

Harris Wofford Oral History Interview—JFK#1, 11/29/1965
Administrative Information

Creator: Harris Wofford

Interviewer: Berl Bernhard

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Biographical Note

Wofford was an assistant to Senator John F. Kennedy (1960); Special Assistant to the President for Civil Rights (1961-1962); and Peace Corps Special Representative for Africa (1962-1964). In this interview, he discusses his work on civil rights issues during the 1960 presidential campaign; contacts between the Kennedy campaign, Martin Luther King, and other civil rights leaders; John F. Kennedy's 1960 phone call to Coretta Scott King during her husband's imprisonment in Georgia; and efforts by the Kennedy camp to free Dr. King, among other issues.

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Harris Wofford
Harris Wofford

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I request that the gift of personal statement form signed by me on June 25, 1972 be amended so that the tape of interview one, and the following additional passages in the oral history transcript remain closed to researchers until June 25, 1982:

page six, lines thirteen through seventeen of the second Wofford answer.

page seventy-three, lines nine and ten.

page ninety-eight, lines seven through thirty.

page one hundred thirty-two, the last two lines on the page.

page one hundred thirty-three, the first two lines.

page one hundred thirty-nine, lines twenty-two through thirty-one.

page sixty-eight, line twenty-three through page seventy, line twenty-seven.

Harris Wofford
Harris Wofford

October 15, 1972
Date

Harris Wofford—JFK#1

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First of Three Oral History Interviews

with

Harris Wofford

By Berl Bernhard

November 29, 1965

For the John F. Kennedy Library

BERNHARD: Harris, when did you first get to meet or to know the President [John F. Kennedy]?

WOFFORD: In 1957, I was in Poland when he gave his speech on Poland. I had just been through parts of Asia after he had given his speech on Algeria. I came back to my law firm and then wrote him a letter saying how much I admired these two speeches, we had an exchange of correspondence then. I think he enjoyed having some support from the bottom end of the Covington & Burling law firm letterhead, since Dean Acheson [Dean G. Acheson], a senior partner, had attacked him publicly for those very two talks. Actually, I met him playing tennis back in 1945 at Clare Boothe Luce's.

BERNHARD: Where?

WOFFORD: Up in Connecticut. It was a week before I first went to the University of Chicago.

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BERNHARD: What were you doing up there?

WOFFORD: That was at the height of the period when I was in the world government

movement, and she was, too. In any case, the first time I really talked to him was in the spring of 1959. I'd seen a good bit of Ted Sorensen [Theodore C. Sorensen] in a number of small discussions on foreign policy. And Ted had suggested that I come and work for Kennedy, and then on one occasion Kennedy invited me up to talk, and he was most persuasive, we talked almost entirely on foreign policy, not at all on civil rights. Really, this account is not just on civil rights, is it, even though you and I together can cover a lot of the civil rights ground of the Kennedy Administration? Kennedy said on that occasion that he was going to run for president—this must have been around February or March of 1959—that he was going to run for president and the chief reason he was going to run was that he wanted to bring about a new foreign policy, and that if the various other alternative Democratic candidates whom he named, like Johnson [Lyndon B. Johnson] and Symington [Stuart Symington, II], were elected president, we might as well reelect Eisenhower [Dwight D. Eisenhower], for they would repeat pretty much a Dulles [John Foster Dulles] foreign policy. And he hoped to have a policy that would establish a new relationship with the developing nations and with the Soviet Union that would take us beyond the Cold War. It was a remarkable conversation because I later saw him do much the same thing with one civil rights leader after another: Martin Luther King [Martin Luther King, Jr.], Roy Wilkins, others. On each occasion he was very much on target.

BERNHARD: Well, was he talking about...

[-2-]

WOFFORD: He was on target for me. He said then just what I most wanted to hear. Now, I think what he said then he very much believed, yet should I also add that he knew that this was what I wanted to hear, and although the immediate purpose of that meeting (which was to ask me to join his staff) was not accomplished and I went ahead with my plans to go out and join the faculty of the Notre Dame Law School, I was much impressed.

BERNHARD: Were you working at the Civil Rights Commission then?

WOFFORD: Yes, although he was asking me to join his staff to be a speechwriter on Asia and Africa. He had looked at, and Sorensen, I guess, had read the book on India that my wife [Clare Lindgren Wofford] and I had written some years before, after we were students there, *India Afire*, and he knew I had worked for Chester Bowles [Chester B. Bowles]. And as far as I know, he didn't know anything about my connection with civil rights on that first occasion.

BERNHARD: Did you ever talk to him about civil rights then?

WOFFORD: Not then, not at all, no.

BERNHARD: When was the next time you ever talked to him?

WOFFORD: I talked to him a few times that spring, as I was saying, as I was deciding first whether I was for him in the presidential race, and second, whether I wanted to go to work for him. And I don't think he could ever quite have understood why I went ahead with the idea of going to Notre Dame, which was a kind of corollary to the work that you and I and Father Hesburgh [Theodore M. Hesburgh] and others had done on the Civil Rights Commission. I think if he had come sooner, I might have joined him then instead of going to Notre Dame.

[-3-]

The next time I saw him was, I suppose, during the Wisconsin primary. I had encountered Sargent Shriver [R. Sargent Shriver, Jr.] as a result of our Civil Rights commission's report. I had given a speech on the commission's report to the city club of Chicago, and Shriver had risen to ask a question. I didn't then know of any connection he had with Kennedy or who he was. But he asked, "What would someone who has studied Gandhi [Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi] suggest for someone on the school board of the city of Chicago in terms of a symbolic action that might break the vicious circle of the racial problem in the city's school system?" I don't think I gave a very good answer, but he came up afterwards and said that he was very serious about his question, and if I had any thoughts please send them to him. And about a week later I got a letter saying, "Dear professor,"—he's the only one that ever called me that—"we on the school board of Chicago are in real trouble, and we need..."

BERNHARD: They still are.

WOFFORD: "...a way to break this vicious circle, and if you have any ideas, send it." Then about three weeks later, we were sitting at home and Shriver called and said he had brought some friends up on a plane for a Notre Dame football game and could we come over. So Clare and I went over to the football game, and throughout, Shriver talked about the racial problems of the city of Chicago. He was not just a member of the school board, he was the president of it, and had been for some years, I believe.

BERNHARD: When was this? In the fall of '59?

[-4-]

WOFFORD: That was the fall of '59. Then Shriver was put in charge of the Madison, Wisconsin area of the Wisconsin primary and some other district and asked me to come up to give a talk. By then, I had said I couldn't join Kennedy's staff but that I was for him for president. So I gave a talk on the theme that there was a Stevenson [Adlai E. Stevenson]-Humphrey [Hubert H. Humphrey]-Bowles-Kennedy view of the world which Kennedy was best able to convey and to carry out.

