

**Marjorie McKenzie Lawson Oral History Interview – JFK#2, 11/14/1965**  
Administrative Information

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**Biographical Note**

Marjorie McKenzie Lawson (1912-2002) was a civil rights advisor for John F. Kennedy's 1960 presidential campaign. This interview focuses on the staff of the 1960 presidential campaign and the Kennedy administration's position on civil rights, among other topics.

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Marjorie M. Lawson  
Marjorie M. Lawson

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Marjorie McKenzie Lawson– JFK #2

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Oral History Interview

with

JUDGE MARJORIE MCKENZIE LAWSON

November 14, 1965  
Washington, D.C.

By Ronald J. Grele

For the John F. Kennedy Library

GRELE: Shall we begin by filling in on the last transcript? I forgot to ask you about the Hyannis Port meeting in October of 1959. Theodore White in his book, *The Making of a President 1960*, has said that you were present at that meeting. What transpired at that meeting?

LAWSON: Let me tell you first how I happened to go. I was in my office one day when I got a call from Steven Smith, the President's brother-in-law, who was then working in the Esso Building as the coordinator of the campaign at that time. He asked me if I would be free to join them for a trip to Hyannis Port; that there was going to be a meeting, and he thought it would be helpful if I could come. He gave me the details about when the plane was leaving and explained that we would only be gone for one day and would be returning to Washington that night and that we would go on the *Caroline*. I think it was the next day that we went. The only other woman at the meeting was one of the Kennedy secretaries, who was taking notes. When we arrived, we went first to Bobby's house and had coffee and got started with a meeting. The Senator came in later, after we'd been talking for some time, and listened while people were talking about problems around various parts of the country and the kinds of things that they would recommend we do. After that morning session, we went over to the Ambassador's house for lunch. Since I was the only woman present, I sat at his right; we chatted throughout the lunch. But it was not the first time I had known him. He was a delightful host. We had a wonderful lunch — it was really more than lunch — dinner with the famous Kennedy fish

chowder. After lunch we went back to Bobby's house and continued our meeting there. The Senator joined us for a while, but he didn't stay all of the

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afternoon. He apologized for Jackie [Mrs. John F. Kennedy] and said that she was over at the house, but she was engaged with some people from a magazine. There were some press people who were interviewing her about an article and taking pictures, so she could not join us.

GRELE: Who did conduct the meeting?

LAWSON: Well, I would say that a number of people were working jointly to keep things moving along. It would be too easy to say that Bobby ran the meeting because John Bailey was there and brought up things. From time to time, other people would make suggestions. It was just a general sort of conversation although one had the sense that it was well-organized and not just a random discussion.

GRELE: How was the country divided? Do you remember?

LAWSON: A great deal of thinking probably had gone into the planning prior to our arriving there. It would be more accurate to say that this was not the meeting at which the country was carved up, as was said in White's book, but this was the meeting at which there were discussions about what had already been planned in advance, and that the final decisions were made on these proposals at this meeting.

GRELE: What was your impression of what had already been decided?

LAWSON: I think that it was decided that the country would have to be divided among the people who had experience in the particular areas, that there would be assignments to people — individuals — who would be responsible for a particular section, that all of these individuals would be reporting back to Bobby and to Steve and to John Bailey; and that at that point the campaign was really sort of being organized by the three of them. But I also had the feeling that behind these efforts there was a central intelligence which was Senator Kennedy saying yes or no, and that he was aware of what everybody was planning to do and was really either giving permission or refusing it at this meeting when they made their proposals. I think that the Ambassador [John P. Kennedy] was greatly interested in their thoughts, although I would say that he didn't have an absolute veto on what anybody was talking about. I think he was there really to discuss his own contribution — the kinds of things that he could do and the people he would know — and, yet, this was not spelled out either because it was so much assumed that he knew people and would do what he could more on an individual basis than what we were talking about with organization and responsibility.

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GRELE: What was your assignment?

LAWSON: Well, my assignment had been predetermined, of course. That was to continue to work with Negro voters, to organize a network of friends, to continue to work with the people who had been delegates to the Convention before and to determine how many of them were likely to be re-elected as delegates in 1960, to follow the state conventions where people were either elected or nominated to determine what Negroes were going to be part of the delegation, to stay in touch with these people, to keep a good flow of Kennedy literature going to these people, and to maintain a correspondence with them. Most of them I already knew, and it was easy for me to keep in touch with them. Sometimes I would call them on the telephone. If I knew that the Senator was going to be in the area, I would call these people and ask them to work with others in the community to set up a meeting at which they should meet and talk with the Senator.

