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Biographical Note
Carver was Assistant Secretary of the Interior for Public Lands Management from 1961 to 1964, Under Secretary of the Interior from 1965 to 1966, and Commissioner of the Federal Power Commission from 1966 to 1972. In this interview Carver discusses the Bureau of Indian Affairs and its Commissioner, Philleo Nash; federal claims to and use of Indian land; industries and commercial enterprises on or close to Indian reservations; problems working with Congress and other federal agencies on issues related to Indian affairs; the Miccosukee in Florida; and the Bureau of Land Management with Karl S. Landstrom as its Director, among other issues.

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John A. Carver, Jr. – JFK #5

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Fifth Oral History Interview

With

JOHN A. CARVER, JR.

October 7, 1969
Washington, D.C.

By William W. Moss

For the John F. Kennedy Library

MOSS: All right, Mr. Carver, I would like to talk this morning, at least to begin with, the Bureau of Indian Affairs. Excuse me. [Interruption] All right. As I was saying, I'd like to start with the Bureau of Indian Affairs this morning, and suppose we begin right at the beginning with the task force on Indian affairs. It's my understanding that this was set up by Secretary Udall [Stewart L. Udall], that it was not one of the President's [John F. Kennedy] initial task forces, but it

was one that was initiated by Secretary Udall under the general task force concept. Is this right?

CARVER: Yes, that's right. I don't recall just exactly how the task force idea started, although task forces were fairly common at the time. But it is certain that Mr. Kennedy, the President, was being pressured in a very direct way through his own staff to do certain things about the Indian Bureau.

MOSS: Specifically, who in his staff, do you know?

CARVER: I don't know who was the contact point in his staff, but some of the Indian

bar (members of the bar who represented the Indian Interest) had a pretty good entree to some of the people in the White House—Dick Schifter [Richard Schifter], Max Kampelman [Max M. Kampelman],

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people like that. The President had made, during the campaign, two or three pretty good statements on Indian matters, and there were a lot of rather direct representations made to the President about reforming the Indian Bureau. Secretary Udall decided fairly early that he wanted Philleo Nash to be the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, but Mr. Nash's history in Wisconsin politics had been such that he ran into a little flak, at least at the outset.

MOSS: He had been for Humphrey [Hubert H. Humphrey] initially.

CARVER: Yes. So the Secretary decided to ask Bill Keeler [William W. Keeler], who was a high official in the Phillips Petroleum Company and the principal chief of the Cherokees, to head the task force. And he gave them

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a very broad charter to go into the whole question of what the policy should be for the future in the Indian Bureau, Interior Department in the relationships with the Indians.

MOSS: Do you know why Keeler was picked over, say, somebody else, or do you know if there were any...

CARVER: I don't really know how Bill Keeler got into that role; I knew he was an absolutely outstanding choice for it.

MOSS: No conflict between Indian interests and oil interests?

CARVER: Well, that's pretty…. Not in terms of the charter of that particular task force. Some of the oil interests of the Indians in Oklahoma were subject to some political controversy, mainly because they were tax-exempt. Much later

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the problem of leasing by the Indian tribes of their oil reserves came up, but I do not think that there was any problem of any conflict of interest sort of thing.

MOSS: This wasn't the main thrust of the task force, was it?

CARVER: No, the main thrust of the task force was a devising of a philosophy or a policy for the governmental activities with reference to the Indians; the

carrying on of the governmental programs or industrial development, and that sort of thing.

MOSS: Would you say it was more a reaction or a response to the Seaton [Frederick A. Seaton] termination business, and so on, then?

CARVER: I don't believe it was a reaction to that. Obviously, that was the principal emotional problem that faced the new Administration.

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That was the one thing that Kennedy had said, during the campaign, that he didn't believe in. But really, nobody believed in it; it was a piece of rhetoric, a piece of political rhetoric, when it was enunciated. It had been abandoned largely by the Eisenhower [Dwight D. Eisenhower] Administration before they left office. They didn't dare admit it, but there wasn't a shred of evidence that I found when I got there that indicated that they were going hell-bent for termination. They'd stubbed their toes on the one termination plan that they'd gotten through and weren't about to make that mistake again.