BERNHARD: What led you to that point of view?

WOFFORD: The discussion with Kennedy plus his speeches on Poland and Algeria, which were in some ways the most promising of all in the period of 1957 to '58. But it leads me to report a postcard I got from a friend after the election, someone who was not convinced by that case. You remember first at the convention Kennedy selected as his vice president someone who was even more suspect than his brother or his father or his family or even his church, Lyndon Johnson. And his first act as president-elect was to reappoint Allen Dulles [Allen W. Dulles] and J. Edgar Hoover. So I got a postcard from Tom Hughes [Thomas L. Hughes], an old friend who later became Director of Intelligence Research in the State Department under Kennedy and Johnson. He said that he wanted me to know that he had voted for the Kennedy-Stevenson-Humphrey-Bowles-Lyndon Johnson-J. Edgar Hoover-Allen Dulles view of the world. And I'm sure he was half right—I'm sure I was half wrong—in the view of the world that I was reporting as Kennedy's. It was a much more complex view of the world that did include all of those other factors. It saw the promise of Lyndon Johnson; it wasn't able to take the Yankee Puritanism or total liberalism of Chester Bowles; it wasn't able to see through Allen Dulles's plans for the first Cuban invasion. Maybe it was *too* complex a view of the world.

[-5-]

BERNHARD: When did you actually come down and leave Notre Dame, really, and work actively for John Kennedy?

WOFFORD: I guess about the first of May, 1960. About six months earlier I had a second round when Father Cavanaugh [John J. Cavanaugh] came over to see us and said that he was on an embarrassing mission; that he was very close to the Kennedys and Mr. Joe Kennedy [Rose Fitzgerald Kennedy] had called him and said that he heard there was a fellow that his son Jack wanted to have work for him, who for some crazy reason had gone out to join the faculty at Notre Dame instead, and the least Notre Dame could do was to give him to Jack if Jack wanted him. And I asked him if he had conveyed this message to the President of Notre Dame. He said Father Hesburgh would be very burned up if he heard, we laughed, and that was about all that occurred on that occasion. But it showed me a little of how Joe Kennedy [Joseph P. Kennedy, Sr.] worked.

BERNHARD: What was the follow-up to that?

WOFFORD: I did work that winter in my spare time, reading all of Kennedy's speeches over many years, and helping to edit a book that was published by Harper [Harper and Brothers] called *Strategy of Peace*. I think I suggested this book to him and I think perhaps that, as editor, I unduly conveyed the Kennedy-Stevenson-Humphrey-Bowles view of the world. Then I joined his staff full-time in May. When I got there, Sorensen said that, whereas when we were first talking about joining them they hadn't really anybody other than Sorensen who could draft speeches that were close to what the Senator wanted, that since then Dick Goodwin [Richard N. Goodwin] had come along and that he did this even better than me. He also suggested that my being close to Sargent Shriver

wouldn't be useful to me with the Kennedy campaign. I think he used the phrase that Shriver was considered the "house Communist," that he was the super-liberal in the family. Finally, he said he wanted to make sure I knew their definition of good and bad; whatever helps the nomination of John Kennedy is good; whatever hinders it is bad. A warm reception!

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Somebody told them that I had had a lot to do in the civil rights area, and one day Kennedy called me in the very first weeks I was there. I had done a couple of speeches, I guess, for his talk to the African ambassadors, on Asia and Africa. He said that he understood he was in trouble with the Negroes in this country, and that I knew something about all this, and did I think he was.

BERNHARD: Did you have any feeling at that time that the President had a particular interest in the problem of civil rights or did he recognize it as a political problem?

WOFFORD: The latter.

BERNHARD: Had you ever talked to him about it before that time?

WOFFORD: No. I said that I thought he was in trouble. I had not given it much thought, as a matter of fact.

BERNHARD: Did Sorensen give any reasons at the time why he thought the President was in trouble?

WOFFORD: This was Kennedy himself

BERNHARD: Oh, this was Kennedy himself,

WOFFORD: ... who called me in one morning in May after I had gotten there and said that he understood that he was in trouble, and I guess that I helped confirm that.

BERNHARD: What was his problem?

WOFFORD: Well, he had voted, as you probably know, for the Jury Trial Amendment in the civil rights debate in '57, was it? And he had done nothing on the other side to convey any real connection with the movement for civil rights.

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BERNHARD: What did you tell him?

WOFFORD: Also, the only Negroes he was associated with were not particularly identified with the civil rights movement. I told him I'd look into it, but my guess was that he was outside the current of the civil rights movement, the civil rights leadership, and that he was very far down on the list of the people that they would support.

BERNHARD: Did he ask you to do anything about it?

WOFFORD: No, we talked about it then, and he asked who he should see, and I began to arrange for him to see some people at breakfasts. We arranged a meeting with Roy Wilkins, and King. I forget—there were several breakfasts for other occasions that were arranged then. Then shortly thereafter Bob Kennedy [Robert F. Kennedy] called me and said that they had concluded that they were in trouble with the Negro vote and he wanted me to come down to his office and work full-time on that subject.

BERNHARD: What do you mean, "come down?" Were you still at Notre Dame?

WOFFORD: No, I was then up at the Senate Office Building. I was beginning to do speech writing for Kennedy. And Bob Kennedy was down at the foot of Capitol Hill in a building around Fifth Street. He said that there was a family man on this subject that they wanted to work on it whose name was Sargent Shriver, and did I know him. I had met him during this previous year. I was delighted that he was going to be the family man, and Bob Kennedy said, "We want you to head up the civil rights section of the campaign and work through Shriver and do everything you need to do to deliver every Negro delegate going to the Democratic Convention."

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BERNHARD: Do you recall about what date that was in '59?

WOFFORD: Middle of May I would guess—1960 we're talking about now.

BERNHARD: What happened after that?

WOFFORD: We set up the section. Shriver hopped in and out of Washington a couple of times. We arranged for Kennedy to meet many of the key Negro leaders. He did very well discussing with them. He learned from them as he talked.

BERNHARD: Did you participate or listen in on those meetings?

WOFFORD: Quite a few of them.

BERNHARD: What was your general opinion of them?

