

Arthur A. Chapin, Jr. Oral History Interview—JFK #2, 3/31/1967
Administrative Information

Creator: Arthur A. Chapin, Jr.
Interviewer: John Stewart
Date of Interview: March 31, 1967
Place of Interview: Washington, D.C.
Length: 22 pages

Biographical Note

Chapin was a staff member on the Democratic National Committee (1958-1961) and Assistant to the Secretary of the U.S. Employment Service in the Department of Labor. In this interview he discusses efforts to desegregate the Department of Labor and hire minorities, efforts to encourage desegregation and equal employment opportunities for minorities in the private sector, and civil rights legislation, among other issues.

Access

Open.

Usage Restrictions

According to the deed of gift signed April 14, 1970, copyright of these materials has been assigned to United States Government. Users of these materials are advised to determine the copyright status of any document from which they wish to publish.

Copyright

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 The copyright law extends its protection to unpublished works from the moment of creation in a tangible form.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

Transcript of Oral History Interview

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

Suggested Citation

Arthur A. Chapin, Jr., recorded interview by John Stewart, March 31, 1967, (page number), John F. Kennedy Library Oral History Program.

Gift of Personal Statement

By Arthur A. Chapin

to the

John Fitzgerald Kennedy Library

In accordance with Sec. 507 of the Federal Property and Administrative Services Act of 1949, as amended (44 U.S.C. 397) and regulations issued thereunder (41 CFR 101-10), I, Arthur A. Chapin hereinafter referred to as the donor, hereby give, donate, and convey to the United States of America for deposit in the John Fitzgerald Kennedy Library, and for administration therein by the authorities thereof, the tape(s) and transcript of a personal statement approved by me and prepared for the purpose of deposit in the John Fitzgerald Kennedy Library. The gift of this material is made subject to the following terms and conditions:

1. Title to the material transferred hereunder, and all literary property rights, will pass to the United States as of the date of the delivery of this material into the physical custody of the Archivist of the United States.

2. It is the donor's wish to make the material donated to the United States of America by terms of this instrument available for research as soon as it has been deposited in the John Fitzgerald Kennedy Library.

3. A revision of this stipulation governing access to the material for research may be entered into between the donor and the Archivist of the United States, or his designee, if it appears desirable.

4. The material donated to the United States pursuant to the foregoing shall be kept intact permanently in the John Fitzgerald Kennedy Library.

Signed

Arthur A. Chapin

Date

APR 9 1970

Accepted

James B. Rhoads
Archivist of the United States

Date

April 14, 1970

Arthur A. Chapin—JFK #2

Table of Contents

<u>Page</u>	<u>Topic</u>
30	Identifying problems in the Department of Labor's Employment Service
33, 41	Desegregating the Department of Labor and hiring minorities
37	Segregation in the private sector
38	President's Commission on Equal Employment Opportunity
43	Revamping the Department of Labor apprenticeship program
46	Civil rights legislation
48	Manpower Development and Training Act
50	Comparing Secretaries of Labor Arthur J. Goldberg and Willard Wirtz
51	Final thoughts about John F. Kennedy

Second of Two Oral History Interviews

with

Arthur A. Chapin, Jr.

March 31, 1967
Washington, D.C.

By John Stewart

For the John F. Kennedy Library

STEWART: Mr. Chapin, let me ask you to start out today to describe the circumstances of your appointment to this position in the Department of Labor. How was the position defined to you in the beginning? Did you have any reservations about it? And what did you primarily expect or hope to accomplish when you started out?

CHAPIN: The first contact I had with the possibility that I was being thought of in a role adjoining the federal system was that Mr. Arthur Goldberg [Arthur J. Goldberg], who was then the Secretary of Labor, having been appointed by Mr. Kennedy [John F. Kennedy], suggested to Mr. Louis Martin [Louis E. Martin] that he would like to offer me a position in the Department of Labor, that would tend to change the present Employment Service and would tend to make it more realistic in terms of its service, particularly to minority groups. He asked Mr. Martin if he would discuss this with me. Mr. Martin did discuss this with me at lunch one afternoon and said that the President was very concerned about the problems that minorities have had over the years with the Employment Service and wanted to know whether or not I would be willing to take on the responsibilities of attempting to change this kind of attitude if it did exist or if it was an attitude within the framework of the federal system. And I said, "Well, I'd like to think about it for a while." I've never been one that's felt very

strongly about joining any bureaucracy, and I told him that.

A week later I got another call asking me had I thought about it; Mr. Goldberg is pushing very hard for someone to make a decision. I said, well, I'd give him a decision the following day, and that I did. I did say to Mr. Martin I would accept it if I were offered. I received a telephone call asking me if I would talk to one of our assistant secretaries in the Department of Labor, and I did that, including Mr. Reynolds [James J. Reynolds], who was at that time in the Department. And two days later the appointment was made. The first programs which we undertook was a program to find out what the problems were.

STEWART: Let me just ask you something.

CHAPIN: Go right ahead.

STEWART: Did such a position exist before at all? Had there been a person in this whole area....