Really, the task force report, I think, is the best of its kind, not only just for Indians but of all of the many equivalent efforts that existed. From my tenure in the Interior Department

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I think that particular report is by all odds the best.

MOSS: And did it pretty well set the stage for policy for the next several years?

CARVER: Yes sir, it did.

MOSS: It followed...

CARVER: It was followed.... That's the best example of one which really chartered a course and furnished a kind of a blueprint which the Administration could follow thereafter.

MOSS: Well, tell me something now. What really is politically sound about being for Indians? I realize it's rather like God, mother, and country, but what advantage does a President or a Secretary of the Interior get by actively acting in the Indians' interest, as opposed to everybody else's interest?

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CARVER: Well, it's mainly psychological, but it is extremely important and real nonetheless. It's got two aspects to it, maybe three: the first one is that the

American people are generally kind of conscience stricken, they got a kind of an expiation complex about it, so that the concrete matter of the government's policy toward the Indians matters to a lot more people that just the Indians. People like Brooks Atkinson [Justin Brooks Atkinson] of the *New York Times* carrying on this big campaign up Kinzua to honor George Washington's treaty commitments to them and that sort of thing is simply symptomatic of the kind of people, really opinion molders, who take an interest in Indian policy and thus exert an influence on an administration which far transcends the intrinsic problem of the number of Indians,

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which is really very small, or the budget for Indians or anything like that.

A second thing which is important is that small as the number of Indians is, there are places in the country where it is politically important enough to swing Senatorial elections, for example. I don't think any student of politics would deny that Quentin Burdick [Quentin N. Burdick] is in the Senate because of the high percentage of the Indian votes that he got. The same thing is true, perhaps to a lesser extent, in certain congressional districts in Arizona.

Then a third thing—and this is much more generalized—the Indians are kind of the symbol of Americanism. As few as the Indians are in the country, there are Indians in most congressional districts, so all the congressman tend

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to extrapolate from the knowledge of their particular Indians to generalize to all the Indians, and this just leads to a terrible mess because there just is no uniformity. But no congressman dares admit that he isn't an expert on Indians because that would be sort of like admitting you weren't an expert on the flag or something like that. So you have a terrible problem of communication on the generality of Indian problems, simply because most congressmen tend to—their threshold of awareness is just on the Indians they know.

That's understandable enough, but if the congressman from Idaho thinks all Indian situations are like that in Fort Hall, or the congressman from Mississippi thinks it's all like that in Philadelphia, Mississippi, or down in Florida with the Miccosukees,

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or out in California with the Agua Calientes at Palm Springs, and so on. You know, the variation is just tremendous, but they don't know it. So you've got a terrible administrative problem arising out of this.

The legal history of Indians is such that you treat with them as if they were sovereign in many respects. In the 1830s, a Supreme Court decision recognized a kind of a residual sovereignty there, which still continues. This is fundamentally contrary to the American scheme, a kind of a double sort of citizenship here; hard for most students of government really to understand it, totally different from that which involved other ethnic groups.

MOSS: Right. And there is a current situation here in 1969 with these oil leases in

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Alaska: The Eskimo and Indians claim that they really didn't get their fair share back in '58 with the Statehood Act, when the federal government turned over I forget how many acres to the state.

CARVER: We recognized this coming long before we knew there was anything like the petroleum values which have shown up since. The problem is really a matter of a congressional sweeping under the rug ever since 1867, when we bought Alaska from the Russians. After all, Russia was a civilized country, and they had a legal system, and in our treaty of purchase agreement we recognized whatever rights then existed. And in a succession of laws thereafter, in the 1880s and 90s and again in the Statehood Act, whatever rights the native people had were continued to them.

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a generalized kind of way nature was in balance in those days, so that they needed all the land there was since their population was kept at a level that the land would support. So the usual test of giving to the native people—the Eskimos, the Aleuts, and the Indians—that part of the land necessary to subsist them in the traditional sense would have been all of it. But, of course, they've come to a cash economy many, many years ago. Hunting and fishing is now more of an avocation, a pleasure to them than it is a necessity for life, but still, those legal rights, whatever they were, the vestigial remains of them are still there.

MOSS: Was there any recognition on the part of the Bureau during your administration that this ambiguity would have to be cleared up?