WOFFORD: One of the most critical ones was a fairly big one that could have flopped badly. One of the key states before the Convention was Michigan, and Kennedy was particularly behind in Michigan with the Negroes and with the liberals. And Governor Williams [G. Mennen Williams] and Millie Jeffrey [Mildred Jeffrey], the Democratic committeewoman, and several other people out there suggested that there ought to be some occasion when Kennedy really talked and answered questions in a no-holds-barred discussion with some of their key civil rights and Negro leadership. So we gambled and invited the Governor to fly a whole planeload of his top civil rights leadership, mostly Negro, down for a breakfast, an all-morning discussion with Kennedy at his home in Georgetown. It was a very militant group that came in—the Governor himself, but particularly the people he brought. I suppose it was Kennedy's hardest test before the Convention.

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BERNHARD: When was that meeting? Do you remember the date?

WOFFORD: No.

BERNHARD: Was it May or June?

WOFFORD: I would very roughly guess it would be about June 1, 1960.

BERNHARD: What happened at that meeting? Do you recall?

WOFFORD: Kennedy was candid and he listened, and he made quite a few promises.

BERNHARD: What promises?

WOFFORD: I can't recall that, but they were satisfactory to the group. That is, he promised executive action; he promised legislative action; he promised a strong platform. He went much further than any of us, to that point, had heard him go.

BERNHARD: At that point, were you convinced that he was committed in the area of civil rights; that he was knowledgeable in the area; that he looked upon it as a moral issue? Or what was your evaluation of the President at that time?

WOFFORD: I think I can convey that answer best by skipping, and describing an occasion a couple of months later, after the Convention, I suppose in August, 1960, during the congressional session. When Kennedy picked me up in the morning—he saw me on a street corner waiting for a cab and was driving his red

convertible, and we were heading toward the Senate Office Building. He was driving very fast and his left hand was tapping on the door of the car. And he said, “Now, in five minutes, tick off the ten things that a president ought to do to clean up this goddamn civil rights mess.” I think I tried my best to do that. I think that Kennedy found it appalling that we were in this mess. He considered it

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irrational. He was not knowledgeable about it. It was alien to most of his experience. He was ready to learn. He was not committed to any positions at all. His vote on the jury Trial Amendment in 1957 was based on a judgment on that particular issue. He had no entrenched positions at all in this area, but he was learning, and he was offended by the discrimination. I think the question then and thereafter was what priority he gave to it, how he weighed it with other issues—with critical foreign policy issues, with matters of peace—with Berlin, that was always the crucial thing with him. It certainly for him was at bottom a moral question, but like peace and other questions, it always had to be weighed as a political judgment; the priorities had to be weighed.

BERNHARD: That was when? In August...

WOFFORD: Yes, I guess. You hadn't encountered Kennedy had you?

BERNHARD: Yes, I actually met him in 1956 down in Palm Beach.

WOFFORD: When was that? You beat me to it?

BERNHARD: Well, I was down there, actually trying a law case, but I was, in my spare time, trying to help Paul Rogers [Paul G. Rogers] who was running for Congress down there. And he had a party for John Kennedy and he invited me to come over there. He wanted me to meet him. He was a fellow congressman then, and that was the first time I really met him. I didn't talk to him at any great length. He was having a lot of back trouble at that time, and he had just come back.... I think it was either—I can't remember whether it was after his operation or he was going in to have one. And we just had a general chat about things. That was the only time I had seen him really until the time when we discussed whether or not he was going to nominate me and that was in '61. I had seen him a few times, you know, just social functions or something in the interim, but that was all.

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WOFFORD: As I said, I think the only thing that struck him about me in those days was the contrast with a senior partner in the firm I was in then (Covington and Burling), Dean Acheson, who had just issued his public statement calling him an irresponsible young man.

BERNHARD: Because of what?

WOFFORD: Because of his speech opposing the French in Algeria.

BERNHARD: I didn't know that.

WOFFORD: My letter to him as a junior associate in that firm, I think, struck his sense of irony. His sense of irony, I think, was one of the more appealing qualities he had. Then when did you next encounter him?

BERNHARD: Well, I didn't actually see him until after he was elected then. And I never really talked to him until early 1961. I had no way to evaluate his reactions. I was with the Civil Rights Commission then, and my contacts had been strictly on a substantive level with the members of Congress. And his office at that time didn't evince any particular interest in this area, so I didn't see him until—I think it was some time in February of 1961, or it may even have been early March.

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WOFFORD: Almost all the things that I listed when he said, "In five minutes tick off the ten things a president ought to do to clean up this mess," came out of our Civil Rights Commission hearings and studies and recommendations. I sort of delivered the nutshell of the commission's reports.

BERNHARD: Well, I just want to go back to one thing. After you had talked to the President in August and you....

WOFFORD: He wasn't the President.

BERNHARD: Well, he was a candidate or a potential candidate in August of 1960. As I recall it, you did become involved on a full-time basis working in the campaign, and from discussions I've had with some of the civil rights leaders one of the significant things that took place during the campaign was the fact that Martin Luther King had accelerated the pace of civil rights demonstrations, and at the same time there was an uncertainty as to whether he would come out in favor of Mr. Nixon [Richard M. Nixon]. As you know, there was some indication that he was certainly favorably disposed toward Richard Nixon. His father [Martin Luther King, Sr.] was very much a friend of Mr. Nixon's, and it was sometime during that period of the campaign he was arrested for a demonstration; his wife was pregnant; he was put in jail. There was a story about the President calling Mrs. King [Coretta Scott King]. What is your knowledge about that whole incident? When did that take place, do you recall?

WOFFORD: From the time of the Convention, one of the questions for Kennedy and for King was their relationship during the campaign. King, I believe, concluded then, or very early, that they should not step up the movement and the protest, that, if anything, they should suspend them for the campaign.

[-13-]

BERNHARD: Why?

WOFFORD: I would have suspected that he was sympathetic to Kennedy from the beginning. In any case, he gave is every impression that he did not wish the civil rights issue to become a primary factor in the campaign. The story is full of irony that Kennedy would have appreciated. I hope King does. We were interested in the endorsement of King.

BERNHARD: When you say “we,” who is the “we” you’re talking about?

WOFFORD: Excuse me. Before the Convention there was a fairly thriving civil rights section that was in operation, if not in orbit.

BERNHARD: Who had put that together?

WOFFORD: I had been working with Shriver. I guess basically the two of us had put it together before the campaign. Kennedy had, before the Convention, Marjorie and Belford Lawford [Marjorie M. Lawson; Belford V. Lawson] who had been advisors to him for some time, who were not particularly close to the Negro civil rights leadership. They had been his chief advisors until we entered the picture and stirred things up. At the convention Shriver took a suite for the civil rights section. We had a breakfast for delegates every morning, and before the Convention was over I think we had 95 percent of the Negro delegates. Negro delegates and alternates at the Convention numbered, I’m roughly guessing, two hundred, two hundred and fifty.

