration project though under FHA to demonstrate that these people, the people that he would select, even though they were apparently bad credit risks would pay their rent, would pay their mortgage payments, because their records of nonpayment were installment credit items where they had been sold a bill of goods -- hot salesman sort of thing -- but weather they had a record really of paying the rent. And it was very successful. That's a little footnote to this question of low credit. But you see, another thing is that with these low interest loans from the federal government, direct loans from the federal government for rehabilitation, plus the grant, now you have a mechanism that can deal with the families that do have a low credit rating as well as not much money.

McHUGH: Does this include people who have poor credit, who don't have the habit of paying the rent?

SLAYTON: Does what include that? I don't know if I understand your question.

McHUGH: Well, can you help these people if you have to -- well, let's say that some of these people might not have what might be called middle

[-35-]

class standards in terms of punctuality of payments, or paying at all, perhaps, if they thought that, well, say, they could get away with it. If you had a substantial number of people, who, say, a subculture who had this kind of feeling that, well, that the outside sort of represented the enemy and they weren't going to do anything, is there anything you could do about this? When you had to move a community of people, what could you do? Could you refer them to public housing?

SLAYTON: Well, the low income families, of course, would go to public housing. You could try to persuade a private landlord to take a family that he might not otherwise want to take. You could try to bring in the social service agencies to work with a family. Of course, the question is: What do cities do with problem families? Whether they live in this area, the renewal area, or whether they live in another area, how can you find housing for them? How can they be instructed in the maintenance of urban property? How can they be conditioned to live in urban areas, if, say, they've been living in a rural area? It's a very difficult... And you can't really. I don't want to overgeneralize on this, but there is evidence that by providing some assistance in homemaking, some instruction, and some evidence of interest in the welfare of the family, that you can begin to change living patterns and attitudes.

McHUGH: Did you find that LPA's tend to be very impatient with this kind of planning? Some people felt that this was basically a real estate operation and that they were being asked to solve social problems.

SLAYTON: Oh, I think there was a good deal of feeling in the early days of urban renewal that -- it was kind of a defensive feeling in a way -- that here urban renewal was going into areas that housed the most difficult social problems, and the purpose of the renewal program was, say, to clear this area, and to relocate the families. And in the process they couldn't be expected to solve all the social problems. I think that's a fair statement today. But in the first place the renewal

[-36-]

agency didn't have any resources to get at the social questions. The only resources they had was money to find houses for people displaced. Several did have social workers on the staff

to help them, these families, in the process. But it could not be a major social service operation, just a very, very small social service operation. And so we worked hard to have renewal agencies relate to the existing social agencies so that at the time a family was being displaced and there was some evidence of social need, that they would bring in the social services to help that family at that time. Then, in addition, we ran a couple of experimental programs where, on the West Side of New York, the Housing Redevelopment Board made a very detailed, in-depth survey of all the families in that area to try to get at the social questions that were being generated -- not being generated, but were there. Same thing was done in a Community Renewal Program in Detroit to try to get some picture of the social condition and the social needs so that some programs would be designed to get at these specific problems. But the renewal program itself does not have authority to spend money to provide the social assistance. Of course, the anti-poverty program came along, and this provided a great new resource and mechanism for dealing with these issues, these problems, that we didn't have before.

McHUGH: Did LPA's tend to feel that getting involved with the social agencies caused a dilution of their authority?

SLAYTON: No. It's hard to speak of a renewal agency. You know. There's quite a spectrum. Generally, I would say that they welcomed the social assistance. They found it difficult to persuade the social agencies to begin to deal with this kind of a problem on a referral basis.

McHUGH: Did they regard it as being the urban renewal agency's problems rather than theirs?

SLAYTON: No, but they have their caseloads, and the thing runs along. And so all of a sudden you begin throwing a lot of new families into the hopper,

[-38-]

and they're overloaded in their work.

McHUGH: A lot of these people never would have come to the recognition of the agency.

SLAYTON: It's a very interesting thing; the surveys that were done in Detroit and New York indicated that there were a lot of people who were eligible for assistance, welfare assistance, and they never applied. You have to seek them out.

McHUGH: That's amazing. Did you find that when people were referred that the agency would accept them, assuming that there was some basis for eligibility?