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CARVER: Oh yes, we went time and time and time again, we went up to the Congress and told them that they just simply would have to face it. I told the Congress numerous times, informally and sometimes formally, that this was the kind of a problem that would be resolved judicially or legislatively but never administratively.

There was no basis for the United States of America through its Executive branch to resolve the problem. A judicial determination or a legislative determination would be necessary is the fundamental predicate to award, in kind, anything that we had up there, such as land; you know, to patent land to the Indians. All we could do was freeze it, which, of course, was done. But to determine how much or the terms and conditions under which they'd get it

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or whether it would involve a full settlement or how it would be managed, this had to be either a congressional matter or, theoretically at least, a judicial matter. Although even if it were judicial, ordinarily a court would say only that they were either going to get the land or its value, then you'd be back to the Congress again to get the money.

Now you've got some of that sort of thing; you know the Tyoneks on Cook inlet that was resolved in the manner of.... That was a kind of a specialized proposition because it was a small amount of land awarded to the Indians in 1918, and we arranged—I personally claim a good deal of the credit—for seeing that the Indians got the benefit of the proceeds of the oil discovered on that reservation, which of course, just transformed that

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particular village. Of course that doesn't do anything much for the generality of the natives in Alaska, but it established, at least, that we recognized and were trying to honor the United States commitment to those people.

MOSS: You mentioned a moment ago the Kinzua dam problem.

CARVER: That was a very interesting one in terms of President Kennedy, because that was a situation in which he had made a campaign statement about honoring that treaty which was directly at cross-purposes with the program of the Corps of Engineers, which was pretty far advanced, to build that dam for flood control in the Allegheny drainage. So when we in the Interior Department eventually had to deal with a very harsh moral dilemma, which stated, as we stated it

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to get out of it—and I think it's an honest statement: "Do the tribes have such a relationship to the United States of America as to be immune from the eminent domain power, the condemnation power?" In other words, do they get their land in kind, whereas you or I or any other citizen whose land lies in the way of some public project gets our constitutional protections out of simply getting fair compensation for it?

Well, we resolved that hard question by going for fair compensation, but as a result, the federal government became extraordinarily generous, to the point of having a lot of trouble in the Congress with what constituted fair compensation; so that in addition for paying for every kind of physical value that you could possibly

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identify and appraise, we went up and supported a bill for a kind of an additional grant of sixteen million or something like that for a whole new community development program up there. We had a lot of trouble with it on the Hill, but eventually got it through.

MOSS: Who was giving you trouble on the Hill on it?

CARVER: My old boss Senator Frank Church was the one that was the most outraged about it; he really gave me a bad time over that. But that was one case where the President was directly involved. We knew what we had to do, because he was embarrassed by the equivocation really involved, in terms of his campaign statement. It was a tough proposition; it had been a careful statement, he had a way out of it, but still, we were,

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in effect, "buying out" of that problem.

MOSS: There was a meeting at the White House with the Corps of Engineers, wasn't there?

CARVER: Yes sir, I was there.

MOSS: Chaired by Lee White [Lee C. White]?

CARVER: Lee White was over there.

MOSS: How did that go? Who was saying what to whom?

CARVER: The meeting didn't last very long, and it was pretty simple because the Corps of Engineers' position was pretty clear. They had done everything that anybody humanly could to satisfy and answer the contentions that the same flood control could be achieved by some other means, that they can build a dam somewhere else, or do this or that or the other. When the Interior Department agreed with them that the problem.... When I expressed to Lee

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White what I've just told you, that, as I saw it, the basic question was whether or not you were going to say to the Indians that they are above the duties of citizenship, you were opening up a whole new can of worms. So I don't recall that we had any controversy in that meeting, although something sticks in my mind that some of the...

I don't know whether our antagonists were present or not. Our true antagonists were the lawyers for the tribe. Dick Schifter's partner—I can't remember his name—had access to those people in the White House and had made the case as strongly as he could; what I can't remember is whether he was at that meeting. But it doesn't matter.

MOSS: Who also besides Interior and the Corps of Engineers people and Lee White were

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there? Were there any other agencies involved?

CARVER: Well, I don't remember at that meeting, but I really don't think any other agencies were involved; maybe there was. Maybe you have some record of it?

