

Leander H. Perez Oral History Interview – JFK#1, 5/22/1967
Administrative Information

Creator: Leander H. Perez

Interviewer: John F. Stewart

Date of Interview: May 22, 1967

Place of Interview: Baton Rouge, Louisiana

Length: 10 pages

Biographical Note

Leander H. Perez (1891-1969) was a Louisiana political figure and the president of Plaquemines Parish Commission Council from 1961 to 1969. This interview focuses on the Kennedy administration's approach to the civil rights movement, in particular the issues of desegregation and voting rights, among other topics.

Access

Open

Usage Restrictions

Copyright of these materials has passed to the United States Government upon the death of the interviewee. Users of these materials are advised to determine the copyright status of any document from which they wish to publish.

Copyright

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 The copyright law extends its protection to unpublished works from the moment of creation in a tangible form.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

Transcript of Oral History Interview

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

Suggested Citation

Leander H. Perez, recorded interview by Josh F. Stewart, May 22, 1967 (page number), John F. Kennedy Library Oral History Program.

Oral History Interview

Of

Leander H. Perez

Although a legal agreement was not signed during the lifetime of Leander H. Perez, upon his death, ownership of the recording and transcript of his interview for the Oral History Program passed to the John Fitzgerald Kennedy Library.

The following terms and conditions apply:

1. The transcript is available for use by researchers.
2. The tape recording shall be made available to those researchers who have access to the transcript.
3. Copyright to the interview transcript and tape is assigned to the United States Government.
4. Copies of the transcript and the tape recording may be provided by the Library to researchers upon request for a fee.
5. Copies of the transcript and tape recording may be deposited in or loaned to institutions other than the John F. Kennedy Library.

Leander H. Perez– JFK #1
Table of Contents

<u>Page</u>	<u>Topic</u>
1	Impression of John F. Kennedy
2	Kennedy administration's handling of civil rights matters
3	Integration in schools
4	Supreme Court decision
5	Voting rights
7	Impact of the Kennedy administration
8	Kennedy administration's encouragement of civil rights groups
9	Excommunication from the Catholic Church

Oral History Interview

with

LEANDER H. PEREZ

May 22, 1967
Baton Rouge, Louisiana

By John F. Stewart

For the John F. Kennedy Library

STEWART: Judge Perez, could you tell us what your earliest impressions, if you recall, were of Senator Kennedy before or at the time he became a candidate for the presidency?

PEREZ: My earliest impression of Senator Kennedy while he was a candidate was that he was a well-educated, intelligent, well disposed young man who conducted his campaign for the presidency on a high plane.

STEWART: Did you ever meet Senator Kennedy before he became president?

PEREZ: Oh. I met Senator Kennedy casually in the United States Senate once or twice.

STEWART: Do you recall what the situations were? Did you discuss anything with him at that time?

PEREZ: No. No. There was no particular legislation in which I was interested at the time. I just met him casually while I was with some other senators.

STEWART: What was your position in the 1960 campaign? Were you supporting either of the presidential candidates? Either [Richard M.] Nixon or President Kennedy?

PEREZ: No. I couldn't support either one because the platforms of both major parties were ultra-liberal and contained so many matters that I thought were unconstitutional and were really un-American and were destined to further bankrupt the country.

STEWART: After President Kennedy was elected, what if any contacts did you have with people in the Administration? Did you ever have any contacts with people from the Justice Department or from any other agencies of the federal government?

PEREZ: Very little. Very little contact. I appeared before one or two committees of Congress in opposition to some of the liberal measures, so-called civil rights measures.

STEWART: What was your appraisal of the way in which the Kennedy Administration approached the whole civil rights matter in its first year in office in 1961? Do you recall?

PEREZ: Yes. There's no doubt but that all the proposals for so-called civil rights legislation was to firm up the minority bloc vote which is most important in a presidential election because of the winner take all method of electing the president by presidential electors.

STEWART: What matters were of the highest concern to you as far as all these problems were concerned?