I think the greatest contribution that I made at that meeting — if it could be called such and if, indeed, I was responsible for the final decision that was made — concerned the campaign in the South. I was asked what I thought Senator Kennedy ought to do about the South. I said I thought he ought to leave it alone and stay out of it; that that was not where we were going to win; that I'd had difficult times trying to convince people that he had no deal with people like Patterson in Alabama; and that if he went there, it would only confirm their suspicions and would cause him to lose the friends that he needed in the North. On the other hand, I doubted very much that he could become the candidate of the South both because of religion and because of the fact that he was a northerner and a liberal. He would only have limited support in the South. Therefore, it would be strategically unwise to go there. At the time, he had a couple of speeches lined up in North Carolina and in Georgia at universities. He asked me if I thought he should keep those engagements. I said I thought so. They were justifiable in terms of being in an intellectual community, and that if he didn't honor those commitments which had been made so far in advance the people would then say he was scared to go into the South. He shouldn't run that risk either. As far as I know, they did exactly as I had suggested.

GRELE: There was, I believe, at one time discussion of John Kennedy's strength in the Alabama delegation — that they might have gotten the Alabama delegation on the second ballot. Did you ever hear anything to this effect?

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LAWSON: From the time of the Patterson visit to his home for that breakfast, there was always talk that he had either secondary strength in the Alabama delegation or outright in private commitments. I never knew the facts.

GRELE: Back to the October meeting. What was your impression of the staff that was gathered at Hyannis Port?

LAWSON: There were more than staff people there, you know. There was Hy Raskin, of course, who did become staff and who was to handle the West. It was mentioned, for example, at the meeting that he had worked in this same area with [Adlai E.] Stevenson. He and Ted [Edward M. Kennedy] were to divide up the West. You remember, Ted did work in the Far West and brought in Alaska — or was it Wyoming? — at the Convention;

that gave us the last number of votes we needed. There was considerable discussion about how Hy and Ted would organize their work in the West. There was another man from Connecticut, who was present at the meeting. I can't remember his name now. It was not Senator [Abraham A. Ribicoff], who had been Governor Ribicoff, but I think it was a former governor of Connecticut, who was there along with John Bailey.

GRELE: Chester Bowles?

LAWSON: No, not Chester Bowles.

GRELE: I'm from Connecticut; I'm trying to think of past governors. John Dempsey?

LAWSON: I really don't know. It was a man that I did not recognize then, and I can't remember that I've heard much of him since.

GRELE: Did the group of people gathered there seem to be a professional group, or did you see some obvious political failings in some of the members?

LAWSON: I had the feeling that they were all professionals and all very much attuned to each other. The basic Kennedy people who had been working on staff positions were there — Lawrence O'Brien, Kenneth O'Donnell. [Robert A.] Bob Wallace was there now that I think of it. He later became Assistant Secretary of the Treasury. I would say that Bob was probably, at that time, less attuned to the Kennedy method and approach than any of the rest of the people.

GRELE: Were there any serious disagreements among the conferees?

LAWSON: Not openly.

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GRELE: But an undercurrent of disagreement?

LAWSON: I would not have been aware of it, I think, other than the normal tension that would exist in any room that Bob Kennedy was in. Here were older men who were speaking out of the wisdom of their experience and who were still sitting there under the supervision of Bob Kennedy, who looked like a boy and acts.... In tight situations like that, he can speak up very sharply and tell people what to do without much regard to their feelings and dignity.

GRELE: You spoke of the meeting with the Ambassador, and you had had earlier dealings with the Ambassador. What kind of dealings had you had with him?

LAWSON: I first met the Ambassador in the 1958 campaign in Boston when I stopped off to keep my appointment, as I had been requested to do, on my way back from