MOSS: No I don't. I was just trying to fish and see if there was anything more.

CARVER: I think we had two or three people from the Indian Bureau there with me. I think General Cassidy [William F. Cassidy] was there. Oh, maybe the Budget Bureau was there—they probably were. But it was made pretty clear then that from there on our charter was we were going to support legislation which would satisfy the Indians as an alternative, even though it was outside the normal concept of

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compensation.

MOSS: It seems to me, in looking over the material that I have, that there were two or three areas that you began to work in in order to help the Indians. One you might call the capital investment kind of thing, school construction public works, and so on. Very early you decided to go with an accelerated school construction deal. How was this arrived at as the first step? Was it the easiest thing to do or the thing that first occurred to somebody or what?

CARVER: Well, we had identified, I think in the task force study, the deficiencies in this area...

MOSS: Yes.

CARVER: ... and here again, we had a real policy choice. You can, in effect, get the

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government out of the school business by simply not building schools and letting the problem of education be handled on a kind of a patchwork basis in the particular areas. Or you can take the course which we took: to say that you're going to have a first-class school system where you had one and go to the Congress and get the money and do what you could, and that's what we did.

We also tried our very best, wherever we could, to use the Johnson [Hiram W. Johnson]-O'Mally [Thomas B. O'Mally] and the other funds to push—to give as much help as we could to local school districts so we wouldn't have a separate Indian school system where we had another alternative. But we were bound we were going to have a good one: if we had to run it ourselves, fine; if we had adequate local help, why, we'd let

them do it.

But our big problems on this, of course, were in Alaska where we had to do a tremendous amount of construction, and particularly out in the southwest, where the plant had been allowed to deteriorate pretty badly. We got some projects on a kind of a cooperative basis where the government put up a big chunk of money for the construction of the school, which would then be operated by the local school district in some places. But it was a priority matter; education was recognized in the task force as being a very, very important deficiency.

MOSS: Another thing that you seem to have done was to convince industries that they should locate near or on reservations. How did you go about this?

CARVER: This particular program, of

course, had been recognized for a long time as being a fruitful one for bringing the Indians up to a kind of an economic equality; at which time, in theory at least, the problems of termination or whatever would simply disappear. So Commissioner Nash and the Secretary got this unit of the Indian Bureau to go out and make a real drive to interest industries in this sort of thing.

Actually, our own program was very successful for reasons which I don't think we anticipated in advance. For example, the best kind of industries we could get to go on here were those which involved repetitive type manual tasks—electronics, or sewing, textiles and so on. So even where you had the plants working very successfully like down to North Carolina or out in

some of the Western reservations, you found that you have a very, very high percentage of woman workers, and you broke the family unit up. The unemployed male head of the family was even in a worse shape, he'd lost his pride. So you pay a big, heavy social cost for that kind of disruption. We did better—you know, like sawmills and that sort of thing, where you had a more traditional type of a male-oriented type activities. Tourism—building camp grounds and getting people in to spend money on the reservations—worked pretty well. But the industrialization problem had that social consequence.

Another problem we had with it, of course, you'd get these runaway industries who were interested really in just taking those grant funds for the training and kind of

running that string out and then going on to something else. They didn't really have any strong interest in helping the Indians, except to just get away from the labor problems that

they might have where they were. This was a continuing problem because you couldn't really measure your success until a long time after you'd spent your money. We did a lot that way, but I'd have to say now that I don't think it was any shining monument.

MOSS: Any attempt at getting commercial enterprises, as opposed to industrial ones, on the reservation; wholesale, retail with the Indians themselves?

CARVER: Our general policy on that, and this is pretty generalized, but those tribes which had their own resources, like the Navajos which were always a special case, they could

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establish shopping centers, and they could establish banks, and they could establish all manner of activities of that kind. But fundamentally, you dealt with this either on a cooperative basis, like you're running a cannery or something like that, or—where we could guarantee the loans and sometimes put up some of the money. But the opportunities there were basically either to reduce the welfare load—kind of a specialized kind of welfare—or just furnishing technical assistance to the tribe where they had the inclination to do it and could get organized to do it.