SLAYTON: Yes, the degree of involvement of the social welfare agencies in these cases varied considerably from city to city, but there was this liaison arrangement

established by the renewal agencies in relocation, and it worked better in some areas than in others.

McHUGH: In which areas did you have problems?

SLAYTON: Well, I'm kind of hard put now to think of where we had problems.

McHUGH: Well, I suppose rural areas would have probably been...

SLAYTON: No, not so much. I don't recall that being that kind of a problem in a rural area. The number of families being displaced were fewer, the small town, the families are known better. You don't have this anonymity which you have in the larger city. Well, I just can't offhand bring a problem area in that respect to mind.

McHUGH: Well, in some areas of the South, weren't they, even when people were eligible, weren't they loathe to admit them to assistance programs?

[-38-]

SLAYTON: Well, I'll have to say that I know that's happened in places in the South but I knew of no case like that that was brought to my attention through urban renewal.

McHUGH: Did state governments feel that their role was substantially decreased by you dealing directly with cities?

SLAYTON: Well, I think that they probably did in many instances, except I don't know quite whom you're talking about, unless, maybe it be the governor, because there aren't many...

McHUGH: Well, I suppose that's ultimately what it comes down to.

SLAYTON: ...state officials who are involved in this kind of question of urban renewal. This is a standard position of the states. It has nothing to do with renewal as such, except renewal does deal directly with the cities, that all funds ought to be channeled through the states...

McHUGH: There had to be enabling acts in each state, though, didn't there? Is that correct?

SLAYTON: Yes. There had to be enabling legislation.

McHUGH: Did some of the states refuse to allow you to operate within them?

SLAYTON: Some of the states refused to pass enabling legislation. I ought to correct the way you put that question. We didn't operate any place; we provided assistance to municipalities. The Federal Government doesn't operate an urban renewal project. Some states did not pass enabling legislation, or passed enabling legislation that really wasn't very effective, having nothing to do with, really, the issue of bypassing the state government as they would put it. The issue was an ideological one. The issue might also be one of the Federal Government becoming involved and what the cities ought to do, and this sort of thing. It was ideological.

[-39-]

McHUGH: Did you usually find that cities...

SLAYTON: All states have enabling legislation.

McHUGH: They do now, is that correct?

SLAYTON: It's deficient in a couple.

McHUGH: You mean they limit your powers?

SLAYTON: They limit the city's powers, as in Louisiana where you can't use eminent domain if the re-use of the property is going to be anything other than public.

McHUGH: I see, I see. Well, then...

SLAYTON: They hope to get that changed this year, by the way.

McHUGH: That changed?

SLAYTON: There's hope in Louisiana that the legislature will amend the legislation.

McHUGH: I see. Were mayors generally strong backers for urban renewal?

SLAYTON: Very.

McHUGH: Would the political costs, the possible political costs deter them?

SLAYTON: Well, quite the contrary. The major mayors ran on urban renewal platforms, and mayors would be defeated because they hadn't done enough in urban renewal. That is, they did not have something to show for what they'd been doing in renewal. They had created disruption and...

McHUGH: Where was this true?

[-40-]

SLAYTON: Well, I think that in some cities in Pennsylvania, Lancaster, Trenton in New Jersey.... Mayor -- my good old friend, what's-his-name -- Holland [Arthur Holland] was defeated, and I think one of the reasons was that he had had lots of problems, not really his fault, on these couple of renewal projects being held up for a number of years.

McHUGH: Was it with the regional office?

SLAYTON: No, it was legal questions on the guy who was going to be the developer, and we held up the disposition of the land because of legal questions, and on and on and on. So I think that his defeat, perhaps, had a good-could be attributed, in a great part, to that fiasco. But a guy like Dick Lee [Richard C. Lee], and guys like Mayor Daley [Richard J. Daley], Joe Barr [Joseph M. Barr], Dave Lawrence [David L. Lawrence], Cavanagh [Jerome P. Cavanagh] ran on renewal platforms. Cervantes [Alfonso J. Cervantes], who was elected Mayor in St. Louis, was critical of Tucker [Raymond R. Tucker], not because he was undertaking renewal but because he hadn't done more. I think the mayors were concerned about losing middle income constituents to developments outside the cities. And so they've had some concern about the new cities program which they feel will help drain off, continue to drain off, or accelerate the draining off of the middle income families, Negro and white, and leave them with the poor. And so they have that kind of concern. You have some feeling of loss of constituents by aldermen at times, and by state legislators who were elected from a district. I remember riding back on a plane to Chicago one day, riding on a plane to Chicago one day. I used to be in Chicago, I guess that's why I said, "back." This is before I was with the government. I was sitting next to a Negro and we started talking and it turned out he was a state legislator. He found out I was in urban redevelopment, and he said, "Hell, I don't like public housing either." And I said, "Why?" And he said, "Public housing begins to provide lots of services that we used to provide in our political organization, and urban renewal displaces my constituents." "So," he says, "I'm against you." A