CHAPIN: Yes, there had been a person in the Bureau of Employment Security, but who answered directly to an assistant to the director of the Employment Service, which was down the line quite a bit. I answered directly to the Secretary of Labor, so there was the direct change. This was something that I had asked for as a part of the decision very early. If there were problems, I didn't want to go through the bureaucracy of trying to get the problems solved, and that was assured me, not directly by Mr. Goldberg, but through his spokesman.

STEWART: Spokesman.

CHAPIN: We talked to Mr. Jamie Reynolds. Our first program was to try to find out what the problem was, if there was a problem. And I suggested to the Secretary that what we ought to do is call in the executive directors of all the Urban Leagues in the United States, here in Washington. They were the major civil rights organization, but more important they were the major non-white social worker organization because most of their executive directors were social workers. The Secretary agreed, and such a meeting was held here in Washington for all the executive directors. They came to Washington, and they spent two days here outlining their relationships with

the Employment Service throughout the United States. And the Department of Labor gave them an overview of the responsibilities the Department had in all programs, not just the Employment Service.

There was the same kind of meeting held with NAACP. There was a similar meeting held in the of colleges throughout the United States because it was my feeling that very few of the college presidents understood anything at all about the United States government's

responsibility and eagerness to employ people or use the talents which they have. And this is the first time this has happened.

Preceding this, as you probably know, the Secretary did ask Mr. Macy [John W. Macy, Jr.] to extend the time of the filing for the federal entrance examination, which is an examination to attract college students; that time was extended. And as a result of that experience, we found that almost no Negro youth in the United State were passing the federal entrance examination and this was a problem. So we were able, one, to identify what the problem areas were: one, at the college level, that youngsters were not being prepared properly or they were not oriented properly to the role of the federal government or the opportunities for which the federal government had. This was, as you probably know, also adopted later by the State Department, the same program which we had instituted here. A series of college conferences were called around the country which were called Secretary's Conferences. These conferences were for the purposes again of taking the show on the road.

Prior to that time, prior to those conferences, however, I participated, at the behest of the President, in the White House Conferences around the country. Again, outlining what the federal government's hope was, but, more important, finding out what people thought about the problems in government. White House conferences in the past had all come to Washington and had a one or two day session, and that was the end of it. But the White House conferences the President outlined was that of youth. I was a panel member on five of the panels. Six conferences were held in seven days. We went from one end of the country to the other. I suppose this reflects the youth of the President. And the purpose of these conferences, by and large, was to attract minorities and to get them into the frame of mind and also, more important, finding out what the problems were in various regions of the United States. I started off by going to

[-32-]

Cleveland, Detroit, then Philadelphia, and then from Philadelphia we went to San Francisco, and then down to Los Angeles.

STEWART: Were you generally surprised at the extent of the problems as far as the employment service was concerned?

CHAPIN: Well, I was not surprised at the extent of the problem because I had been privileged to see memoranda that had been presented to the previous President's [Dwight D. Eisenhower] Cabinet which indicated that there were only twelve segregated local offices in the United States. My information almost immediately was that there was a lot more than that. I personally traveled from one end of this country to the other and looked at the employment offices, talked with people in various employment offices, talked with community leaders, spent some six months doing so. Then I presented a program to the then-Secretary of Labor, Arthur Goldberg, one, eliminating the segregated employment offices: they called them two things here. We found out the word segregation, even though there was a wall between the two offices, they were not known as segregated offices. They were called divisional offices, so that eliminated the word segregation. And that had been presented to the President's Cabinet, but nobody questioned

the fact that there were x number of divisional offices, there were x number of segregated offices.

So they were able to cut down on the subject of segregation per se if it was not geographically segregated. That is to say if there was not an office for colored people in one section of the city and white offices in another section of the city, if they were side by side, they were then called divisional offices, which, of course, were one and the same. There was no difference at all. So, therefore, the figures would have been different. And it always intrigued me ever since, that figures have a way of being really misleading.

STEWART: No one picked that up?

CHAPIN: No one did. Not even the Cabinet officers and there is a matter of record that these were presented to the Cabinet members. This is in no way a reflection against the former Secretary, Mr. James Mitchell [James P. Mitchell], but indications that he probably never thought about

[-33-]

the differences between divisional offices and segregated offices. And I probably would not have thought about it myself, had I not been able to travel the country and find out what the situation really was.

As a result, Mr. Goldberg's order not only eliminated segregated offices almost immediately but eliminated racial identification. In 1962, Mr. Goldberg issued an order that there would be no identifying marks as to race on any forms by the Bureau of Employment Security or unemployment compensation forms. This was carried out to some extent. And then we had to go around to find out, even though he had issued the order, we found out that there were those who didn't believe that this was a true order. So we had to do almost a state-by-state review to determine whether or not they were carrying out the Secretary's order on this basis. So what we were doing is following up on the things that happened so that we were sure, and could assure him, that there was a continuity of what he desired to have and desired in his administration.

STEWART: Was there any substantial shift in the replacement of Department of Labor people working in regions who just couldn't accept this new approach, so to speak?