PEREZ: The main concern I had was with the ruinous deprivation of the right of the people of self government under the Constitution. And that has virtually been destroyed more so under Lyndon Johnson since he took office as President in November 1963.

STEWART: Did you feel that the Kennedy Administration was going too far, taking too many actions in the whole area of school integration?

PEREZ: Yes. Of course, that goes back to the time of [Dwight D.] Eisenhower under the [Earl] Warren Court which destroyed all the prior jurisprudence on the subject of equal facilities and on the constitutional right of the states to regulate their own public school system which had been sustained by the United States Supreme Court previously. As a matter of fact, state courts, federal courts had held for many years before 1896 when the United States Supreme Court confirmed the right of the states to operate separate but equal facilities in their public school systems. And the 1954 Warren Court decision proceeded not on interpreting the Constitution, but, in effect, the Court repudiated the Fourteenth Amendment and said they could not turn the clock back to the time when the amendment was adopted onto the Plessy-Ferguson Case in 1896 because at that time the Court did not have available to it the knowledge of modern psychology such as was now available in the Court, citing in its footnote 11, Kotinsky and Chein, E. Franklin Frazier, Kenneth B. Clark, Theodore Brameld, and they said see generally [Gunnar] Myrdal's The American Dilemma--all communist subversive writings. I know that K.B. Clark was a member of two communist front organizations and social science advisor to the legal staff of the NAACP [National Association for the Advancement of Colored People]; that E. Franklin Frazier was a member of eighteen communist fronts. And I know, too, that Myrdal's book called The American Dilemma was sponsored by a two hundred and sixty thousand dollar grant of the Carnegie Corporation of Alger Hiss fame. That was one of Hiss's corporations, that is, he headed it as president. And I know, too, that in the preface to Myrdal's book, he cited various psychologists or sociologists who were given to him by the Carnegie Corporation to work on his book, The American Dilemma. And they contributed most largely to the book, including W.E.B. DuBois who is the most cited subversive of any American. And Myrdal simply borrowed some of the writings of anti-South and communist writers to confect his fourteen hundred page book.

STEWART: What was your answer generally to the argument that was frequently put forth by the Eisenhower Administration and certainly carried on by the Kennedy Administration that the Supreme Court had ruled and, therefore, it was the law of the land and any remedies had to be through the judicial process?

PEREZ: I remember that very well. The Supreme Court handed down first a preliminary decision and then fixed the matter for a hearing eleven months later and invited

the United States Attorney General to research the history of the Fourteenth Amendment and see if it had any intended effect on education. And, of course, there was nothing in the history of the Fourteenth which indicated any right to the federal government to interfere, take over, or control the administration of any school system. And the Court so held. But the Court proceeded then, went off on a tangent, based its decision on a psychological ground that to discriminate against Negro children could well do them harm to their hearts and minds which may never be remedied.

STEWART: What was your course of action? How did you deal with the Supreme Court decision which, presumably, was the law of the land?

PEREZ: Well, of course, the Supreme Court was not the law of the land because the Court has no right to legislate or to make laws or to say that an amendment to the Constitution was out of date, and at the time of its adoption they did not have available the knowledge of modern psychology because psychology is not our law of the land. Neither is a Court decision which is so far afield as to, in effect, repudiate a purported amendment to the Constitution. But during those eleven months when the preliminary decision was handed down to the final decision, the American people were mind-washed by high-pressure publicity all to the effect that whatever decision the court handed down is the supreme law of the land. And that was dinned into people's ears and showed to them in periodicals, in newspapers, and radio and whatnot so as to ready the people to accept whatever the Court handed down as its edict to be the law of the land. Now then, of course, not only it's made the law of the land by force, not by right of law. And Eisenhower was used to illustrate that most forcibly when he sent the One Hundred and First Airborne into Little Rock to enforce the unlawful decision of the United States Supreme Court.

STEWART: What did you feel was the primary motivation of President Kennedy in taking the actions that he did to enforce what he considered to be something that had to be enforced?

