Robert C. Weaver Oral History Interview –JFK #4, 10/1/1964
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Weaver, Robert C.; Administrator, Housing and Home Finance Agency (1961 - 1966). Weaver discusses the contributions of the Kennedy Administration and John F. Kennedy's [JFK] personality in relation to urban and rural societies and urbanization. He discusses his relationship with White House staff as well as those within the Housing and Home Finance Agency, among other issues.

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Oral History Interview

Of

Robert C. Weaver

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Robert C. Weaver – JFK #4

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Oral History Interview

with

ROBERT C. WEAVER

October 1, 1964
Washington, D.C.

By Daniel Patrick Moynihan

For the John F. Kennedy Library

MOYNIHAN[1]: This is Mr. Moynihan interviewing Dr. Weaver at his home in Washington, October 1, 1964. This is our fourth interview, first reel. Dr. Weaver this smoke ring is just perfect.

WEAVER: That's what I learned my first year in college.

MOYNIHAN: When we last left off we had talked along and I think a good talk about the events of the Kennedy Administration which involved the what is now known as the Negro Revolt. You probably have other words for it -- [Moynihan continues a long question which cannot be heard.]

WEAVER: I think this is one of the phases,, but I think also it is part of the fact that not only were these men of the city, but I think the

[1] The mechanism of the recorder was not working properly and for this reason it was very difficult to understand the interview.

men of, I hate to use the word, sophistication, for want of a better word. Certainly the men who placed a great deal of emphasis on thinking, men who placed a great deal of concern about culture as signified by Mr. Kennedy, were assembled here, and I have a feeling that in some ways this group was far ahead of the thinking and the reactions of the American public as a whole. The impact of their point of view upon the Nation is, I think, probably one of the great contributions of the Administration -- contributions which can be really evaluated only by history.

It seems to me, too, that a great contribution of the Kennedy Administration, and I think one has to give the late President primary credit for this, was the fact that we did have in the President a man -- an urbane man if there is such a word -- a highly rational and intelligent man, a man who was at home with concepts and philosophy, who had a real, deep foundation in history, not in the sense of making it, but in the sense of interpreting it and understanding it, and a

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man who was completely compatible with ideas and with concepts. Also he was a man who represented the type of figure that has not been typically the American political leader in the past. He was a man who would be probably much more at home in certain European countries than he was in his own native land because of what he stood for, his capacity for articulation, his urbanity and sophistication.

The impact of this was dual. I think it complicated in some ways some of the legislative programs that he submitted because they were possibly a little too intellectualized for many people in this country and certainly for many people in the Congress. On the other hand I think that in the span of less than two and a half years, oh it was a little over two and one-half years, the impact of this on the country was much greater than the country ever realized. I think it was a process of very rapid sophistication of the American's concepts of himself and in America's receptiveness of ideas for which President Kennedy was a telescope, a movement which seemed to me needed to be

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accomplished in order to bring us into the mainstream of the world in which we live. Because it seems to me that this type of attitude is absolutely necessary for adequate functioning in the modern society. Again, as I said earlier, I think this can only be measured over a period of time. But I don't think that the nation will ever again not be responsive to some of these things that he held dear.

For example, consider the cultural exposure that he subjected the nation to by the emphasis that he placed upon cultural values by the very type of entertainment which typified the White House. The recognition given to artists, given to scholars, given to thinkers, which was personified by the fact that he surrounded himself with thinkers, has had an impact which I believe will be lasting.

I will try to interpret this off the top of my head in terms of really bringing the country in a short period of time to facing up to the fact that it was an urban society and that many of the values which we have are brought forth in glorification of the good old days. I

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am not so sure how good they were. Yet we continue to make the most of the great virtues of the rural personality: the city boy who comes to town and gets "took" by the fast women, the whiskey and the gambling. Of course, he's having a wonderful time but nobody forced him to leave his rural setting; yet we get the impression that all of his purity is vitiated by these terrible urban influences. This goes way back in our culture, of course, to biblical days and even earlier. The idea that the cities are evil and really there is sort of a puritanical concept that maybe they are so full of vice, so full of the bad that they should deserve to be destroyed and that they are going to be destroyed.

MOYNIHAN: Did someone say that in the Jeffersonian Creed that in the beginning was the farm?