Groton. The first person I saw was the Ambassador. He would come into the office mornings around eleven o'clock. He was very dapper; he would be dressed quite formally. When he strode into the headquarters with his ruddy cheeks and white hair and very winning smile, everyone sort of perked up. Nevertheless, he was a sad figure because the Kennedy staff people paid no attention to him. I mean, people like Ted Sorensen and Lawrence O'Brien and Ken O'Donnell. They did not cluster around him nor seek to speak with him; they just went about their work ignoring him. And he would sort of wander around the office trying to find somebody who wanted to talk to him. What he wanted to talk about was Jack, so that when he found a willing ear, he would sit down and tell all of the things that he could remember about Jack as a little boy and his ambitions for Jack and the other children. He would talk about his own childhood and his early days in Boston. With me he talked at great length about prejudice — religious and racial prejudice. He spoke of the time when he was a child and lived in South Boston or East Boston. I think this was rather romantic and probably not quite as true as he seemed to think in the fullness of his years. But he would talk about the fact that he had to work as a little boy and that one of his jobs was to get up early in the morning and go to the house of a neighbor who was Jewish and who had a business. The Ambassador's job was to light the fires. He said, of course, how could anyone consider him prejudiced when he had had to work as a child for a Jewish family. Later I read that his parents were rather well-to-do people in those terms — at least middle class. I suppose if he got up at five o'clock in the morning to light somebody's fires, it was because he wanted some spending money.

GRELE:       What was your impression of the influence of the Ambassador over the candidate?

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LAWSON:     I think that he had tremendous influence over him because he had reared him. He was his father, and he was a strong man who made a mark on all of his children. I think it was a measure of their manhood that they struggled to free themselves of his influence and discipline. But they always respected him, and while they may have disagreed with him, I think they were bound to respect his wishes. When they really were going to go against his wishes, I think they tried to hide it, at least not to bring it into open discussion. They never openly disagreed with him in public that I saw, and I don't believe anybody else ever thought they did.

GRELE:       Were there disagreements in that election?

LAWSON:     Well, one of the agreements was that the Ambassador was to stay out of the way. He did his best. This may be one of the reasons nobody would talk to him when he came in the office. As time went by, he came in less and less. He was round on victory occasions, though.

GRELE:       Why did they want him to stay out of the way?

LAWSON: I think that they regarded him as controversial because of his stand on McCarthy and because of what were regarded to be his feelings about appeasement of the Nazis at the end of his career as ambassador to England. At least, these were the reasons that were generally discussed at campaign headquarters — that he would be an embarrassment to Jack. Even at that time, I would say that the reason was because everybody's eye was on the presidential nomination; it was not because he would have done Jack any harm in Boston or in Massachusetts. But the world — or at least in the United States, politicians were watching what was going on in Boston. If the Ambassador had had a very large role in that campaign or had been greatly in evidence, then it would have been said that he was dominating Jack and that he would influence him as a candidate and as a president.

GRELE: Was there any evidence that he played a large role financially in the campaign?

LAWSON: Well, let's say, I'm sure that he was doing all he could, but there was no evidence. As committees were formed and his friends were on those committees that provided money for the campaign, one has to assume they either did it because he asked them, to or because they were friends of his and would want his son to win.

GRELE: You were telling me earlier about a conversation you had with the Ambassador where he wished he could have given more.

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LAWSON: Yes. We were talking about how I would organize the Negro vote, not for this campaign but nationally. He said that he wished he could give me carte blanche, that he wished he could tell me just to go ahead and do whatever I thought was necessary just as he wished he could say this to any of the people who were interested in his son and hoped that we would be successful in the drive for the nomination. He said he wished he could pay all of Jack's bills, but he knew that he couldn't. He resented very much the fact that other people had to raise funds to pay for the campaign when he would have been glad to pay for the whole thing if he could have. But he did tell me at that time that if ever I had a program I wanted to do that required money, I was to get in touch with him, to let him know. I never found this necessary. I just sent my bills in for whatever they were to whatever committee I was told to, and they were paid.

GRELE: Back to '58 again. What was your impression of the relations between John Kennedy and Foster Furcolo?

LAWSON: I was not aware that there was any relationship between them. The campaign was run as if it were in a different state; there was no connection between the Furcolo campaign and the Kennedy campaign that I knew of.

GRELE: Were there Furcolo workers in the Negro wards in Boston?

LAWSON: I'm sure there were although I can't say that I ran into any of them or that I knew what they were doing. If there were some who were also working for us and working for Furcolo, I had orders to be interested in what they were doing, but I never had any discussions with them about what they were doing for Furcolo.

GRELE: It was either during that campaign or shortly afterwards that John Saltonstall began to organize some of the people at Harvard for Kennedy. Do you remember any of this?

LAWSON: I remember John Saltonstall and his wife; they were part of the Kennedy campaign in 1958.

GRELE: They were attempting to organize intellectuals in Cambridge to come to work for Kennedy during '58 and then afterwards.