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After the Convention, Kennedy, following Shriver’s advice, took a new turn in political organization, as far as I know, and had a whole parallel organization to the regional organization of usual political campaigns, a kind of ideological organization, an issues organization, and had whole sections devoted to issues. There was the civil rights section; I was the coordinator of that under Shriver. There was the urban affairs section; Adam Yarmolinsky was the coordinator of that under Shriver. There was the farm problem section, which was also under Shriver. There was the business and professional operation, which was somewhat traditional, under Shriver. At least those issues sections, we were in operation as a section of the campaign, with a great deal of leeway and autonomy, responsibility and scope, very little control. One of the problems I think in appraising Kennedy and the campaign and his family operation in politics is the thesis that has prevailed that this was a very efficient monolithic operation. Maybe compared to other operations, but I think most of us who were in it saw very little of that side of it. Certainly I saw mainly spontaneity, a lot of chaos, creative chaos, and scope for initiative and responsibility.

BERNHARD: How much were...

WOFFORD: We were very much on our own as far as I could tell.

BERNHARD: Well, how much was John Kennedy involved in the ideological groupings and the idea-generating panels or sessions that you had, and how much was Robert Kennedy involved?

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WOFFORD: I think John Kennedy's central principle in politics, as far as I was able to distill it, was his desire to see the maximum intelligence brought to bear on public problems. He had no ideology and, if anything, was put off by too far-reaching ideas. Certainly idealism or liberalism, in any conventional sense, was uncongenial to him, but he wanted to see minds brought to bear on problems and he gave full reign to this. He welcomed it; he brought it into his campaign to an extent greater than, I think, it has ever been brought in. Those who compare the 1960 campaign with the Stevenson campaign say that despite all Stevenson's love for ideas and ideals, that the Kennedy campaign in 1960 gave far more scope and a lot more money and a lot more attention to these issue sections than had ever been tried in a political campaign before. Bob Kennedy, I don't know to what extent he was involved or interested in this in the beginning. I'll come to it later on civil rights, but we were starting to talk about the King affair. And from the beginning of the civil rights campaign, it was of interest to Kennedy that King and the key civil rights leaders endorse him or convey to the Negro public that they had confidence in him. We had—we were constantly negotiating this from the beginning of the campaign almost to the end. We almost had a meeting in Nashville, Tennessee. King said in effect that if Kennedy would come down and meet with the board of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference and promise full action on civil rights, that they would then resolve that they had confidence in his leadership on civil rights, although they were not going to endorse him as a candidate. On the other side, three southern governors, according to Bob Kennedy, had said that if Kennedy supported Khrushchev [Nikita Sergeyeovich Khrushchev], Jimmy Hoffa, or Martin Luther King, they would throw their states to Nixon.

BERNHARD: Do you remember what states these were?

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WOFFORD: No. I would guess that Georgia and South Carolina—those governors were two of the governors that were being discussed. The first meeting was to be held in Nashville. I can't remember what happened, but I think that fell through. The second meeting was to be held in Miami between Kennedy and King and his board. Kennedy was coming down to address the American Legion.

BERNHARD: When about was that? Do you recall the date or the general period?

WOFFORD: You can check. I would guess the date would be late September. I remember being bitterly disappointed when it fell through because it had taken many hours of discussion on both sides to bring about the meeting and an agreement as to what they were going to say and what the issues were. I believe the original occasion proposed for Nashville King had backed out of, for some reason. But Kennedy backed out of this one because at the last minute Martin said that he was, of course, going to have to invite Nixon to meet with their board. Nixon was going to fly down to address the American Legion the day after Kennedy did. And Kennedy said, "To hell with that, Nixon doesn't have much to lose in this whole situation," and he, Kennedy, did; and if that's the way Martin was playing it, he'd rather not go and meet him. That is, if King was just going to fairly neutrally receive him and then the next day receive Nixon, it just didn't seem worth it to Kennedy. I was very unhappy when this all fell through. The irony is that King did not go ahead to Miami and then invite Nixon. He at least was sympathetic enough to Kennedy so he dropped the whole thing. What Nixon would have done, I don't know. I'm not even sure whether maybe he tried, and Nixon wasn't interested, so I can't be certain. In any case, King was Atlanta-bound, when he had hoped to be in Miami, and this is one of the minor comic touches in the whole story, because King had been advising the young, I guess it was the beginning of the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee, but in any case, the students, not to conduct a jail-going campaign in the midst of the

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presidential campaign, but he had not been able to prevail. I'm quite sure he was hopeful of being out of town on the day they had picked for their sit-in at Rich's Department Store. But when the Miami meeting with Kennedy broke down, King found himself back in Atlanta, with no excuse for not joining that day's sit-in at the Rich's Department store. So you can tell the day he was scheduled to have met with Kennedy was the day he felt compelled to join the students in the sit-in at Rich's Department store.

BERNBARD: That was in October of 1960.

WOFFORD: Early October or...

BERNHARD: Late September or early October.

WOFFORD: Yes.

BERNHARD: Of 1960.

WOFFORD: He had already been arrested for driving with a valid Alabama driver's license more than sixty days, I believe it is, after he had moved to Georgia. And had been sentenced to something like twelve months in the hard labor gang for this crime, high crime, but had been given a suspended sentence, so that as soon as he was arrested for sitting-in, there was the question of whether his previous sentence would then be invoked. He was in jail for several days. And I woke up one morning, a Sunday or

Saturday—I had decided to take off from the campaign to spend with my family and was enjoying myself greatly when suddenly a thought occurred to me: what an incompetent civil rights man I am for Kennedy when my friend, King, was in jail in Atlanta and I hadn't done a thing about it or thought about it or imagined what ought to be done about it.

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I ought to put in here that my association with King had gone back many years. I had first started working with him during the Montgomery bus boycott in 1955 and 1956; I went down and gave a seminar on nonviolence and the law to his Montgomery Improvement Association and had been in very close association with him for these years. So I called from home that day Morris Abram [Morris B. Abram], an old friend of mine who is a lawyer in Atlanta, and asked him what in the world he was doing about this situation in which King was in jail under the administration of his friend Mayor Hartsfield [William B. Hartsfield], who in the Civil Rights Commission and in other work I had come to admire greatly, and Morris was very close to him. And Morris said this was a very fortuitous call because the mayor had just called a meeting of all the Negro leaders of Atlanta, and he, Morris, was just going over to participate in it, and he would convey to the Mayor my interest in the mayor's doing something to get King out of jail. And I said, "Please do so and give him my regards," and we cheerfully hung up.