WEAVER: Yes. This I think was at least challenged, not so much by direct assault, but by symbols on the one hand and by real sophistication on

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the other hand. So that I think urban exposure has its real historical importance in the impact it had upon our self-image and our thinking. Of course there were other aspects of it and those aspects were the more immediate and more practical. The fact that urbanization has brought to us, as every country in the western civilization, tremendous problems. Problems we all know of housing, overcrowding, transportation and air pollution, adequate water supply, adequate open spaces. All of these things which the legislative program of the Kennedy Administration, both in what it achieved in the Housing Act of '61 and related acts and most recently in the Mass Transportation Act which was passed after the President's death but which was conceived of in the White House in those early days. So that the immediate impact of this was, I think, an assault and an attack upon problems which he delineated and defined. The long-run impact of it was upon the thinking of the country and the attitude we had towards ourselves, so that the process of urbanization which was going on physically and which

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had been achieved to a great degree physically was given articulation and was given an image and was given a thought-basis in this short period of time.

MOYNIHAN: Bob, we've talked quite a bit here about some of the things you were able to do. There were some things you weren't able to do. Some

things you did differently than you would have. I wonder if you could tell us some of the -- troubles of the two and a half years, is all it was, of John F. Kennedy.

WEAVER: Well, I think that at times, I, as many people who worked in this Administration, probably felt that there was an overcautiousness on the part of the President. I for one never translated this into a feeling of lack of belief of his commitment to what he had expressed as his desires and his hopes but as a part of two things. First of

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his own personality because this was a rather thoughtful and rather -- I wouldn't say cautious -- but certainly not a frivolous man; and of course the other thing which has been said so frequently is the fact that being a politically sophisticated person he was conscious of the fact that he did not come in by any landslide -- he did not have any great mandate from the American people.

Also, I think that, and this I can see in retrospect when looking at his operations and the operations of Lyndon Johnson, that Kennedy was much more a man of ideas and a man of concepts than a man of personal relations in the sense of being able to work with people and adjust himself and adapt himself to what one has to do in order to, apparently, get legislation through in this country. I don't think that he was ever as much at ease with the Congress as was Lyndon Johnson and other President, although I am sure he certainly knew technically how the system worked. He knew the congressional organization and he knew the processes. But I don't think he really enjoyed

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what one often has to do to get legislation through, and I don't think he was capable of being able to give the impression that he felt great admiration for some of the people for whom he didn't feel great admiration. This is a handicap, I am sure, on the part of a politician but I think it's part of the personality that John F. Kennedy had and I couldn't say it was a fault because I think that I would be described by an objective person as having some of the same attitude.

President Kennedy was something of an aristocrat in the best sense of this word and also I have a very distinct feeling, in fact I know not from having had it done to me, thank God, that he was one of the most intolerant persons toward a bore. If he encountered a bore, unless the latter were entirely insensitive, he was made conscious of that fact. I think this is something President Kennedy did instinctively and I'm sure he had the capacity of having people talk and not listening to them when they went on and on and on at great length. There was the other side of his personality --- the fact, as I think I said earlier,

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in the instances where I've been able to be in a position of briefing him on subjects that he had great capacity to get concepts and ideas very quickly and once he had them he didn't want them reiterated. Anyone dealing with him would find this out. Well this then, I think, caused some trouble because it caused some resentment by people with whom he had to deal in order to get legislation through. His quick and retentive mind was something of a problem.

I had great admiration for it except when it affected me personally and adverse reactions to it handcapped something that I wanted to get through. I would say that the main thing that concerned me in this was at times when it seemed to be that we weren't moving as quickly as I would like to be moving in some of the areas where I operated. But through it all, I never lost my confidence and my belief in President Kennedy and in the fact that he was committed to the same things that I was committed to. I sometimes did feel that we weren't getting the results that I would like to see gotten.

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Now as far as my own personal problems were concerned they were few and far between as far as my relationship with the President and the White House was involved. As I've said earlier one of the reasons for this was because I had long since learned that to get things done, when you are dealing with busy people, the most effective method is by briefing the people who brief the principal. This results in your having the minimum amount of contact with the principal, and I found that when I had to see the President I could have access to him but I certainly didn't avail myself of it too frequently. I didn't have a feeling that it wouldn't be possible if needed.