MOSS: I understand there was a lot of cross-working between the Area Redevelopment Administration and the Bureau on this kind of...

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CARVER: There was a lot of that at the time, you'll recall, and you had a hard time ever really pinning down which was chicken and which was egg in some of these things. But there was a lot of working together with Small Business Administration and Area Redevelopment and that sort of thing.

MOSS: How were your relationships with Commerce Department on this?

CARVER: Well, I guess, mixed. In a very real sense the thing was decentralized in both agencies to the point when it worked or it didn't work sort of depended on how the local people took care of it. We had relationships with other agencies which were kind of shining examples of things working right, like Marie McGuire [Marie C. McGuire] in Public Housing. She really got

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interested in Indian housing, which was another, of course, big drive that we were pushing on. And that was very useful in terms of getting the rules and regulations of the housing people changed to accommodate either a kind of a self-help program or the local....

Getting around, we had a lot of problems with the Labor Department because they had kind of a lock on this whole question of the building trades; you'd get a lot of friction, locally. I had to work on Jack Henning [John F. Henning], Undersecretary of Labor, to say, "You fellows have got to make a few adjustments here." Jack was kind of intransigent on this subject. I don't know exactly how that finally came out, but there was some friction, which is kind of the name of the game

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in the housing business, I guess. We had some real good successes in housing down in Florida and some out in South Dakota.

MOSS: How did Nash stack up as a commissioner?

CARVER: Well, I guess you get mixed reports on him. I think he's the finest commissioner that the Indian Bureau ever had. I admit to being somewhat prejudiced—I felt very close to him at the time of his selection, and I worked extremely well with him, as I saw it. He and the Secretary never did get along very well.

MOSS: Why was that?

CARVER: That's a pretty good question, too. One reason was that Nash never did get over the initial suspicion which Clinton Anderson [Clinton P. Anderson] had about him at the time of his confirmation. Anderson exerted a very powerful influence on Udall, directly

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and indirectly, so that this kind of tension marred the relationships between the Secretary and his commissioner for a long time.

I guess another honest thing to say was that Philleo and I worked so well that it was just bound to be that the Secretary would sometimes feel like he was left out of it. I guess from time to time it hurt my relationships with Stewart, too. I enjoyed working on the Indian programs, felt that for a period there we had a golden age of them. On toward the end they all fell to pieces.

Nash, oh, he made some mistakes; some of them were doozies. He got old Cy Fryer [E. Reeseman Fryer] in there, who is a big old fraud, to kind of run his economic development business, and this caused some problems. Held been in the Indian Bureau many years before and had antagonized the Navajos when he'd been out there—a very unpopular program—twenty years before.

I was going to say he just didn't

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have that good a relationship with the Secretary, and you have to, really, eventually if you're going to succeed as commissioner; and eventually, he was replaced. But, gee, the Indian Bureau did some great things under his leadership, and what we've outlined here—seeing the thing whole, having a kind of a vision for it—is, I think, what they've missed ever since. When they replaced him with Bob Bennett [Robert L. Bennett] that was just a public relations gimmick, having an Indian commissioner. Bob's a good guy, but in much narrower horizon. You've got to have a big politician, really, to carry that job through. Philleo never did really get along with the Congress anyway; the fact that he didn't get along with Clint Anderson was just symptomatic. He had some Congressmen he got along well with.

MOSS: What kind of congressmen did he get along with? What was the hang-up here, in the

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current jargon?

CARVER: Well, he got along well, for example, with Jim Haley [James A. Haley], who was the chairman on the House side. He couldn't get along with "Scoop" Jackson [Henry M. Jackson], he couldn't get along with Clint Anderson, and he really, I guess, couldn't get along with Frank Church, which indicates there must have been some kind of problem because Frank's easy to get along with. I don't think it was so much a personal problem as really it was just kind of understanding that institution of the Congress.

MOSS: A misconception on Nash's part, or what?

CARVER: Some people just don't understand the Congress, and you couldn't really blame the Congress; it's up to him. But, you know, when you look back to find out what kind of success commissioners have had with the Congress, you just put your finger right away on one thing which Nash never did really have: and that is to have somebody

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on his staff who can make that Bureau respond to the Indian problems of the members in their districts fast enough so that they never had to face head-on what was just absolutely the politically intolerable situation of fighting with the Indians. Philleo was always a little late. He'd have a problem with the tribe in Wayne Aspinall's [Wayne N. Aspinall] district, and Wayne would decide that the problem was that he had the wrong superintendent there. Maybe he had the wrong superintendent, maybe he didn't, but he never did understand how to deal with that problem.