PEREZ: Oh, it was strictly political, of course, because both major parties were in a mad scramble for the

minority bloc vote. And I know as a fact that the minority bloc vote is largely a communist dominated bloc vote whether it is through the NAACP which the Congressional Record and the House Un-American Activities Committee reports show to be dominated by subversives, at least three-fourths of its directors and its officers and so forth. And [James] Farmer's CORE [Congress of Racial Equality], the same; his directors most largely are members of subversive organizations. SNCC [Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee] is practically altogether communist. And Martin Luther King is a product of the Montego, Tennessee, school for the training of professional communists. So there's the background. And there's no doubt that the conspiracy is to deprive our white youth of public school educational opportunities. So in the end, whether it be two or three generations, American will simply dry on the vine. We'll have an insufficient number of high school graduates and college graduates to man our large industrial empire. We will not produce enough physicists, electronic engineers, engineers of all types, doctors, and so forth to compete with the communist world dominated by Russia. And in the end, of course, I can see, whether it's two or three generations away, the United States will have to practically surrender to worldwide communism.

STEWART: What was your reaction to the efforts of the Kennedy Administration in the whole area of voting? There was considerable effort to involve themselves in voting situations in various states, primarily in the South. What was your reaction to these efforts?

PEREZ: Well, now, I don't recall that Kennedy went near as far as Lyndon Johnson did because Kennedy was in office, oh, I'd say at least over a year.

STEWART: For three years.

PEREZ: For three years, and Kennedy never did have introduced in Congress such a bill as called the Voting Rights Bills of '65 or even the so-called Civil Rights Act of '64.

STEWART: He introduced that in 1963.

PEREZ: The '64 Act.

STEWART: Kennedy introduced it.

PEREZ: But not the Voting Right Act which nullified all state uniform voter qualification laws and which took over, really, the regulation and operation of our elections on a state, local, and even precinct level. Now we have federal registrars. We have federal spies at our voting machines casting votes for illiterates. And virtually the six Southern states which come under the so-called Voting Rights Act of '65 are in a second Reconstruction period.

STEWART: What is your stand on the right of various people to vote? Who do you think should be eliminated or should not have the right to vote?

PEREZ: All of those who can legally qualify under uniform voter qualification laws of the state are entitled to vote. But the federal government has no right, the Congress has no legal right to enact voter qualification laws. Now, the United States Supreme Court had held time and time again that under the Second Article and I believe it's Seventeenth Amendment of the Constitution of the United States, the Constitution adopted the uniform voter qualification laws of the states for the election of the most numerous branch of the legislature. And the Constitution is what was violated by the Warren Court in upholding the so-called Voting Rights Act of '65. But I think a careful reading of that Court decision will show that the Supreme Court bypassed its previous decisions holding that the Constitution had adopted the uniform voter qualification laws of the states for the most numerous branch of its legislature as provided in the United States Constitution. But there again, the chief executive uses the courts, its edicts, which are supposed to be the law of the land, and then the chief executive enforces it with, of course, the power of the federal government. So we have now government by men instead of government by law.

STEWART: Did you ever feel that there were among the close advisors to President Kennedy people who were substantially influenced by subversive groups?

PEREZ: Well, I do know this. I do know that Kennedy was elected by the man who held the balance of power in the balance of power state. Without Dave Dubinsky, Kennedy could not have been president. He won by eighty-four electoral votes. New York had forty-five. Dave Dubinsky could have given his forty-five to Dick Nixon if Dick Nixon had not had the Alger Hiss brand on his forehead. He was given credit for exposing Alger Hiss. So that if you will check Dave Dubinsky's early record and see what he was in Russia before he came to this country, you'll know what I mean.

STEWART: Did you ever feel that there were any people on the White House staff, for example, or in the Cabinet who were subject to heavy influence by what you would consider subversive groups?