I suppose the biggest fiasco in which I was involved was the matter of the Department of Urban Affairs, and here I think the ineptitude was not in the Executive but in the Legislative Branch. This was the thing which could have worried me a great deal, but I think that I was able at the time, certainly in retrospect, to look at it fairly

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objectively and to view it as almost a comedy of errors, because, as I've said earlier, I don't think we would have gotten the Department in any event, but I think we would have certainly gotten much closer to it if it had been handled better in Congress. And I don't think it could have been bungled much worse than it was.

On the whole, I've had a very enjoyable period and I don't know any time where I've enjoyed what I was doing much more than I have in my present job. The great frustration of any Administrator in Washington, and this has been true too in New York State as you know, but I think it's even more true here, is the fact that the Congressional process is an extremely difficult one. For example, I've just gone through a situation in the last few days, when, after getting a legislative program across -- the Housing Act of '64 -- the Appropriation Committee either did not appropriate enough money, as in mass transit, to administer it properly, or, as in the case of the program for grants to

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states for state programs for training and research, both bodies of the Congress in the Appropriation Committees failed to act and then the House in its vote did not appropriate a single dollar for this particular activity. So that really you not only have to get your legislation through but then you have to repeat the process and get it through a second time.

MOYNIHAN: You have two bills.

WEAVER: You have two bills, that's right and in this particular case involving mass transit and the training and research program, it happens that the Chairman of the Appropriations Committee in the House just doesn't believe in these particular programs and this is the way he "unlegislates" what Congress has legislated.

Now I don't know how this can be offset. It's been particularly difficult this time because it comes at the end of Congress and the

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time element is so short and you don't have much opportunity to work on it. But I think there is a deficiency, and there was a deficiency under the Kennedy Administration, of the type of communication -- effective communication -- between the Executive Branches of the Government and the Legislative bodies. On the other hand I hasten to add that, as you know, in New York State when we were in State Government, and when there was a body of a different party from the executive, it was up to the administrator of the various agencies to do the whole job. He had to carry his own legislation through with very little effective support from the executive and he had to get his own appropriations.

However, regardless of where the situation arises, it would seem to me too that this is a most frustrating experience because one is placed in the position of attempting to work through the administration with the administration policy which is adopted, and at the same time very often the administration is not effective in carrying out

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the final assignment which is to get the money to run the program. And I think this was to me the most frustrating experience that I had. It's only occurred in a few instances and these have been more since the Kennedy Administration then during it but the pattern was primarily and essentially the same.

I suppose the answer to it is that all of us tend to think that once the substantive legislation is passed the job is over, and I think there is an almost optimistic feeling, maybe it's because you've knocked your brains out getting your legislation through, and you think the appropriations will follow. Actually, perhaps, some of this is due to our own ineptitude. I don't know but it can be extremely frustrating and it's particularly difficult because so often in these recent years the appropriation has come at the end of the session and it goes so

rapidly that you just don't have a chance to be effective in working on it unless you can get the White House to intervene, and very often the

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White House is so busy with other things that it's hard to get them to be effective.

MOYNIHAN: Would you want to comment maybe, describe some of your relations with the White House as you say? I suppose there was three principal people in your life there: Ted Sorenson, Dave Bell and Larry O'Brien, and then there would be others you would know particularly about. What for the sake of the record, would you want to record about them?

WEAVER: Well, I think that Ted Sorenson, as would be obvious to anyone who has seen the workings, held what was something of a unique position. I think this was the one man who could really make decisions in the name of the President and who knew him well enough to know which ones he could safely make. As far as I know, and I was involved not only with our program but I was also involved with him very intimately in

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the early development of the Poverty Program, and in the latter instance he could get the groups together and would be able to make 80 or 90 percent of the decisions on the spot and then say well on these others I'll have to talk to the President, or we'll have to talk to the President. In my own area the same thing occurred and I've never known him to reverse himself in any of these decisions.

My contacts with him were not too frequent but when they did occur they were in depth and they certainly made me realize this man's tremendous ability and this man's unique relationship with President Kennedy -- how he worked so closely with him almost as an alter ego and where he was really reflecting -- out of years of contact -- what he knew would be the President's thinking. In all of these things it was obviously that he was acting for the President in terms of the President's philosophy.

My other strongest and most continuing contacts were with Lee White who was the person in the White House responsible for housing legislation.

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and the housing activities.

MOYNIHAN: Frankly, I'm happy you mentioned it because I had -- happy only in the sense that I would have thought one of the men perhaps the man who is most neglected in the White House lore is Lee White.