[-41-]

very frank discussion. But that's not true of the mayors, because constituents stay inside the city, pretty much.

McHUGH: You mentioned the middle class, the concern about the middle class moving out. Do you think it was -- given the trend of the times -- that it was really feasible that people would move back into the city? This was a presumption, I believe, behind much of renewal.

SLAYTON: Well, yes. History has borne out the -- it's not so much moving back in, as people wanting to be able to live close in, and this has applied primarily to

couples whose children have grown and they've got a big house out in the suburbs and they don't want to cut the lawn anymore. And it applies to young couples who are getting established for the first time. And it applies to newcomers to the city, executives of corporations coming in and they want a place to live, and they haven't learned of the infamy or the character of the area which was the slum area. And so, if it looks like a good place to live, they live there. It took a long time for Southwest to overcome the stigma of it being a slum area. Southwest, wasn't a good address. Well Southwest has an entirely different character now. People think of Southwest as a pretty lively place to live. The big thing though is, you can't really do a job of providing places for people to live in close -- in areas if they have children, unless you have all the attributes of decent schools, and places for kids to play in, this sort of thing. And the school is clearly the most crucial question. If you want families, if you want to be able to provide for families with kids in close - in areas, you've got to have the schools that are really good schools and are not overwhelmingly Negro.

McHUGH: Well, did you find that in cities when they did undertake urban renewal, what happened here? This would seem to be quite a problem. You would think they would have to, well, do a great deal to change the whole administration of the school program, say, so that inferior teachers weren't sent to these areas or that the least money wasn't spent in these areas.

[-42-]

SLAYTON: Yes. It has kind of a reverse twist, too, the charge that you're put in the best teachers and spending more money in these new areas, and you ought to be spending in some other slum areas. Let me give you a couple of examples. The school in the Lafayette Project in Detroit, the Chrysler School, is a very heavy drawing card for people living in that area. And you find in this very close-in area in Detroit demand for those town houses, the fifty-cent word for row house, is very great because of that Chrysler School. It is a very desirable place to live. When I was with Webb & Knapp I worked very closely with the school board. When I was working on the development of Southwest, Washington, I worked very closely with the school board and Dr. Hansen [Carl F. Hansen] on the Amidon School, because the character of that school would be very important to families with children moving into the area. And it was established as a new kind of school. I don't know how well you remember the Amidon plan in Washington and all of that, which was... The plan was criticized and all of that. But it was considered a good school, and families did move down there, and they did send their kids to school, even though it now has, or did have, sixty-five percent Negro families in school. About two hundred of those families came from public housing. But, you see, then the charge was that all of the middle class families, white and Negro, in this area, Southwest, were going to Amidon, and here were these other two schools, Syphax and Bowen, which are pretty lousy schools in terms of physical equipment. I don't know about their teaching. And that this was inequitable, so that, therefore, they ought to have, to distribute this differently. And they just started this new plan. I don't know if you've been following it, or not, where they have certain grades going

to Amidon, certain grades going to Bowen, and certain grades going to Syphax. Now I think this is going to hurt the attraction of families with kids to Southwest, and I think we may end up with three schools that are going to be ninety to ninety-five percent Negro and maybe, not so good, or with more and more of the middle class white and Negro families not sending their kids to Amidon but sending them to private schools or moving someplace else. Interestingly enough on Amidon, it was built before the population of

[-43-]

Southwest was built up. So there was a policy that anyone who wanted to send his kids to Amidon could, so long as they provided transportation to and from. The major, the group that picked that up and used it the most, were middle class, middle income Negro families who felt that this school gave their kids a chance to get a middle class education. Overwhelmingly Negro families did this. Very interesting.

McHUGH: Did you have any success in persuading the cities to give a, say, a higher level of services to some of these areas? It seems that people felt that their problems came from the poor level of city services, police protection, and trash collection.