A couple of hours later the phone rang. Morris said, "Hold on to your hat. I realize you didn't mean anything like this. The Mayor wants to talk to you in just a minute. Let me tell you that he has just gone on the television and radio networks of the nation and announced that in response to Senator Kennedy's direct personal intervention, he has ordered the release of Martin Luther King." I said, "He said what, Morris?" He repeated it and then the Mayor came on and said, "Harris, I know that you didn't expect this, but when I see a peg I hang on it, and I needed a peg today, and you gave me a peg and I've been swinging on it the last two hours. And you get through to Senator Kennedy and you tell him that I'm giving him the election on a silver platter and don't throw it in my face." And we argued a little bit.

BERNHARD: About what?

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WOFFORD: Oh, about whether it was appropriate to say that Senator Kennedy had directly and personally intervened in this in view of the fact that I had rather casually called Morris Abram that day without having told the Senator anything about it.

BERNHARD: Had the Senator known that you had talked to Morris Abram?

WOFFORD: Oh no, not at all.

BERNHARD: At what point did the Senator actually become knowledgeable about what had been going on?

WOFFORD: Well, after I had heard that it was on nationwide television and radio I did my best to get through to the campaign party to let them know what had happened. They were out hedge-hopping in Kansas or Iowa, and either Pierre Salinger [Pierre E.G. Salinger] or Kenny O'Donnell [Kenneth P. O'Donnell] answered the walkie-talkie in a car that was in some kind of a parade out there. I tried to describe what had happened. Later that night they issued a statement saying that in response to many inquiries from around the country about the constitutional rights of Dr. King, an aide of Senator Kennedy had inquired about his constitutional rights.

BERNHARD: Had you made any formal request that anything be done, to Mayor Hartsfield?

WOFFORD: No. Not at that point, nor any request to Kennedy. I said I just sort of woke up on this beautiful day and decided that I had been entirely derelict, and so I called Abram.

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BERNHARD: Now, what reason did Mayor Hartsfield give publicly for involving himself with Martin Luther King?

WOFFORD: Only one: namely, the direct personal intervention of Senator Kennedy.

BERNHARD: And he said this publicly?

WOFFORD: On television and radio. Yes.

BERNHARD: When did you...

WOFFORD: Bob Troutman [Robert Troutman, Jr.], who was Kennedy's southern campaign director at that point, was taking his children to a baseball game in Atlanta and was driving in his car on the same pleasant Saturday or Sunday afternoon, and heard the Mayor over the radio. And Bob Troutman stopped the car, deserted his children and went into the drug store, and telephoned Bob Kennedy and said he suspected the dark hand of Harris Wofford in this.

BERNHARD: And what did Robert Kennedy say?

WOFFORD: I don't know that his suspicions were that aroused, but I was very soon thereafter in the presence of Robert Kennedy.

BERNHARD: That day?

WOFFORD: Oh, yes.

BERNHARD: What did he say?

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WOFFORD: Actually, he was very concerned about what we do henceforth. He didn't go over the past very much on that occasion. So was Bob Troutman, who was quite a person and a good friend of mine. Troutman, after he decided that he was not the victim of a well-planned plot, proceeded to draft a statement because he too agreed that it was disgraceful that King should be held and sentenced to hard labor for driving without a state driver's license. And he drafted a very strong statement—in fact stronger than I might have drafted—saying this was an affront to American justice and that King should be released, which he proposed that Kennedy should issue.

BERNHARD: What happened with that?

WOFFORD: Kennedy or Bob Kennedy decided they ought to reach the Governor of Georgia, and the Governor of Georgia [S. Ernest Vandiver, Jr.] said, as I understand it—he is reported to have said he would guarantee to “get the sonofabitch out of jail if Kennedy would promise not to issue any public statement.”

BERNHARD: Who was the governor then? Was it Griffin [Marvin Griffin], do you recall?

WOFFORD: I don't recall.

BERNHARD: Was this the same day or the day after?

WOFFORD: Several days thereafter.

BERNHARD: Well, how many days after the actual incident was it before you talked to Senator Kennedy about it?

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WOFFORD: That initial incident? I didn't talk to him about it at all. I heard that he had made the agreement with the Governor not to issue a public statement. I heard his case for doing so, which seemed quite persuasive; namely, that he was more concerned with the justice of the matter and with King's release than with getting votes or making a political issue and that, faced with the choice with getting King out of jail versus making a political issue, he didn't think he had any choice. And I appreciated that, but the thing continued to spiral because no sooner than he was released from jail by Hartsfield, than he was arrested by a county judge in Georgia and was back in jail. I think that was about the time, in fact, that the Governor of Georgia made the promise to get him out of jail. But the fact remained that these were Southern Democrats, these were Democrats

putting King in jail, and that at any moment this could become a national political issue even if, within a few days, the Governor of Georgia was going to get him released. It was a very tense political situation. Later we learned that very key Republicans were pressing for a major statement by Eisenhower or by Nixon saying this is what Democratic justice is like, and it could have been the turning point in the campaign, I suppose, the other way as far as the Negro vote was concerned, if Eisenhower had issued the kind of statement that Nixon says that he asked him to issue. Or if Nixon himself had issued a statement that was appropriate.

BERNHARD: What was the story of Senator Kennedy's actual call to Mrs. King? When did that occur?

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WOFFORD: Mrs. King had called me one afternoon. Some years before, when we first met her, driving her and her husband back from Baltimore one night around 1956 or '57, she told my wife how her recurring dream was that her husband was going to be killed in this movement, lynched or shot. And I think this was still overcoming her. She was some months pregnant; she just heard her husband had been taken out to a prison many miles out in the countryside in Georgia. From Morris Abram we had learned that this was a good move, that it had been arranged because this particular penitentiary was under a warden in whom everyone had confidence; that he would preserve the safety of any prisoner in the penitentiary. So we were relieved that he was in this penitentiary but that was no relief to Mrs. King, for whom the news that in the middle of the night, around three in the morning, he husband had been driven two hundred miles into rural Georgia, was a nightmare.

And when I finished talking to her, I realized I had not calmed her or given her sufficient support, and it occurred to me that this was one thing that Kennedy himself could do. He knew King, and I think he had met Mrs. King by then. And I tried to get through to Kennedy with this idea, but a week or so before I had brought such bad news with my account of the Hartsfield interview—I think that's probably the reason—in any case, nobody would answer the walkie-talkie. And I tried for several hours rather frantically and still no answer. I was at that point primarily concerned with, just that night, giving some support to Mrs. King.