The Eisenhower Administration, of course, had had tremendously good relationships with the Congress because the guy that they had dealing with the Congress was Rex Lee [Hyrum Rex Lee], the ultimate pragmatist. If Carl Albert [Carl B. Albert] wanted something,

why, Rex would find out a way to get it for him without compromising the program too much. He understood this business of

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dealing with the Appropriations and the substantive committee members in such a way that they didn't ever really feel that the Indian thing was getting away from them; Frank Church felt the Indian thing was getting away from him.

The Indians trusted Philleo, and this communicated itself to the Hill, and then they distrusted him, and there was that pull and haul, too, now that I think about it a little bit. I thought he was a great commissioner, but the proof of the pudding is that you can't be a great commissioner unless you've got the support of your secretary, and Philleo didn't have it, so I guess he couldn't be a great commissioner, paradoxical as that may seem. But he did some great things.

MOSS: In an earlier interview I asked you about how the conservation lobbies were. Could you say something about the way the Indian lobbies were, the Association on American Indian Affairs, the National Congress of American

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Indians, the Indian Rights Association, this sort of thing?

CARVER: What I said before would apply here. You had to understand them, you had to be available to them, and you had to understand what their particular points of view were and make the appropriate adjustments. The NCAI [National Congress of American Indians] was basically an Indian organization, the American Association was the Indian lovers association, the Indian Rights Association was a more militant group, and you made those discount factors on them. Some of them had a kind of a pretty good input.

When I went up and spoke to the American Association in New York early in the Administration, I gave them some kind of basically unpalatable facts of life about how I felt we had to deal with these Indians on something better than an ethnic basis. And thereafter, with that kind of touchstone to my philosophy, I was able to get along with them all right.

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But they don't really think in those terms, they're much more simplistic than that. They say you've got to look after the Indians qua Indians, and I was willing to look after the Indians because we had their land. The philosophical difference was a real one.

I think my school of thought has long since lost out, but I still think that if you look to the situation of the Menominees where we closed them out, you'll find out that we were able to be much more honest with our programs as long as we had the land in trust, and then we could give the money for the schools and the money for the hospitals and the money for the

roads without being in a kind of a position of going into one county in Wisconsin and giving a whole bunch of block grant federal money without any real justification for it except kind of a special bill from the Congress.

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MOSS: Right. Do you think there's anything we haven't covered on the Indian affairs portion that ought to be covered at this point?

CARVER: I don't know just exactly how you want to handle these Indians. We could talk about Indians here for six or seven hours; really, we could. At some time in the future, perhaps, you ought to.... If you want a little vignette of a study of a success of the Kennedy Administration which was in resolving the Miccosukee problem in south Florida. Because when Kennedy came into office we had the absolutely intolerable situation of a very left-wing lawyer representing those Indians and going down to Havana and demonstrating at the United Nations.

MOSS: I haven't run across this, please go on.

CARVER: And we got a program going down there which was one of those little jewels of things, a kind of a manageable, demonstrable

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success.

The Miccosukees were a division of the Seminoles which had never made peace with the United States, and they were kind of a separatist group down there, withdrawn into those Everglades, and you didn't have any communication with them. When you got into the late '50s and you got some political activism going, they asserted the claim to basically all the land in south Florida—just exactly the same theory as we just discussed in Alaska—and then undertook to put their claim to the international organizations, claiming that nobody had ever made peace with them, therefore they were a sovereign nation and so on. The whole thing was a kind of a public relations embarrassment, really, to the United States.