CHAPIN: No there was not and still isn't. I would say that most of the people who were administrators within the Department, the Employment Service, that is, in the Department at the time, in 1961, are still here now. And although there have been several changes, we found that there were few Negroes working in any federal regional office throughout the United States, not even a Negro secretary in any of our Southern States at all. That was one of the changes that I'm happy that we had something to do with. There are now Negroes working in both professional categories and in the clerical staff in every region in the United States, and there are eleven such regions which we have full jurisdiction over.

I also might say that there were two Negro professional people in any of the field offices. We were instrumental in getting the first director to the Employment Service, a Negro in New York. In addition to that, since the present Secretary, Mr. Wirtz [Willard Wirtz], we were instrumental in

[-34-]

getting in as the director of the Bureau of Apprenticeship and Training a Negro in the Chicago regional office which takes in several states in that region. So today there are Negroes in administrative and policy making positions, unlike, I suppose, even some other government agencies.

During this time, as you probably know, the President had what was called a little cabinet, a White House cabinet, which we participated in actively and reported to Mr. Lee White [Lee C. White] and occasionally with other members of the White House staff, including Andy Hatcher [Andrew T. Hatcher], who acted both in terms of a contact person and a representative of the White House press staff.

STEWART: What particular things would you say the White House was interested in? Or what were the major aspects of the whole problem were the people like Lee White most interested in?

CHAPIN: Well, Lee White was primarily interested in the progress that was made in the area of civil rights. This was his prime...

STEWART: Yes, but I mean within the...

CHAPIN: ...responsibility.

STEWART: ...framework.

CHAPIN: What he wanted to know was, what did you do this week? How many people you employed this week. Has the Labor Department increased its number of people in higher jobs? He wanted to know what had happened to the Employment Service. How many offices did you close up? An Executive Order does not necessarily mean that the states will immediately, tomorrow morning, do what you ask them to do. It takes a long time to do this. It's not as immediate as one would assume. Mr. White knew this.

STEWART: Was there a question at the time as to the authority of the Secretary to do this?

[-35-]

CHAPIN: Well...

STEWART: ...without any....

CHAPIN: No one ever questions the Secretary, but they just don't get it done. And this means you've got to cajole and push and convince them that you really mean business. I think that other administrations have probably issued such orders, although I haven't read of any, but unless you put the second phase of this, and that's what Mr. White's job was. His job was to follow through and to make sure what was happening and report directly to the President. There was no in-between. He talked directly to the President on every operation that was going on in every department of government, and there was always a question of, well, when is—you said that the order was issued, how many have you done? What is the situation?

They wanted to know time, chapter, and verse, and where the new offices were located. This was the kind of thing the White House wanted to know. They wanted to know numbers in terms of increases of better paying jobs for non-whites. They wanted to know what the numbers were. They wanted to know what the projections were. This was an ongoing situation. They wanted to know what programs were going to be geared directly to influence this group of citizens. So it was constantly a more than just a memoranda kind of thing. They telephoned—and I might say that I've never known the White House to pick up the telephone seemingly as often as they did in the Kennedy Administration—on minute details or situations regarding these problems.

STEWART: Did you run into many situations of congressman, senators, or representatives getting involved in situations regarding their states either because of the reluctance of their state people? Did this happen frequently?

CHAPIN: I personally never had this happen or never knew that any letters came to Mr. Goldberg on this subject. There may have been some, but if they

[-36-]

were, I did not know of them.

I might say to you that a very interesting part of this—to give you some idea of the White House—there'd been a complaint for sometime against the Lockheed Aircraft Corporation in terms of Lockheed's policies of discrimination both in hiring and in dealing with those employees that it had hired on a racially different basis. Mr. Jerry Holleman [Jerry R. Holleman] was the then Assistant Secretary, and we were very much interested to see what could be done to change that situation because that was a major government employer. There was great interest to try to see what could be done.

I recall I was asked to go find out what the problems really were, and I remember that when I got to the airport, I went to get in the limousine and I was told, well, no, you couldn't get in the limousine because you were a Negro. You had to call a taxi cab from Atlanta to the Airport. They would put a meter flag down in downtown Atlanta which meant it cost about three dollars with nobody in the cab. Then when you got in the cab the meter flag was still down; they took you where you wanted to go in Atlanta, which meant that for your normal

dollar and a half fee, it would cost a Negro between six and seven dollars to come from the airport. The taxi cabs were marked "Colored" and "White." A Negro could not be carried in a "White" taxi cab. And the same thing held true for the Negro cabs. Well, this intrigued me because I had not seen that before.

In addition to that, in terms of my investigation, I found that on the parking lot in Marietta, Georgia, where the Lockheed employees park their cars, the lot had toilet facilities, and those toilet facilities were marked "White" and "Colored." That also intrigued me. I found that the Negroes were given different time cards than the whites were given, and they had to punch into a different time clock. Within the plant itself, you had segregated restrooms; you had segregated facilities for eating; even the push carts that were used for the coffee breaks since people didn't go to the cafeteria, the cafeteria came to people, and they had certain push carts which had coffee and other things on it for Colored and for White which was a completely peculiar situation.