WEAVER: Yes. I must say that my relationships with him have been most happy. First, he is a very able person. Secondly, he is a person who I have gotten to know as a friend and for whom I have deployed a great deal of personal affection and admiration. Also he is really that type of public servant who is self-effacing but who is always accessible, works long hours and knows what he's doing and really produces for those who have contacts with him. I think, one of the reasons my relationships with the Executive Branch -- well of the White House in fact -- were as pleasant as they were was primarily because of Lee White.

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I got to the point where we could communicate very easily with each other and where I would be able to get ideas across and get action very, very fast. The fact that there is someone with whom you have a relationship who is always accessible and with whom you can communicate is one of the surest ways to prevent frustration in situations such as one in the Federal Government where the issues are so large and where the problems are so complicated. Lee got into this field and he became knowledgeable in this field, in the sense of knowing the big issues, and he had sense enough not to try to become a technician. This I think is the only effective way that he could have operated.

As far as Larry O'Brien was concerned my relationships with him were largely secondary because mostly Milt Semer, who is now the Deputy and was then the General Counsel, and Jack Conway, who was the Deputy, were -- for the most part -- by delegation handling the legislative and the political affairs of the agency. My theory of administration is

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that you ought to have one cook working on one dish you that you won't have a hash come out of it, and this worked very well. The contacts that I had with Larry were warm and productive but his was not my area of speciality and I didn't attempt to immerse myself too much in it.

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[BEGIN REEL #2]

WEAVER: I think there's one thing I might add to this while I'm speaking of my relationships with the White House staff. There wasn't a single person on the staff, with the exception of Arthur Schlesinger, whom I had known before.

You speak of Dave Bell. Here is another man for whom I have the greatest amount of respect. I think he's an extremely able person and I think he is a brilliant administrator. He was able to maintain the respect of his staff, and that Budget Bureau staff is a real bureaucracy if there ever was one. As a matter of fact I think it is a branch of Government that is sure it's closest to God. Yet I've seen Dave Bell overrule the staff on the basis of fact

and on the basis of his own analysis, without alienating the people who worked with him and maintaining their respect for him. So I think he was able to use a

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staff most effectively and this is a very, very difficult technique, as you know as well as I do. I would place Dave Bell high on the list, first as an administrator, second as a man of extremely great ability and knowledge and also as a very fine human being.

MOYNIHAN: Who are some of the other people who you would remember from these years?

WEAVER: Well, I would remember John Macy extremely well and also extremely favorably, because I think that the job he has is an extremely difficult one. I remember back during the Defense period when i was in government before and one of my friends was accused of being left-wing. I was working for Sidney Hillman at the time, and Hillman, although he knew the accused was not left-wing, felt that this was a case about which -- Hillman, of course being the great compromiser -- we

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shouldn't make an issue. Dr. Will Alexander and I went to bat for this man and we appeared before the Board of Review of the Civil Service Commission. We worked hours, got all our material together and they sat there like three mummies.

At that time the Commission was completely bureaucratic, in my opinion did everything by rule and there was no recognition of the fact that we were dealing with human beings but an attitude that we were dealing with regulations and rules. I might say that we were able to save this able man who faced charges and since that time he's gone on into other activities very successfully.

I think that John Macy humanized the Civil Service Commission and Civil Service System and also did a tremendous number of other things. The executive committees he set up, I've forgotten what they call them -- something like an Executive Council in the Region, have done a great deal to pull government together by bringing together the

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heads of the various agencies in the field so they can look at problems that cut across the agencies and also can get to know each other. This has been, I think, of great great value to the operation of government. John Macy and the people in the Civil Service Commission, because certainly he doesn't deserve all the credit for it, have done a very good job of recruiting for the most difficult types of positions in the government today -- position that are in short supply, positions that require a great deal of training.

The great problem as I see it in public service is the problem of how do you get enough security to protect the individual and still not to get yourself boxed in so that you

have mediocrity entrenched. This is something that the Civil Service Commission certainly hasn't solved and something I don't think is amenable to solution. But certainly the present Commission has faced up to it and certainly it's tried to do something to reconcile these two objectives. I think, too, that the Commission has become more flexible in clearing people for

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positions which require special skills and has become an instrument to assist in the carrying out of the government's work rather than, as in the past, sometimes to deter it. I think John Macy not only is the symbol, as the titular head, but is the actual head of the Civil Service Commission. He has imbued it with a lot of his philosophy and I think it's been all for the good of the government.