Well, John Crow [John O. Crow], who was acting commissioner at first in the Indian Bureau and later deputy commissioner and a really fine citizen, John Crow decided that was one

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that was or manageable size and we ought to see whet we could do about that. So we sat down one time, and we worked out just kind of between us a program to bring those Indians back into the mainstream of the American system. We picked out a very, very able guy from over in Oklahoma, sent him down there as a special project officer, had him open an office just to deal with the Miccosukees. He got their confidence and began to work with them, and we got some money down there, and eventually.... It's there to be seen to this very day, these

withdrawn Indians that wouldn't go to school or anything like that, now operate a couple of fine restaurants on the Tamiami Trail, sell their handicrafts, and you just have never heard any problem with the Miccosukees the last five or six years.

I'm particularly proud of what we did in housing because we got some imaginative guy at the Indian Bureau, and he designed

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a modern house with all of the best features of their native hut, which is a raised platform with a thatched roof and open to the elements. And we built a kind of a T-shaped structure with the utilities in a central core and then a living room and kind of bedrooms off. Then we put a thatched roof on it right over the regular roof, and we had a big overhang of the roof so that in good weather you could just lift panels up and have this thing opened, either just a screen or to the weather, so that the Indians could live in a modern house that had the "feel" of the kind of places they'd been living in out there in those Everglades. And we could build them for, oh, forty-five hundred or fifty-five hundred dollars or some very low sum because of the way we did it, and the Indians took to them. So we just kind of revolutionized the housing of the group down there. And they bought

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them for fifty-six hundred dollars. They could all make enough money wrestling alligators to make the payments and so on.

We worked out with Florida opportunities for them to have the franchise or the concession as tourist services, as it went through their area, so that they could have air boats and boat rentals and that sort of thing. And this was just one of those little programs you do where you have a great big mess, and you work it out, and nobody says much about it, but you get a kind of a deep personal satisfaction that the President isn't embarrassed by these guys waiting on Castro [Fidel Castro]. Castro was up in New York at that time, do you remember? He was still with us, so to speak

MOSS: Yes.

CARVER: And he went up to the United Nations, and these guys went up and visited him.

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MOSS: Tell me, this begins to sound in a way that the one-shot, localized, very highly focused efforts do better than the broad, scattergun kind of thing that might come under, say, Area Redevelopment or something like this.

CARVER: Well, I really believe that you've got a big moral dilemma here, too, because you're always doing these demonstration-type deals, and if you

put enough money and effort in you have something showing pretty good. The question is: if you don't have enough effort for the mass to become critical, so to speak, then you've just wasted it all. But you do make choices when you decide to do it here, and generally speaking, it is the squeaky wheel syndrome; you're picking out the place that's worst, and a lot of times, you're thus being unfair to the people who've really tried to help themselves.

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We had the same kind of problem in the Philadelphia, Mississippi, really, in their housing and schooling, and the one-shot deal of the Pine Ridge, South Dakota housing, and some of the things we did in some of the villages in Alaska. I guess you've shown real insight there.

It doesn't really always take an awful lot of money, but what it takes is what you really are mostly short of, and that's imaginative people who can get down there and work with the Indians in such a way that they can get the satisfaction of doing it for themselves; you know, helping them rather than doing it for them. That's at least the way I feel about it.

MOSS: We still have some time this morning. I think I'd like to get on to the Bureau of Land Management [BLM] for a bit, at least for the balance

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of this tape. Very early on, there were two policy statements: one by Secretary Udall, I think on 14 February '61, and the other one by President Kennedy in his natural resources message. Some of the details were that you were going to get full value in public land sales instead of having the public cheated on it, leases and sales and other dispositions were to be permitted only for sound public purposes, avoiding disposal to speculators, no opening of marginally agricultural lands for agricultural purposes, things that couldn't be developed under existing land laws were to be retained, a general conservation in the public interest sort of thing. Where did this originate, in another task force or...

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CARVER: No. I would say that if I had to judge the biggest personnel mistake that Udall made, it was in his selection of his staff man from the House Interior Committee, Karl Landstrom [Karl S. Landstrom], a man with whom Stewart had worked when he was in Congress, to be the director of the BLM. And these very early policy statements, the kind you've just outlined, represented the kind of the public outpouring by the new director through the Secretary of his reaction to the whole series of abuses in land administration which had been observed by the Committee during the Eisenhower years.

But my criticism is not that the abuses hadn't been there, but that the policy was framed fundamentally on a kind of too narrow a basis, it went to the symptoms of land administration rather than the fundamental philosophy that was

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implicit, or the questions which were implicit in the continuing workings of these old land settlement laws, which hadn't been amended for many, many years and really needed changing rather than a redirection of administration.