[-37-]

It's interesting to know that the property which housed Lockheed was leased from the federal government. It's actually government land. And in my report I made this point. The Attorney General saw this, and things began to happen. You probably know, the whole issue of airport travel began to change, and elimination of segregated facilities in airports became an issue with the former Attorney General, now Senator Kennedy [Robert F. Kennedy], took as a result of that investigation.

Now this was fed directly to the White House. The information that we found was fed directly to the White House. As a result of that kind of information and as a result of the White House intervention, a gentleman in Atlanta, who had been a very close friend of the Kennedy family, was asked to look into the situation, see what could be done, and out of that was born Plans for Progress, which, of course today is National Alliance of Businessmen. But that's how it was born—the difficulty at Lockheed. And as a result of that work, Lockheed became the outstanding employer in this area. They eliminated the segregation, that is completely, in all phases. But this was done as a result of these steps that I've just outlined to you.

Very recently, as a part of that college conference I spoke to you about, we had the industrial relations person out of Marietta address one of those conferences. He later became the executive director for the Plans for Progress, just a year ago here in Washington. So Lockheed has become from where it was to the leader in this field. And I would say that this was largely done as a result, even though it's not completely done as a result of the Kennedy Administration, which gave the impetus to this problem.

STEWART: What other contacts did you have with the President's Committee, with Holleman and John Feild [John G. Feild] and Hobart Taylor and those people?

CHAPIN: John Feild, as you know, was the first executive director of the President's Committee serving under Jerry Holleman. That Committee was put

together by myself and Jerry Holleman, that is, the original personnel of the Committee, and the operation of the Committee was actually put together by Jerry Holleman and myself. The Committee was formerly the President's Committee for Equal Opportunity of—I'm sorry, somebody by the name of....

[-38-]

STEWART: There were two of them. The Committee on Government Contract and the....

CHAPIN: The Committee on Government Contracts, which was headed by Mr. Nixon [Richard M. Nixon], former vice president, and then there was the committee for civil servants, but I'm trying to think of the name of it. I can't recall the name of that committee, but that was headed by a man in Chicago; he was a minister. He headed that phase of it.

STEWART: Right, right.

CHAPIN: This as for the people who work within the framework of the government itself. Our relationship was to put those two together and make them one committee, both in-house and out-house, with out-house responsibilities. Mr. John Feild was a recommendation of Senator Hart [Philip A. Hart] of Michigan. Mr. Feild had been employed with Senator Hart and others in this direction, including several civil rights groups that recommend Mr. Feild for the position. Mr. Feild was given the responsibility as executive director and remained so until the end of the—the very unfortunate assassination of the President.

STEWART: I think he left...

CHAPIN: He left just—no, I'm sorry, he did leave sooner than that. He left, mmm, I guess it was six months before, maybe even more than that. There was a conflict that had developed between the Administration and Mr. Field and some members of the President's Committee, including some unhappiness, I think, on the part of Mr. Goldberg, who was the vice chairman of the Committee. Vice President of the United States, Mr. Johnson [Lyndon B. Johnson], then was chairman. But there was internal conflict, and it was recommended that Mr. Feild resign from that Committee, and later, as you know, Mr. Hobart Taylor became its executive director. Mr. Taylor had been working for the Committee, I might say, almost from its inception. He was known as counsel to the Committee, and he was working almost from the inception of the Committee in that capacity. I worked very closely with Mr. Taylor when he was both counsel and also executive

[-39-]

director of the Committee.

The Committee involved itself, and had regular meetings, I might say, as you probably know and have probably heard, with the Attorney General, who took a very active role in the Committee membership. It's interesting, we helped to write that Executive Order, and one of the things we put in the Order was that we had noted from past committees that the personalities on the committees did not attend many of the meetings, they'd send substitutes. If you'll read the regulations, substitutes were not permitted except through the advance knowledge of the Committee as a whole. Therefore, members of the Committee actually did participate in the dialogue and debate of the Committee itself. This was a very effective Committee, very effective. And its effectiveness was because Mr. Goldberg was there at almost every meeting; the Vice President was there; the Attorney General was there. These were people who had direct interest in this Committee, along with some of the White House people from time to time, including Mr. White.

STEWART: You, I assume then, had no reservations that the Plans for Progress approach was criticized in some angles.

CHAPIN: Yes.

STEWART: You had no reservations that this was a good course to follow as far as that Committee was...

CHAPIN: Well, I felt differently than some of my friends in the civil rights movement who had some misgivings about the industry's sincerity in this direction. I did not feel that the government, the vastness of the government, could ever police itself to the point that it could, by demand, bring about a complete change. I thought it had to be done in many, many ways, and I thought you had to use many vehicles, and I thought that the industry's interest in this direction and a man from industry who had lots of vigor and lots of drive and a Southerner, too, was most helpful. He may not have approached it in the same way that some other people would have approached it, but I think that we were very fortunate in having him in to take on that responsibility.