MOYNIHAN: Tell me in your own bureaucracy who did you find that you were glad to meet and what were your problems in making -- in providing that balance you just spoke about?

WEAVER: Well, the situation there is, of course, a mixed one. As I said earlier I was extremely fortunate that in that two of the three of the branches of the HHFA, and I'm speaking now of the Office of the Administrator as contrasted to the other constituent agencies because there I am not as familiar with the personnel even the top personnel as I

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am, of course, the people who report directly to me.

We have three top lawyers and about four or five others in the Office of the Administrator who had been in this work for many years. They had written practically all the housing legislation and I'm sure also most of the reports of the various Committees after the hearings on the housing bills. They had technical knowledge and great flexibility. They were able to offer criticisms and advice but largely reflective of the philosophy and the attitude of the then current Administrator which is, of course, a talent which all lawyers should have but many do not have.

In the Office of Program Policy which is the Research Branch and the "think" branch of the agency, there were about four people who were extremely able. One man is an economist -- Henry Schecter, another man a statistician Jack Ashley, and three or four others who again had the advantage of technical knowledge, competence in their particular disciplines, and also the store of knowledge of what had happened before so

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that when you came out with an idea they could tell you -- and the lawyers also could do this -- "Well this was proposed in 1955 in a slightly different form and it was turned down for the following reasons." This of course saved any Administrator from a lot of lost motion and

really helped me and my top associates who I brought in from making mistakes we might have made.

We also have a good administrative office with a competent person who's been heading it for some time, and I think we have in John Frantz in Housing Home Finance Agency, one of the best Budget Officers in the whole government. I may be a little bit chauvinistic about it and there may be some as good but I don't think they're any better.

Now there was another problem that we ran into. It was a problem which you as a bureaucrat in the Department of Labor, I think will not find unfamiliar. Some of our constituents, such as some of your branches, feel that they are autonomous and have people in them whose

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whole career is to try to prevent becoming a part of the overall activity; who want to operate separately and distinctly and by themselves and who kept the new commissioner, and the new top people off balance. They, more or less, constantly say to the permanent staff, in effect, (Oh I have not heard these words but I have seen the reactions) are you a mouse or a man? If you are a mouse you will be Weaver's man if you are a man you'll be your man and tell Weaver to go to hell. And this is a constant pressure that is exerted in all government agencies. I am sure that it went on in mine where I had really not even the legal basis for coordination that you have in the Labor Department. In addition I have certain constituents that are much older than the overall agency itself and I have persons as commissioners who are Presidential appointees and whose predecessors had been Presidential appointees before they ever thought of having an administrator for the overall agency. Then, of course, there's always the issue of a power struggle and the fighting for position and fighting for autonomy which goes on in every organization.

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I've been very fortunate in some of the Commissioners I've appointed. I've had to replace one of my Commissioners, and I hope that the replacement will prove to be satisfactory. I have a Commissioner who is a very charming person but not too good an administrator with a bureaucracy which is fairly well entrenched and has a pretty good idea that if it's been done this way for a long time it's going to continue to be done this way.

On the other hand the biggest problem that I faced, and my predecessors had faced it before me, was the fact that the largest constituent, which is FHA, had first, more or less, been seduced into the belief and the reflection of the belief that it wasn't really a part of Government. You see FHA out of the fees and out of its insurance funds is self-sustaining and it doesn't cost the government a penny. This has given the illusion to some of the people in FHA, and certainly to many of the people in industry, that FHA really is a quasi-private

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agency of the industry and that it's a terrible thing that the Congress insists upon appropriating funds for its administration. These people believe that FHA ought to be able to have its own administrative budget and control itself since no federal funds are involved.

MOYNIHAN: It's procedure that the funds it collects go into Treasury and Congress?

WEAVER: Right, and this has been a real point of opposition, first with the industry groups and secondly with some of the people in FHA. The fallacy of that, of course, is that while it is true that out of the insurance premiums which we now have a reserve fund of some -- over a billion dollars there has not been any necessity for appropriation of any additional money for this operation or for paying off the insurance adjustments, and I doubt if there ever will be unless we have a major depression. But that insurance fund is not only supported by

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the premiums which are in it but it's supported by the pledge of the credit of the United States government, and therefore, FHA is a government agency, and therefore, it can cost the government something under extreme adverse economic conditions.