PEREZ: I don't know of any, really. But I haven't had the opportunity of research and seeing reports on any of them. As you know, since the Truman days, the House Un-American Activities Committee was virtually abolished and prevented from continuing investigations of subversive activities.

STEWART: That's just about all. Let me ask one question in conclusion. How would you, from a fairly long range perspective, judge the impact of the Kennedy Administration on the internal affairs of this country and how would you rate him as a president?

PEREZ: Well, I don't believe the Kennedy Administration had any very great impact on the country. I don't think so. I don't think the legislation that he proposed or the economics of his Administration were very far different from the Eisenhower Administration. I recall when Kennedy was first president, he did what other presidents usually do. They force through the Congress large appropriation bills so that they have billions to play with; they have billions for take-home money to the various members of Congress; they have billions to promote and to support various giveaway programs to attract votes in various states. And Kennedy followed the same procedure. Of course, it's an evil in this country, and that is one reason why the country is hopelessly bankrupt, political reasons, using the resources of the country to promote selfish political ambitions

and the grasp for more power.

STEWART: Do you feel that the activities of so-called civil rights groups, for example, in your home parish would have taken place without the backing or the influence of the federal government?

PEREZ: There is no doubt but that the federal government encouraged these so-called civil rights demonstrations, which were in no manner civil rights demonstrations. They were simply demonstrations against state and local authority. They were encouragements to armed rebellion such as developed in Watts and in the East, even in Omaha, Nebraska, other areas of the country. But the irresponsibles were encouraged when. . . . One of the worst spectacles, I suppose, that was ever put on the television screen was when Lyndon Johnson as President, in an address to a joint session of Congress, sang the international communist song of hate, "We Shall Overcome." And added to that, the spectacle of Warren, the Chief Justice, and four of the black-robed Justices of the United States Supreme Court applauding and swinging in rhythm, "We Shall Overcome." You saw the same song sung in Belgium and in other areas where communist inspired youths threw themselves on the highways to obstruct the army parades and the like. Now isn't that a terrific scene to be placed before the American people? The President singing the international communist song of hate, encouraging these irresponsibles, goaded on by communists in the background, to go into armed rebellion. And we're paying now. They've encouraged it to such an extent now that the federal government is practically helpless to stop these same type of demonstrations against our war effort. And when the so-called leaders like [Stokely] Carmichael and Martin Luther King can brazenly advise thousands of people to resist the draft, which is a violation itself, and to go by scot-free shows that the politicians in the White House and in Washington are afraid to proceed against blatant law violators which they've encouraged to such an extent now that they can't stop them.

STEWART: To say, again, you feel that their motivation is strictly political? It's because of the potential votes of Negro people?

PEREZ: There is no doubt but that they are motivated strictly and solely and selfishly by politics, by their own selfish aggrandizement. They certainly are not moved by any patriotic reasons.

STEWART: Or any feelings of morality or anything else?

PEREZ: Well, morality, of course, is out of the question because it's unmoral. There's certainly no element of integrity in this situation either.

STEWART: Just one last question. It just occurred to me. Were the problems that you had with the hierarchy of the Catholic church in any way related to the Administration in Washington?

PEREZ: Oh, no. Oh, no. That was simply due to the fact that there was an archbishop who came down from Kansas City and St. Louis who was acting as a hatchet man there to enforce integration of parochial schools which was resisted, and he threatened the whole community with being disbarred from the Catholic church. And then in my case, in my dispute with the Archbishop, he said that I excommunicated myself. And I told him that it was strictly ridiculous that I

STEWART: He said you excommunicated yourself?

PEREZ: Oh, yes. I automatically excommunicated myself. They never issued any order to excommunicate me. And I challenged them to do it if they wanted to. It was their prerogative, but they didn't do it. No, it's a false assumption that I was excommunicated. I did not excommunicate myself as they said. And I'm still a Catholic. I still practice my Catholic religion.

STEWART: But this had absolutely no relationship to anything else.

PEREZ: Oh, no. I don't think so.

STEWART: Okay, is there anything else you want to say?

PEREZ: No.