SLAYTON: Well, when a new area was established the municipal service generally followed the pattern of the quality of the municipal services to the better areas of the city. The real problem was to get cities to provide the kind of municipal services to the slum areas that they do in other areas, and pave streets, put in street lights, build decent schools, collect the garbage, and right down the line. The level of municipal services in these areas is not very good.

McHUGH: Would this be a reflection of the low power, bargaining power, politically, of these people?

SLAYTON: I think, certainly, in part, that. It's, let's say, a holdover. Holdover isn't quite the right word. It's a continuation, although this is diminishing of the double standard we've had for years, and years, and years. We've had a double standard of justice, of law enforcement, in primarily Negro slum areas than we've had in the rest of the community. The attention the police give to fights in Negro areas, in the Negro areas in the South, particularly, the whole different standard of justice -- they wouldn't pay much attention to the one Negro killing another, hurting another. And we have the same kind of standards, I think, pretty well applied in Negro slum areas in our major cities. We haven't

[-44-]

gotten ourselves to the point of really applying the same standards throughout the city. And, of course, as you say, the political power of the poor in the slum areas is considerably less

than in the better areas. They just can't demand, or haven't, until recently, been able to demand the kind of services that the rest of the city receives.

McHUGH: Did these people getting organized through or for urban renewal, did this -- did you have the impression that this increased their political power?

SLAYTON: Well, I would -- yes, particularly, for instance, in a rehabilitation area. The councilmen would be very much aware of this organization, they would be able to speak up at the public hearing. The councilmen would become aware of the needs of this area. They'd begin to see firsthand some of the problems that would be presented to them. They would be conscious that these people were going to vote, and their responsiveness would be important. Yes, I think so.

McHUGH: Did you find that poor people were likely to get involved in planning? I would think that there would be more of the homeowners, pretty much.

SLAYTON: No, you know, in any area there are not many people you can get involved in going to meetings, to worry about the planning of the area.

McHUGH: Even when they anticipate that something quite radical may happen to the area?

SLAYTON: But, if you have something that is threatening then they will rally round very greatly. When I lived out in Park Forest, Illinois, and it was a brand new community, and it didn't have the streets paved, and it didn't have sidewalks, and we had water in our basements, Jiminy Crickets, did we have organizations. They were setting up a school board. Boy, I was at a meeting every night, and we were banging all over the place, and well,

[-45-]

as soon as those things started getting corrected the average person really doesn't pay much attention to it. The new subdivision, and the street lights aren't in, and there's something wrong with the house, and so you write to the builder, and you organize and you get all heated up. So you organize around something that threatens you, a negative item rather than a positive item.

McHUGH: Did you find -- well, do you think that generally city administrations would take cognizance of the demands of these people in these poor areas? Some people maintain that the poor were not planned with, that they only planned with middle class people, or that they would go around the poor, ignore them.

SLAYTON: Well, you see, this is a -- you're talking about a subject that is a very involved subject and planning with people and planning for people is a slogan. It's not a

program. It's an emotional statement; "Doing the planning with the people"
sort of thing.

McHUGH: Did the government require to an extent -- or did the -- well, was it policy that people should participate in the planning? Or to what extent was it....

SLAYTON: Well, you see, I don't know what you mean when you say, "...participate in the planning." Should they decide the location of an expressway? Should they be able to veto expressway going through their area? Should they...

McHUGH: Yes, that would be the type of decision. One would think that possibly they might, I suppose, they would naturally want it to go around the area.

SLAYTON: Every area does.

McHUGH: Every area does, yes, that's the problem.

[-46-]

SLAYTON: Do they veto a mass transit system coming through their area? Do they.....
You've got to think of planning for the people, and with the people. There's something called the whole city, the whole metropolitan area, and everybody in that area needs representation, and they are represented by their elected officials. Of course, in Washington we don't have elected officials, but generally they are represented by elected officials. Planning for people can mean allowing a very small group, with is articulate -- it may not represent all of the people in the area -- to take a position, prevent something from happening, when something should. This is a very involved question, and it's.... I don't think it ought to be answered superficially, as a requirement that you're planning for people and with the people, planning for people. Basically, you find that planning for people really works in rehabilitation areas, because this is where they become personally involved in improving their own living conditions.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

[-47-]