Here was a problem of a tradition that FHA was a unique and separate type of agency and also the fact that this agency had for so long operated free-wheeling and that the Commissioners of the FHA hadn't paid too much attention, if any attention at all, to the administrator and that many in FHA resented the idea of the administrator getting into their particular fiefdom because it was sort of a feudal system. So that this was a key spot. The problem was accentuated by the fact that with the urban renewal program and with mortgage insurance being the basis of construction -- residential construction -- in urban renewal areas you had to have a coordination, a cooperation between FHA and URA if you were to do this job. and this could only be done

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either by the administrator hitting heads together or by the two commissioners getting together or by their getting together with the encouragement of the administrator. And the key thing here was the personality and the attitude of the man who was commissioner of FHA. I was extremely fortunate in the selections here. The first man I selected was Neil Hardy who had been in the agency for a long time, who knew the operations of all branches of the agency and who knew the people in FHA. He was a person for whom many in FHA had affection and most had some confidence, and he was able to go in in the first couple of years of this Administration and begin to bring FHA into the operation of the total programs of the agency. He cooperated with URA and he definitely indicated that he was a part of the Administration and a part of the agency itself.

Just the other day I read a piece written by one of the men who had been in the Office of the Administrator, had worked with Neil when

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Neil was there, had gone over to FHA as their chief economist and research man. I don't know whether it was a Freudian slip or not but he said in one place: "When Mr. Weaver appointed Neil Hardy Commissioner of FHA." Well this was inaccurate in that although I did select him, the appointment was made by the President -- it was a presidential appointment. But it was perfectly clear that Neil was a part of the organization which I was heading and that his loyalty was to me and to the agency as well as to the FHA itself.

Then when he left I got Phil Bronstein who had been with the Veteran's Administration and also knew the operation very well but was a tougher administrator than Neil. He has put into more concrete expression the philosophy and attitude which Neil was able to give FHA at the beginning. I think that Neil's being the less tough man but personifying this attitude of cooperation probably softened up the situation where Phil could be as effective as he has been.

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By and large the people that I have been working with have been extremely competent also they have been on the whole as loyal as any group is. Of course you always get retailing and you get different types of personalities. You get some who are very much concerned with selling themselves and being in the limelight. You get others who are less so but this is par for the course and you expect it.

I think we have been able to establish that matters of appointments, where there is political clearance involved, go through my office and are handled completely and entirely by me. For the constituent agencies, the Commissioners make the choice but I arrange the clearance, and they do not have contacts with the White House on this. I have firmly and early established that on these matters the White House was to talk to me and not to talk to the Commissioners and I know of no instance where that has been abridged.

The second area is in the area of legislation. All legislation for all parts of the agency come through my office. The Commissioners

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make their recommendations and we sit down and talk about them. I make decisions as to what we're going to do and, again, by and large there's been little retailing, but of course, there will be some. It will be explained that they didn't call the Congressman but the Congressman called them, sometimes by invitation I'm sure.

Finally, in the matter of budget, the same type of thing occurs, and the budget matters are handled for the entire five constituents in my office by me and my associates and not by the Commissioners. As a matter of fact, in the Budget hearings the Commissioners are not even present unless there is a particular issue which affects them but this is my decision and not anybody else's. So getting control over the top personnel, the legislation, and the budget has been the mechanism whereby I have tried to get some control of the operation.

MOYNIHAN: Can I ask you to what extent were these four items not in the control of your predecessors?

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WEAVER: This I don't know. I am sure that the Budget has been operated more or less this way. But I think what had happened before in some instances was that although this was the procedure there would be variation from it where individuals would have their lines of contact and where they either would go directly or through the back door or something of this sort.

I would say this has been greatly minimized in the last three years. Theoretically, of course, this is the way it should always operate but from what I understand, and I don't know, but what I've been given to understand it has not operated as clearly in this wise in the past as it has during this Administration.

MOYNIHAN: Sir, let me ask you for the last question, so general that it could almost be without meaning and if you don't answer now you can answer it in the next book you write. How did it all add up to you?

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Was it a system working? Some people would have said that things were further out of control. Your administration not only under President Kennedy but President Johnson saw the outbreak of mass violence in the centers of the American cities for the first time probably since the late 19th century when the great strikes of the -- of that era. Yet so many things did happen, where do you come out?