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So I called Chester Bowles who was in Washington, where he lived. He said he would call her right away, and moreover, he would have Adlai Stevenson talk to her. Stevenson was at Bowles' house that night for dinner. The next morning she called me and said that she suspected that I had had Mr. Bowles call her and that it was the most wonderful thing that had happened to her. He gave her a sense that there was hope and that people cared, and she was very warm and all. She mentioned nothing about Stevenson, so I talked to Bowles later and asked him how it had gone and about Stevenson. And Bowles said that he had tried to get Stevenson to talk to her but Stevenson said that would certainly be

inappropriate since he had never met her, had never been introduced to her, something like this. For all my affection for Stevenson, I had a feeling that that was some insight into his problems in American politics.

Then Shriver called me a little later that morning—or I called Shriver—and I was telling him about this. And I said that I had wished that Kennedy had made the call because he had had so little occasion to convey his passion on anything. I forget the conversation, but in any case, Shriver said, “It’s not too late. Hang up.” He said, “I’ll go right straight out to the airport. I’ll put it to Jack right now; it’s not too late.” I remember feeling a certain exhilaration, but I wasn’t sure whether anything was really happening. And Shriver did drive out very fast to the O’Hare Airport.

But it wasn’t quite as straight a line as this story suggests. He got into the room and he looked around and he saw all the campaign aides and he concluded that if he brought it up in that crowd it would never happen. There would be a committee, and out of the committee would never come anything like this. So he waited, precariously because the plane was going to leave pretty soon. But Pierre went out to the press, and Ted went to finish a speech, and finally Kenny O’Donnell went into the john. Shriver put his foot against the door to keep it closed and said to John Kennedy, “I know you can’t issue a public statement, but Mrs. King is very upset and very pregnant, what about just telephoning her?” And he said Kennedy looked up and said, “That’s a wonderful idea. Do you have her number?” Shriver did; put the call through.

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Then back in Washington, the first thing we knew about it was that Morris Abram called from Atlanta and said, “It’s happened man; it’s happened.” And we said, “What’s happened?” He said, “Well, old Dr. King has just come into my office, and he said, ‘You know I was going to vote for Nixon because I’m a Baptist and Kennedy’s a Catholic. And I was leading the Negro ministers in Atlanta in supporting Nixon. But now, I’m here to deliver a suitcase full of votes because Senator Kennedy has called my daughter-in-law, and wiped the tears from her eyes. Any man who will do that, Catholic or not, can have my vote and the suitcase of votes that I bring, will you please send it on to Senator Kennedy.’”

Then a little later, I’m told, as they were landing in Detroit, Kennedy said to Pierre Salinger, who keeps asking him what he’s done to try to keep up with him, “...And this morning I called Mrs. Martin Luther King.” And Pierre said, “What?” About this time on the ticker from Atlanta, Bob Kennedy was getting the story.

Now, I have to stop here and describe the way that Ted White [Theodore H. White] in his first draft of *The Making of the President* described this. It was not wholly corrected in the final version. He said the idea having been suggested by me, a command decision was made and Kennedy called Mrs. King, while immediately in unison brother Bob in Washington called the judge [J. Oscar Mitchell] to get King out of jail. Well, the unison consisted of Bob Kennedy, in Washington in some fury, calling me and Louis Martin [Louis E. Martin], who was my chief partner in crime in the civil rights section of the campaign, into his office and saying, “Now you bomb-throwers have done too much in this campaign,” or, “This is the last thing you bomb-throwers are going to do in this campaign.” He was livid and angry, and I would have said perhaps frightened. In any case, he was pale, seemed so. And he

told us about Southern states that were probably going to be lost because of this. He was very exercised.

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So much so that when David Brinkley, twenty-four hours later, called up to say that they were reading a wire story that said how a brother of Kennedy had called the judge in Georgia to get King off. Could this be true? And which brother? I thought about the brothers and assured him I thought it could not possibly be true. He said, "Well, can I disregard it?" This was 6:30 at night. And I said, "I think you can. It just can't be true." I knew Ted Kennedy [Edward M. Kennedy] wasn't going to enter this, and I knew what Bob Kennedy thought.

About 11 o'clock that night Bob Kennedy called John Seigenthaler, his chief aide, and said, "Can you and Wofford get together and draft a statement explaining why I called that judge this morning?" I said, "John, he called the judge this morning? How could he have done that?" John said that Bob said he just woke up this morning and he was so damn mad that that cracker judge should put a decent American in jail for driving with an out-of-state driver's license, clearly on the grounds of color, and screwing up his brother's campaign to boot, that he just got the judge on the phone and said to him, "Are you an American? Do you know what it means to be an American? You get King out of jail!"

BERNHARD: Did you have a chance to talk to John Kennedy about that?

WOFFORD: Only once did he ever refer to it. On the Sunday before the election, I was taking him something that we wanted him to issue, but which he decided not to issue because he felt we had shot our bolt by then. And I was walking out to the plane with him at the Washington Airport—he was flying off for his last day of campaigning in Pennsylvania. And on the way out to the plane, he said, "Did you read what Martin Luther King's father said?" I said, "Yes." He said, "He said that he was going to vote against me because I was a Catholic. Now, he's going to vote for me just because I called his daughter-in-law. That's a helluva bigoted thing to say, wasn't it?" I said, "Yes." We walked along. He said, "Imagine Martin Luther King having a bigot for a father."

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We walked a little farther, and then he turned and with his best grin said, "Well, we all have fathers, don't we?" That's the only time he ever mentioned the subject.

BERNHARD: What other incidents took place in the campaign that perhaps later, or even then, reflected John Kennedy's attitude toward civil rights or his attitude in foreign policy that may have been borne out later on after he became president?

WOFFORD: The other major event, I suppose, was the constitutional rights conference that we held in New York.

BERNHARD: That was in October, too, of 1960 wasn't it?

WOFFORD: It was before the King affair, I'm sure. The thought was that just as the civil rights section of the campaign was new in that it was focused on issues and ideas rather than on the minority vote, which was the way political campaigns had been organized before, the climax of it ought to be something that would really carry the candidate along and convey what he had to say on the issues. So the key civil rights leaders of the country, Republican and Democrat, were invited to a constitutional rights conference in New York City for two days to discuss the main problems of civil rights and to draft recommendations for the new President. And we had workshop sessions of people, twenty-five, thirty for each workshop. With a few exceptions, all the major civil rights leaders of the nation accepted. I suppose something like five hundred of the most active civil rights people in the country came. The reports each of the workshops, in education, housing, voting, administration of justice, issued were very far reaching. They summarized almost everything that had been thought and written to date in those fields.

BERNHARD: Were you there?