MOSS: Was the moratorium on individual applications a part of this same...

CARVER: The moratorium on individual applications was a part of this same approach, which was, fundamentally, anti-abuse. Well, everybody's anti-abuse, but you're just trying to take care of these little cankers as you see them without ever getting at a real policy or philosophy of the kind that we mentioned for the Indian Bureau. You didn't really see what you were trying to do, except to kind of crush before it happens this situation where a man goes out—I don't

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know the application of the public land laws—gets some land for two dollars and a half an acre, and a year later he sells it for twenty five hundred dollars an acre. You say the government's been had; I suppose the government, in fact, has been had, but if you're just trying to deal with the abuse, rather than to get to your policy for the thing, you get a lot of misdirected effort. Lord knows in the BLM in the first two and a half years of the Administration—the first two years of the administration of Udall in that area was misdirected effort. It just went down to almost zero in terms of the morale of the Bureau and so on.

MOSS: You finally got a public land law review, though. But this wasn't until, what, 65?

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CARVER: The bill for the creation of the Public Land Law Review Commission was passed in September of '64, and honestly, fundamentally, you'd have to say that that was no project of the Department or even of the Administration. The Administration agreed to it because it had to get along with Wayne Aspinall, but that was his idea, pure and simple, beginning to end.

MOSS: I have a record of a letter from the President in January '63 to Aspinall, putting the idea...

CARVER: I wrote that letter, that letter originated in my office. It was a very key letter because it recognized, in a fashion which hadn't been the vogue theretofore, that the Congress had a legitimate interest in going into this thing, that Article IV of the Constitution did give them prerogatives, which Kennedy recognized. We owned up, in

effect, to a kind of an Executive vacuum-filling process in the past, but said, "Let's work on this together." But I still stick by my statement that the impetus for this thing was on the Hill.

MOSS: Now, how did the Department shift in this, because, obviously, it would have to do some shifting from the original Landstrom kind of approach to the kind of thing that you, at least implicitly, have been advocating here? There must have been some kind of shift from '61 to '63 for this to take place.

CARVER: The sterility of that original freeze policy became evident right away. You just can't stop the land transactions; the land is a living thing and some of it's capable of being used. The government gets a very poor reputation if it just

wants to just sit on something. If it's concerned about profiteering, it should carry on its business so that that doesn't happen, but it shouldn't just stop business. So we got enormous press right away. You know, you can't do business by just stopping, because too many of these things were perfectly legitimate and proper. So the freeze was kind of gradually lifted. I guess eventually it was formally lifted, but....

MOSS: Some eighteen months later, I believe.

CARVER: ... but long before that we'd begun to move the process on.

MOSS: What I'm after, I think, is, did either Landstrom, or Udall begin to see the light, and really...

CARVER: Landstrom never saw the light; Udall began to see the light. Landstrom eventually had to be replaced.
I don't want

this part of the interview to go by without saying that I think Landstrom is an extremely able, conscientious, dedicated man, who later served me with great distinction, but he just was miscast as a Bureau director, as a policy maker. He's a staff man of military training. He's a fine citizen, just was a lousy director of the BLM.

But in terms of a different approach, I guess an honest thing to say about it was that it was jointly worked out by Aspinall, mainly and by me acting for the Secretary. So essentially, peace was declared, and we started down the road by getting that Classification and Multiple Use Act passed, getting the Public Sale Act passed, getting the Public Land

Law Review Commission passed, by getting a policy on concessions in the national parks (it's really related to this), by getting moneys

freed so that the BLM could build some privies and do what they might call recreational work, but which we really call protection work, and that sort of thing. But the mechanics—the dynamics of this thing was strictly the relationship between the House Interior Committee and the very strong personality of Wayne Aspinall, and the Department as a department, with me as kind of the key man in terms of handling that relationship so that Aspinall's prerogatives weren't stepped on and still we could go ahead and get out business done.

MOSS: Okay, fine, I think I'd like to push on with this a little more next time.

CARVER: Fine.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

John A. Carver, Jr. Oral History Transcript – JFK #5
Name List