WEAVER: Well, I think that I would say that in looking at the general situation in cities there is only so far that federal legislation and federal action can go in solving these issues. I don't mean to imply by that we have gone, as they say in Oklahoma, "as fur as we can go" but I don't think that there is hope of solving all these problems through federal legislation through federal programs and through federal action. As I point out in the book I've just written, the main problem here is our form of government: the fact that we've got these three levels of government, that most of the powers are in the states anyway, that the

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local government have a limited amount of authority, and that they certainly have a limited amount of taxes. But more important than that, and when I talk of urban of course I mean not only the central city but the suburbs, the great problem ahead of us, as I see it -- one of the great problems if not the greatest problem, the difficult problem -- is the problem of land policy and land use. The new suburbs of tomorrow -- are they going to be any better than those of today or are we going to have a lack of green open space; are we going to have

septic tanks; are we going to have inadequate water supplies; are we going to bulldoze down all the trees and then plant little "ole" scrub piens around; are we going to follow the contours of the land and make the houses grouped closer together so as to preserve the natural beauties which apparently is what people are supposed to go out in the suburbs to secure; are we going to be able to get away from these single income bedroom communities? All of these are problems of land policy and they are extremely difficult because the areas where the basic decisions

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are made do not now have any viable, urban oriented form of government. If they have a government at all it's rural so we get over zoning, and we get all of the other problems. Until we have either the states' assuming more responsibility in these areas or we do something about getting effective local governments ahead of people, and this is very difficult to do, many of these problems are going to remain unsolved.

What we've been trying to do in HHFA is to influence this largely through extending the area and the scope and the coverage of planning. This helps a little but it doesn't solve the whole thing; of course the tax problem is involved here, too. The way we tax land is sure to result in its uneconomic use, and our income tax regulations encourage land speculation, for example, and all of these are institutional factors.

Now as far as the matter of the upheavals in urban communities in recent years is concerned, as much as I am troubled as a middle class American by the fact of violence and as much as I abhor violence, I think that history will probably record these as evidences of change

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and change towards a better situation. Because I think when this is looked upon in retrospect the very people today who say that we've moved too fast in Civil Rights and that Negroes are asking for too much and want their rights too quickly will be able to say well -- if I had been in their position I would have wanted mine a whole lot earlier and I would have been raising the hell that they raised perhaps 50 years earlier. So that I think this is an inevitable situation, a period of change, and where you have an intolerable situation the whole history of mankind indicates that the only way you are going to get change is by the people who are at the bottom raising hell to get out of their submerged position.

Looking at it as a Social Scientist, I think that it's probably inevitable and it may be a good sign because you don't have these events when you have a closed society, such as Dr. Silver described as having existed until recently in Mississippi. If society is completely controlled and completely closed you don't have such overt hostility

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because the disadvantaged don't have the opportunity to express such attitudes. In a closed society people are held in such subjection that unless they have a whole revolt and the whole

system is gotten rid of little change occurs. I'm not being original when I say that I think the real significant features of these tensions and these hostilities and this violence has been that most Negroes are fighting not to change the whole system; they are fighting to get into the system. I think this is a healthy thing although it's very disconcerting, it's very discommoding, and it's very reprehensible to some as it occurs. It's a healthy sign of a society which has got certain ills but it hasn't got the cancer that spells mortality but it's got a malady which needs treatment and maybe surgery -- not surgery that completely remodels it, or threatens its existence -- but simply conforms it to the norm that we all express believe in and we all feel should be ours. But we don't want the inconvenience, we nice middle class people, of having things upset, and as long as we aren't affected by the inequities and

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brutality personality, there's a tendency to feel that maybe the disadvantaged are pushing too fast.

I think the key to this is what the average American who is not a nonwhite but a member of a majority group would do if he were subjected, in a democracy which claims to stand for equal opportunity, in an economy which has more affluence than any other economy ever had, if he were in this submerged position; and I'll guarantee that he would either be the head of these riots or possibly be the head of some subversive organization which would try to overthrow society. So as much as I deplore violence as a temporary thing, and as much as I realize that very often this does give the loud mouthed guy the opportunity to come forth as the leader and to holler for extremism and so forth, but just as you only have communism in those countries which have poverty and maladministration and a lack of justice, so you only have this type of hostility and this type of violence in a country which has failed to live up to its promises.

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MOYNIHAN: Thank you sir.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

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