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WOFFORD: Yes. I suppose I was the director of the conference. The reports were, in part, in some sense, embarrassing to Kennedy because they went even further than the platform. And the platform we ought to come back to. I just remembered the platform in terms of the theme of irony—we ought to cover that. But these reports went further than the platform. Kennedy came in at the end. He had first approved the idea of the conference, and he was a very perceptive, quick, bright man who saw things ahead of time. And I don't think it was a surprise to him that assembling these people was going to be embarrassing. I think he took the gamble, and then just before the conference he met with us to see what these reports were that he was to receive, because the format was: for an hour he was to hear all these reports delivered to him by the key civil rights leaders, and then he was to respond. And so we summarized them very briefly, and he went into the assembly, and for about an hour he listened to these reports. And then he gave a great response that carried him further in his commitment than he had until that date.

Ray Jones [J. Raymond Jones], a New York Democratic leader, then a leader of Harlem, who worked with us during the campaign, he called me on election day, and he said, "You know"—you have to know Ray to appreciate his describing this as a symphony—but he said, "You know," he said, "this whole civil rights campaign was a symphony. One movement after another." And he saw the King affair as the last movement, but the constitutional rights conference as the great movement before that.

BERNHARD: Who actually sponsored that?

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WOFFORD: Kennedy himself. The invitations were in his name. On the platform, there's just one story I want to tell. Bowles, if you recall, was chairman of the platform committee and was also supporting Kennedy in the campaign. There was a little slip-up because Bowles had in mind and on paper a fairly moderate civil rights platform, stronger than before but still fairly moderate. It was being, however, attacked from the southern white side. To counteract the predictable watering-down process, Bowles suggested several of us working with him to draft a maximum plank with everything, an enforceable FEPC [Fair Employment Practices Commission], et cetera.

The morning of the platform battle, Bob Kennedy, who then thought the issue was between a single Bowles draft and some dilution of it—and he was not fully informed about the far more drastic platform that included FEPC and a number of other planks—called a caucus of all the Kennedy people and said, “Our position is to support the full civil rights platform, and we're going to go all the way.” In the transmission of this, the word went forth that they were to support the strong platform, by which Bob Kennedy and the Kennedys had meant the more moderate Bowles platform but which in the heat of that battle meant the stronger draft. This resulted in the Kennedy people going in and tipping the balance in favor of the platform much stronger than anyone had imagined, including Bowles, who had countenanced this additional plank as a sort of a gambit which everyone understood would have no chance at all of being passed. And to the consternation of some and amazement of all—of those who proposed the strong plank, those who opposed it, and Bowles who had orchestrated the thing—the total plank of the civil rights people was adopted at the Convention. Kennedy took all this in his stride.

BERNHARD: Do you think he had any personal understanding of the scope of the platform in 1960?

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WOFFORD: I think that civil rights was not a high priority for Kennedy at this period.

BERNHARD: During the course of the campaign, do you think he reevaluated his position on civil rights or his exposure to people who were concerned about the issue?

WOFFORD: Not very much, no. But I think that his concept of executive action was one of his major themes that ran through everything including civil rights. I think he had a picture of a strong President who was giving leadership in all parts of our public life and all branches of government, and that civil rights was an aspect of this. I think he thought that he was going to give moral leadership in this area, an executive leadership that Eisenhower had not given. I think his chief concern then and very possibly, as far as I know, to the end of his life, was foreign policy and peace and relations with the Soviet Union and the other issues which, in my relationship with Kennedy, always seemed to be the dominant issues for him.

BERNHARD: Were you involved in giving him any advice that may have led to his

announcement in early December, prior to the time that he was actually inaugurated, that he intended to nominate Robert Weaver [Robert C. Weaver] as head of the Housing and Home Finance Agency? Do you know why he did that?

WOFFORD: My understanding at the time was that his reading of the politics of the situation was that by announcing his determination to nominate a Negro he thought that he would win sufficient Republican support to assure passage of the bill making HHFA a cabinet department.

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BERNHARD: It was really sometime after he was actually elected and before his inauguration. I never really understood that and I thought that maybe perhaps he had stated it to you or some others why he had decided to do that.

WOFFORD: My impression was that he was putting Republicans on the spot.

BERNHARD: One other thing that really came up before he was inaugurated and after he had been elected, and that was late in December, I remember Roy Wilkins gave a speech in which he deplored what he called the “super caution” of John Kennedy since mid-November in approaching the civil rights issue. And he couldn’t understand why he had begun to back off any discussion of legislation and had been emphasizing the need for executive action, particularly in the voting area. Do you know why this had taken place or what created the situation that inspired Wilkins to make these comments which were highly critical?

WOFFORD: I wouldn’t be surprised if Wilkins had been advised that there was not to be any substantial civil rights legislation the first session of Congress and was very disappointed about it. I think that Kennedy moved in this direction partly because of the higher priority he was giving to other issues in Congress and partly because he was—“tempted” I was going to say—he was pleased by the idea of how much could be accomplished by executive action without Congress having to be called into the picture. This goes to a much more far-reaching and general question about Kennedy, and that is his relationship with Congress. I think that he, as far as I could see, was quite intimidated by Congress. He weighed it very heavily, perhaps too heavily. In any case, some of my friends who come out of Congress feel that Kennedy, because he was never on top of the legislative branch, overestimated its powers. In any case, he was always greatly concerned with the degree to which civil rights issues, if thrown into Congress, would jeopardize all his other programs.

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BERNHARD: What was the day when he was inaugurated? Do you remember the date?

WOFFORD: Isn't it January 20?

BERNHARD: Yes, but I'm trying to think what was that day. What was that day? Monday? I can't remember, well, sometime prior to when he was inaugurated, when John Kennedy was inaugurated, he had a meeting with a number of the civil rights leaders. It was in January—sixth or eighth or one of those dates. Were you involved with any of those in setting them up or why he had them? Because out of one of them, Roy Wilkins, I remember, turned around from being quite critical of the positions that John Kennedy had taken since November and said that he was then satisfied that the President had assigned new priorities to civil rights and that he was satisfied with his commitments—just that thing. And it didn't really make very much sense to me at the time as to why Wilkins would come about 180 degrees from what he had said in late December. Were you involved in any meetings with the President and the civil rights leaders before, just before the inauguration?