[-40-]

As you probably know, the President provided an office here and in an old building over here, just across from the White House, for the Committee. That's where the Plans for Progress Committee really worked. They brought people in, industry people, from all over the country because of the relationship that this man had with the President, and he was in Florida talking to him at his pool about his program. He had complete access to President Kennedy, even by telephone. So it was that kind of relationship which I think was healthy and good, much could not have been gained. And even now I think we were right. The critics no longer criticize Plans for Progress as they formerly had in the past. And, as you probably know, Plans for Progress has shown there are more Negroes now in middle management positions than ever before in the history of this country and that most of the major corporations in the United States are not only hiring without racial, or very little, racial

discrimination, they are seeking the utilization through the Department of Labor and others in this direction for help and guidance.

One company I went to see just last week, sends to this office constantly their job openings asking us to disseminate it wherever possible. Well, we're just one source in this kind of situation. The Department of Labor has put out a directory of predominately Negro college graduates for the benefit of the industry. This has been done as a result of our interest in this area.

STEWART: Let me ask you a few other questions. You mentioned this about internal problems of the Department of Labor. I read some place, and I think you may have mentioned it, that there were absolutely no Negroes employed by the Department of Labor south of Washington in 1961, which is pretty amazing. First of all, how effective, generally, was your recruitment drive in the first year or two of the Kennedy Administration?

CHAPIN: Well, let me tell you how this was accomplished. You did read somewhere, because I wrote this down, that there were no Negroes employed south of the Potomac in the Department of Labor and very few north of the Potomac. What we did is we called the regional administrators in all the bureaus—that is, the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the Bureau of Employment Security, and the

[-41-]

Wage and Hour—and we said to them, “Look, now this is what your picture is, bureau by bureau, and there's no excuse for having this ridiculous picture. We want you to find qualified people; and we want you not to look over the shoulders of these people; we want you to make sure that they are given an opportunity. Now, more important, before any appointments are made for any existing vacancies, we want to see who they are here in Washington.”

Well, this had never been done before. I don't doubt that others may have said the same thing, but nobody had checked up, you see—it's this checking phase that the Kennedy Administration was interested in, which I like to call follow-through, to find out whether or not what you said in the first instance was actually carried out. We would call and actually find out what had been done almost daily so that I could report to Lee White, who was constantly asking, “How many have we got this week? How many next week?” David North was involved in this same kind of exercise a little later on in this direction, but there was Jerry Holleman, who was the contact in terms of the Department of Labor's role in this direction.

STEWART: Was there considerable opposition to what you were trying to do?

CHAPIN: Well, there was a considerable opposition, I would say, not vocal opposition, but certain regions—the Atlanta region, for instance, there was opposition out of that region. I remember one regional director in Texas who said, “Well I didn't think they really meant it. Once they told me it was for real, they

really meant it, I went out and did what I had to do. I didn't object to it but I always like to know whether it's real or not." Well, I think the follow-through is what we found that led, that the people to know that we really mean business in this direction, and it was not just a kind of an icing on the cake situation; it was not done for political purposes, that the Administration really meant business. And once regional directors knew the Administration really meant business, then they capitulated almost completely.

[-42-]

The fact of the matter is, regional directors would call me and say, "How do I go about doing some of this?" And then they would report to me what they were doing. So I didn't have to go through the bureaucracy again. I could call the regional director in Atlanta or the regional director in Texas or the regional director in New York or any regional director and say, "Well, what are you doing?" in any bureau, in any department. So it was the cutting of lines which led, I think, to the success of the program. But more important, it was the relationship which we were able to establish with these regional directors because they were rather important individuals, see, and the statutes establishing regional offices are rather clear, that they do have certain administrative responsibilities which only the Secretary can countermand.

STEWART: What about appeals? I understand there was a fairly complete revamping of the appeal procedures within the Department. Again, was there much opposition to this, and how successful was it?

CHAPIN: Well, I didn't have very much to do with this area, and I don't like to comment on something I have very little to do with. This was handled by and large, by Tom Powers [N. Thompson Powers] and some other people in the Department of Labor. I was not involved in that procedure, although the President's Committee gave birth to this question. I was not part of that responsibility. This was developed with some of our—I can't recall the name of the man now who was in the President's Committee—but by and large that's where that came from.

STEWART: What about apprenticeship programs? Were you heavily involved in this area?

CHAPIN: Apprenticeship programs are something we were involved in, but not really heavily involved. I first was asked by Mr. Goldberg to take a look at the apprenticeship situation. I observed there wasn't a single Negro working in a professional category in any apprenticeship in the federal system at all. So that we found that one out. And I had to find a handle of how to do this.

[-43-]

The long range handle would have been, obviously, to get them through the Civil Service route. I didn't feel that this was going to work for a lot of reasons. The reasons are if

you looked at the specifications, the job specifications for getting into the apprenticeship program, hardly any Negroes could ever get into the program at all. The job specifications cite something like this, that a training advisor in the regional office must have had I think three years working either as an apprentice or working as a local joint apprenticeship committee. He's had to have relationship with apprentices. Well, if there were no Negroes in the apprentices in the beginning, they'd never get into the Department of Labor because it was so written in that direction.