WOFFORD: I remember meeting Wilkins on one occasion such as that during that period. I was not on Kennedy's staff then. I was working with Shriver on the so-called "talent hunt." I also remember the occasion when your—our—Civil Rights Commission met with the President just after he was inaugurated. On that occasion I had met with Chairman Hannah [John A. Hannah] and Father Hesburgh before they saw the President. Mrs. Lincoln [Evelyn N. Lincoln] would call me over to the White House when the President was going to be late for a meeting with civil rights people. I would be called over to entertain, and I was then. We talked for some time about what they were going to say to the President. They had very powerful things to say to him. They were rolling all their recommendations into one ball and they were going to deliver it to him. And I was very interested to see how Kennedy would respond. I had told them that I had just made this decision

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that I was going to help Shriver on the Peace Corps and go into the Peace Corps, which he had just been asked to head. They were discussing why I shouldn't work in civil rights. And we weighed the two things. I told them why I really had decided that I had contributed most of the ideas I had in civil rights and that I was going to try to help Shriver create this strange new animal, the Peace Corps.

And a little later in the day, Hannah called me up to say that, "Either you or the President were disingenuous because among our recommendations to the President, we said that under the previous administration, civil rights was in the basement, at best. And there really wasn't anybody in the White House concerned with civil rights, and you ought to have somebody concerned with civil rights in the White House." And he said, "Kennedy looked us in the eye, and he said, 'But I have a special assistant who is working full-time on civil rights, Harris Wofford.'" Of course he had never mentioned the subject to me since the election.

BERNHARD: I remember that meeting with the President because at the time, I didn't

understand that you were a...

WOFFORD: Were you in the meeting with the President then?

BERNHARD: That you were the special assistant.

WOFFORD: I wasn't.

BERNHARD: I was surprised. I didn't understand it at the time. What really took place after that?

WOFFORD: Ralph Dungan [Ralph A. Dungan] called me and said, "The President wants you to come over."

BERNHARD: Was that the same day the Commission met with the President?

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WOFFORD: I believe so. I had already heard from Hannah so I sort of guessed what was up. And I was trying to weigh in my mind what I ought to do. I remember going over there and waiting in Ralph Dungan's office to see the President and a very old friend of ours, Tom Hughes, happened to be there, too, from the State Department. And the old man of the White House who comes and swears people in with a book, you know—I can't remember his name.

BERNHARD: Hopkins [William J. Hopkins], is it?

WOFFORD: Yes, I think so. He came in and he said, "Are you Mr. Wofford?" And I said, "Yes." He said, "Would you raise your right hand." And I remember thinking to myself, I really ought to talk to the President about this. In any case, I raised my right hand and took the oath after him and a little later they called me in to discuss what the job would be.

But the more significant thing about that meeting was that as with most other meetings, including, I suspect, the meeting with Wilkins and civil rights popular leadership, the President made very sweeping commitments to carry out the programs. He conveyed to the Civil Rights Commission that he was going to do most of the things they had recommended. You ought to pick up the story from here if you were in that meeting.

BERNHARD: Well, I was only in one part of it, the first part of that meeting, and I don't remember everything that took place. I do remember Dr. Hannah using the phrase that he thought it was a great shame that despite his close friendship with President Eisenhower that the Commission had been the doormat of the administration as far as he'd been concerned, and he thought that it was unfortunate that every time an effort was made by the Commission to talk to the President about civil rights he always ended up talking to General

Persons [Wilton B. Persons], and that he thought something ought to be done that was dramatically different. And I think that was about the time the President indicated that he intended to do something different. He intended to have the responsibility lodged at the White House, and that he had already selected somebody to take care of that, and that Dr. Hannah would be pleased to know it was someone that he had worked with at the Commission. And I think Dr. Hannah was, one, he was rather pleased with this reaction, and two, he was rather surprised that the President was aware of the fact that you had been working at the commission. I didn't stay in during the rest of the meeting because there was going to be—as I understood it—some discussion about who the President should nominate as staff director, so I departed after the first part of the meeting.

WOFFORD: Was that your first meeting with Kennedy since the Florida meeting?

BERNHARD: That's right. And it was very brief. And I remember even before that you and I had had some discussions about who was going to have what jobs. I don't know if you remember that but things became very confused in the period right before, I guess it was right before the inauguration, as to who would be heading up the office in the Justice Department and the commission, and would anybody take on responsibilities at the White House. I always had the feeling at the time that part of the confusion at the time was the lack of commitment on the part of the Administration, or at least a lack of understanding of what had to be done in the civil rights area. And it was more a question of what the political needs were, to fulfill responsibilities. I could only remember that I was very pleased that at that first meeting with the President he at least seemed clear on what he intended to do, despite all the confusion that had preceded it. My own reaction was that it was rather remarkable confusion about what had to be done to structure the effort in the civil rights area within the government.

WOFFORD: I should confess my errors of judgment at this point, though, because, at this point in time, my guess was that the President was really committed to executive action on a very sweeping scale very fast, and that the resistance to such action might well come from Bob Kennedy, who was very connected with the Southern politicians that he worked with in the campaign and very disconnected from civil rights—and yet as he then developed, Bob Kennedy, in some sense, was the Puritan. For him, this became a black and white issue, a moral issue, and he responded immediately and strenuously on many issues, in contrast to Kennedy, the President, who began to balance the thing much more. I know this picture is complex, too, and one of the fascinating things is the Attorney General's and Justice Department's relationship to the Civil Rights Commission, which repeated the sad story of the Eisenhower Administration to some extent. Except in the estrangement...

BERNHARD: Except that it was even stronger in terms of concern. I think the Eisenhower Administration had not been one of reaction. It had been more one of ignoring even the existence of the Commission. I think the best illustration of that was when the commission first started to hold hearings and it began to create these problems in the voting area for the Department of Justice, then under Rogers [William P. Rogers] and under Eisenhower. There wasn't much of a feeling that they had any responsibility to react. I think that, quite to the contrary, Robert Kennedy had the feeling of a need to react, that there was a political problem in allowing some of the, what at that time appeared to be, wild ideas of the commission to gain currency. And I think that there was an affirmative effort made to contain the criticism of the commission more during the early stages when—they were most politically sensitive to any criticism of what I'd conceived at that time to be under the President's or Attorney General's—says that once you take care of the voting deficiencies you'd really taken care of the major problem that they had to confront.

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WOFFORD: I have to qualify that, perhaps as a result of the period of independence I had while you were still at the commission. I think—weren't you in '59, when I was at Notre Dame and I was very much involved in the effort to get the Civil Rights Act of '59 or 1960 to include the federal registrar plan of the Commission and some other things? I worked with Father Hesburgh, and Attorney General Rogers was almost violent in his reaction to our effort to press this issue. He was—also, it's irrelevant to this account right now, but I am sure the extent to which he conveyed his displeasure, his anger equaled anything you saw from the Attorney General when you went...

BERNHARD: Well, that may be true.

WOFFORD: ...when you were at all in conflict with him under Bob Kennedy.

BERNHARD: Well, that may be true.

[END OF INTERVIEW #1]

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