I suggested to Mr. Holleman that what we might do is that since we really were attempting to recruit and since the apprenticeship program was really a program to develop—it really was not an operating program; it was a program to develop apprentices with employers—we'd never be able to develop these people unless we were able to find some Negroes to do it. So he bought this, and we came up with the idea of developing what we called "apprenticeship advisor (minorities)," and I will never forget that.

The Civil Service Commission gave us the opportunity to do this recruiting, and the first recruitment we did was three. I'd recommended there be at least one in every office, that is, in every one of our twelve—at the time we had twelve regional offices. The first three were put on; one in California, Chicago, and New York. The fourth went on in Atlanta. And three of the four were Negroes. That was the first Negro entrance into the apprenticeship program. One was a Negro woman out of New York, one—in fact all of the people who were there had to have labor backgrounds because there was so much you couldn't change of the specifications, but we were able to change, at least, you didn't have to have apprenticeship backgrounds because when you put that in, it meant that you just couldn't get Negroes; it's an impossibility. So we did have a great deal to do with that, and that program was under Mr. Goshens [Edward E. Goshens].

[-44-]

Then I recommended that there be a man in Washington, and that man who was selected for overseeing the program out of Washington is now the regional director for the apprenticeship in Chicago. I recruited him personally. I recall going to Dayton, Ohio, at an Urban League Convention; he impressed me, and I thought that he would make a good person to introduce this program in an area where there was a great deal of hostility. I know of no area where there was more hostility to change than there was in the apprenticeship program. And I might say that even today probably it's the hardest of all the agencies, and you have to have more imagination there, I suppose, than any other agency that I know of to work with. But this was cracked just on that basis.

STEWART: Did you maintain a continuing relationship with civil rights organizations, particularly with the Urban League and the NAACP?

CHAPIN: Not only maintained it, I would say that there was a corollary between the office constantly and all civil rights organizations. And we'd had previously worked with Harris Wofford [Harris L. Wofford, Jr.], as you probably know, and that famous telephone call to Doctor Martin Luther King [Martin Luther King, Jr.]. So we've had a lot of organizations that were not, at that stage of the game, looked

upon as large operating civil rights organizations, but other organizations as well. And this office, at that time, had, and still does carry on that kind of relationship. As I mentioned earlier, we brought in all the executive directors of the Urban League throughout the United States for two days here in Washington. When I say I brought them in, they were not paid to come in, but we did pay their transportation, but they were not paid to come in. And this had been the first time that any government agency had ever done this.

STEWART: Did you personally recall running into any embarrassing situations because of all the criticism that these people were making of the Administration, particularly regarding the lack of legislation?

[-45-]

CHAPIN: Well, I ran into a great deal of criticism. In fact, the matter is the NAACP, Mr. Herb Hill [Herbert Hill], was on several occasions quite critical of me personally, saying that—I think on one occasion he said I'd sold out to the Democrats. This didn't disturb me; I expected to get some of this; and I presume the reason why the NAACP in particular—I'd been most active before coming to Washington with the NAACP and both the Urban League, but not much more active in the NAACP. I had written legislation which went to the United States Supreme Court and was upheld in the field of housing, and the NAACP had given me several awards as a result of that. Unfortunately, Mr. Hill felt that I had sold out completely for a job, which is, of course, untrue. He made a speech in Arizona, I remember, in which he was quite critical. He had a right to be critical of the agency but not of me personally, I don't believe. But he was.

But since that time and since, he's found changes. I recall he came to Washington complaining to Mr. Goldberg—he thought the Department was a sellout organization and so forth—but that resulted largely in my fight for Plans for Progress. I felt very strongly about Plans for Progress, and Mr. Hill did not feel strongly about that. I'm sure he's since changed his point of view. So sometimes you're vindicated for taking a hard and difficult position, and in this case I think it was a hard and difficult position to take, but I thought it was the right position because I believed in the people who were trying to be of assistance, who really were sincere.

And I think there was some concern among Negro groups that the Administration was not sincere because the President had not pushed for legislation. Mr. Clarence Mitchell [Clarence M. Mitchell, Jr.] was one of those who was quite critical that the Administration should be pushing for legislation; Mr. Whitney Young [Whitney M. Young, Jr.] was rather critical in this direction. Most civil rights groups wanted legislation. I think the President was trying to get them, really, to be critical because he wanted it, I think, to be known that the great pressure and the country really wanted civil rights legislation, and that it was his way of building up a demand of legislation. I'm certain of that. I'm certain from my own discussions with other people in the White House that he's not opposed to

[-46-]

this, but he wanted it to be a climate of public opinion that would gain support because at the time, the President indicated he didn't think he could get the legislation passed. This is one of the issues he wanted to build up as much pressure as possible in this direction.

STEWART: In your personal contact I assume, then, that you would use this as a defense of the Administration, the fact that it couldn't get passed? What generally was your reaction of the people you were talking to?

CHAPIN: Well, people I talked to in this area, it's true, I did tell a number of people that I encouraged them actually to develop organizational support for legislation because I thought that it was going to take an awful lot to get civil rights legislation passed. Most civil rights leaders agreed that it would take an awful lot to get it passed, but nevertheless they wanted the legislation, and this in no way diminished the situation. The President felt that much more could be accomplished if you proved in the administration of government that minorities really could administer programs and administer them wisely, and that this bugaboo that they weren't qualified and that sort of thing could be erased from the minds of many, many men. He felt strongly that if you were able to put your house in order, that is, the government itself, the major employer, put its house in order, this would be easier to sell to the Congress of the United States. And I think there was a great deal of truth in that kind of situation—I don't think we'd have ever gotten the civil rights bill passed had it not been for this groundwork being laid. In spite of all that's being said today, I just don't think that would have happened.

STEWART: That's very interesting, the part about really asking for criticisms to build up some pressure. I had never realized that. What discernible impact, if any, did you feel the demonstrations were having on, particularly, your efforts and your activities? Any at all, or anything else that was...

[-48-]

CHAPIN: Well, some of our people in the South would say you're pushing too hard. This is when the question came up that many Southerners agreed on the righteousness of the position, but they thought you were pushing, the Administration was pushing much too fast, much too fast. That is, federal people felt they were pushing much too fast. But we find that federal people may not like what they're doing, they do live in the community, and the mores of that community do have an effect on their day-to-day lives. But once they understood that this is what the Administration wanted, this is what they did. Now they were a long time getting around to it. I don't mean they did it the next morning. They just didn't roll over and their ideas die in that direction, but they did do what we asked them to do.

They did it in—I remember when I went to Atlanta they were very proud they should take me through and have pictures taken with me and some of the people they had employed very recently. They wanted to show me their offices in this direction. The information officer wanted to tell me the contact they were making in the community. We had suggested....

The Secretary had bought the idea of detailing people from the states to go around the country to introduce state administrators to Negroes in their states. I'll never forget—we introduced the state administrator to college presidents, to the placement officers in Negro schools, and these, by and large, were state run institutions, and they never contacted these people at all. And we were able to bring that kind of dialogue. So what we did on many, many fronts, it wasn't just an attack that was solely on one issue; it was done in many, many ways. We tried many, many efforts. It was not written down per se, you do it this way. It's interesting, and I think the Kennedys' history will probably say the Kennedys had no formula for this. The Kennedys were interested in results—how you got them is your business, but they were interested in results. And I think this was really helpful.

STEWART: Were you at all involved or can you recall anything significant regarding the programs of the Bureau of Labor Statistics or the MDTA [Manpower Development and Training Act] programs?

[-48-]

CHAPIN: The early days of 1962 is when the Manpower Development and Training Act was enacted. I, like a lot of other people, were in the dialogue and discussions in this direction. Its first Manpower Administrator was Mr. Seymour Wolfbein [Seymour L. Wolfbein]. I worked very closely with Seymour Wolfbein in establishing the first office here, and, as you probably know, the number two man to Seymour Wolfbein was Dr. Gregory [Francis A. Gregory]. I had something to do with Dr. Gregory's appointment, so that this would start off.

You also ought to know that among the first group of research programs, a program which now is history, was started at the Norfolk State College; that's a program that got a great deal of publicity, and if you talk to people there, it'll show that it was our decision to get this project underway. So we had a great deal to do with the Manpower Development from its very inception, both legislatively as well as in terms of the programs which were its major objectives. I feel that we still are not spending enough money in this direction.

Arthur Goldberg, as you know, gave birth to this manpower training and retraining act. And it was a combination of things that had happened under the Roosevelt Administration [Franklin D. Roosevelt] in the past and the automation that had taken place and the changes that had taken place that the labor unions were constantly concerned with, and Walter Reuther [Walter P. Reuther] had a great deal to do with this, his ideas were sought by the White House, and Arthur Goldberg had a great deal to do with it because he talked with a number of labor people in this direction. So because of his own background, he had the knowledge of jobs being lost as the result of automation, and, as you probably know, Arthur Goldberg was quite concerned with the problems of automation and technological changes that were taking place. So the dialogue there was, although not directly at that time concerned with civil rights, this was not one that was forgotten. It was known at that time the people who were lowest on the economic totem pole were the non-whites in this country.

STEWART: Was there anything in the Bureau of Labor Statistics of any significance that you...

[-49-]

CHAPIN: I can't recall anything specifically.

STEWART: Did you see any significant difference in the approach taken to civil rights problems by Secretary Goldberg and Secretary Wirtz?

CHAPIN: Well, that's a hard question to answer. I don't think there is any difference. I think it's a different approach to the problem. I think Secretary Goldberg had an approach which was different obviously than Secretary Wirtz. Secretary Goldberg, I think, related more closely to civil rights groups than does Secretary Wirtz relate to civil rights groups. And I presume this was just Secretary Goldberg's personality. He has had a long time working relationship with people in the Urban League personally, on a personal basis. He's known Roy Wilkins for many years; they've had a personal relationship with Roy; he's known many labor leaders who are Negroes on a first name basis. So it's really just a personality difference.

Secretary Wirtz is programmatically, I think one might say, much more efficient from a programmatic point of view than Secretary Goldberg. And Secretary Wirtz is interested in results and obtaining these results so they'll not be just milestones, but they'll be statues that will remain for many years. So it's just a difference, a program administrative difference between two men. Secretary Wirtz leaves a great deal more administrative responsibility in the hands of his administrative people, I think, than Secretary Goldberg. That's you know, the difference I would think.

STEWART: Okay that's just about all the questions I have unless there's.... Is there anything you'd like to say in conclusion about your relationships with the Kennedy people or about the Administration.

CHAPIN: I would say that...

STEWART: I guess I really didn't ask you, did you have any direct contact with the President during the three years.

[-50-]

CHAPIN: Yes, I did.

STEWART: Could you describe these?

CHAPIN: Well, my contact with the President, as every person who contacts a president of our United States, I assume, was obviously a great experience. I've had contacts with two, well, three now, presidents in the White House—but I suppose the contact with Kennedy was a different kind of experience. You didn't look at Kennedy in the same manner as you do most presidents of the United States.

At least, I didn't. I felt like I didn't have to call him Mr. President, and yet, I would never do so other than unless we were not in public. But he had known me personally before he became president, and he related to the people in a manner, I suppose, which he was magnetic in terms of the kind of relationship you have with a man of this type. He had clichés which he didn't use for any purpose; he talked as though everyone could understand him, and he was crystal clear in what he wanted done. He didn't go around the bush about these matters, particularly with government people. And he did not have much patience when people gave him excuses—I found that out pretty early. He just wanted results, period, and he wanted it quickly and fast.

I know a true story. I don't know how often it's been told or whether it's been told at all. When the Attorney General became Attorney General, there were only ten Negroes working in the—nine Negroes, I'm sorry—nine Negroes working in the Justice Department. Somebody raised this question with him, and he said, "Well there's now ten. I, just before you came in, two minutes ago, appointed the Northern Director of the Department in California and he's a Negro." Now he had worked with the Kennedy Administration. He still is, I believe, the Attorney for the Northern section of California.

So the Kennedys were action people. I think that's probably the best way of describing him. They were not people who concerned themselves with red tape or concern. If something had to be done, it just had to be done, and that's all there was to it. No excuse would stand. So I think that might be the difference in this direction. What I remember most was the party that the Kennedys gave for all the people who had participated in their campaign. It's the first time, I presume, that Negroes were invited en masse to

[-51-]

the White House in the United States. And that did more to bring people to understand this matter which obviously was a question of legislation. He wanted legislation; but there's some things he recognized had to be done. And he brought, invited Negroes from all over this country to join with him in an evening of entertainment at the White House and this did take place during his Administration. It has never taken place since and had never taken place before. This was a man who really believed that the Negro had actually been taken advantage of in this country, and he was out to rectify and change that avenue of direction. And he did it, I think, in a shorter period of time than ever anyone thought could have accomplished it.

As I think I said in the early bit of our conversation, in California, to go back to what he said and the Vice President said in California at that first meeting. It was recognized at the first meeting he had after being nominated by the Party. There was a meeting with the Negro delegates and those who were there at that Convention, at the Biltmore Hotel; the meeting held at the White House, the only meeting that's ever been held where Negro leaders throughout this country who had supported the President were invited back to the White House—all of this taking place as a result of the effort put forth by the President Kennedy. He meant what he said. So I suppose this has been my relationship with him.

STEWART: Okay, very good.

[END OF INTERVIEW #2]

[-52-]

Arthur A. Chapin Jr. Oral History Transcript–JFK #2
Name Index

E

Eisenhower, Dwight D., 33

F

Feild, John G., 38, 39

G

Goldberg, Arthur J., 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 36, 39, 40,
43, 46, 49, 50

Goshens, Edward E., 44

Gregory, Francis A., 49

H

Hart, Philip A., 39

Hatcher, Andrew T., 35

Hill, Herbert, 46

Holleman, Jerry R., 37, 38, 42, 44

J

Johnson, Lyndon B., 39, 40, 52

K

Kennedy, John F., 30, 32, 35, 36, 39, 41, 46, 47,
50, 51, 52

Kennedy, Robert F., 38, 40

King, Martin Luther, Jr., 45

M

Macy, John W., Jr., 32

Martin, Louis E., 30, 31

Mitchell, Clarence M., Jr., 46

Mitchell, James P., 33

N

Nixon, Richard M., 39

North, David, 42

P

Powers, N. Thompson, 43

R

Reuther, Walter P., 49

Reynolds, James J., 31

Roosevelt, Franklin D., 49

T

Taylor, Hobart, 38, 39

W

White, Lee C., 35, 36, 40, 42

Wilkins, Roy, 50

Wirtz, Willard, 34, 50

Wofford, Harris L., Jr., 45

Wolfbein, Seymour L., 49

Y

Young, Whitney M., Jr., 46