LAWSON: Yes. This had not so much to do with the campaign in '58 but just generally, you mean? I think that effort began very early. I think when the Senator began to be interested in national office, he realized that he would have to be informed on

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many complex issues. He turned naturally to his alma mater and to the people at Harvard that he had respect for to ask them to advise him. This was the source of the difficulty on the civil rights bill because he had been in touch with Paul Freund and had been led down that primrose path. With respect to the intellectuals at Harvard, there was a girl who had started that effort, who worked in the Boston office, who later came to Washington and continued for a while and then later, after the campaign, was in the State Department.

GRELE: Who was that? Do you recall?

LAWSON: Her name was Deidre Henderson. She was sort of in charge of the Senator's office in Boston. It was her job to organize the intellectuals and to keep a flow of information between the Senator's office and the people that were being asked to submit ideas. Later, this was also a special unit of the campaign, and Deidre still worked with them. I think she was an old friend of the Senator's; her sister used to go with him. She'd be a good person for you to talk with because she had very close connections. Later, she worked in the State Department. She later went over to the Peace Corps. She's probably either with Sarge Shriver at the Peace Corps or the Office of Economic Opportunity.

GRELE: Moving on, you said in the earlier transcript that in 1958 you knew he was going for the presidency. Did he tell you this, or were there indications of this?

LAWSON: Well, I'm trying to remember any specific time that he said this to me, but it was certainly understood. I think I can remind you of my conversation with him at the time I began to work in the Massachusetts campaign in 1958 when I told him that

we would have to run that campaign as if we were.... We would have to have in mind the national campaign, and there was general understanding. But that was not the first time that we had talked about his interest in national office.

GRELE: Moving on now, in your work in West Virginia, what was the position of the unions in West Virginia? Do you recall?

LAWSON: I remember that the picture was confused; that there was no clear cut allegiance one way or the other; that, I think, some were for Senator Humphrey and some were for Senator Kennedy.

GRELE: That's just about the last of my questions.

LAWSON: You will remember I told you that some union people brought Senator Humphrey through Bluefield and pulled a lot of very

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unfortunate planning capers that caused him to be embarrassed.

GRELE: Again moving on. In your hunt for delegates, some of those delegates were connected to various unions, especially the United Auto Workers. What was their response to John Kennedy?

LAWSON: Wild, in the beginning.

GRELE: Like who?

LAWSON: Well, like Walther Reuther's own administrative assistant whose picture is in the publication of *The Kennedy Years and the Negro*, which is published by the Johnson Publications and written by Dorothy Saunders. People like [William] Bill Oliver and Horace and others.

GRELE: Horace who?

LAWSON: I can't remember Horace's last name at the moment. He would be very angry with me if he knew that because I engaged him in conversations over a couple of years. I was a member of the Civil Rights Leadership Conference. They were also delegates so that all during these years — 1957, '58, '59 — we were frequently seeing each other. It was known that I was making friends for John Kennedy, and they used to hoot and laugh and tease me about it. They were sure that he was not a liberal. After his vote on the civil rights legislation, they just made it pretty clear that they were never going to be for John Kennedy. I continued to work on them. I think the real confrontation came after Governor [G. Mennen] Williams said that he would throw the support of the Michigan delegation to the Senator. You

will remember that Senator Kennedy went up to.... What's the name of the place in Michigan where the Williams' have a summer home?

GRELE: Mackinaw?

LAWSON: Yes, Mackinaw Island. Senator Kennedy was very gracious. He traveled to Governor Williams, and the arrangements were made. However, at the same time, Negroes who were on the Michigan delegation were not happy. Prior to that time, their dissatisfaction had become so apparent that the plan was made to bring them to Washington, to bring Negro leaders — not only those who would be on the delegation but other Negro leaders — to Washington. They were entertained at the Senator's home by Senator and Mrs. Kennedy at a luncheon and a day-long session. There was very frank talk at this meeting — some of it quite loud.

GRELE: What arguments did Senator Kennedy use?

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LAWSON: They used the arguments and he used charm.

GRELE: What were their arguments?

LAWSON: Their arguments were the same old arguments that I had been answering for several years. Why did John Patterson come to his house for breakfast? I would imagine — although I can't remember the exact words — Senator Kennedy said something like, "Well, you're here. Some people will wonder what kind of a deal I've made with you because we've had lunch." They were never happy with his vote on the civil rights legislation, and he never sought to defend it as I had advised him not to. But I'm sure that's not why he didn't defend it; he never defended anything. He always moved ahead, and he would say, "All right, these are our choices. Who are you going to be for? I think, if you're going to be for me, this is what I can do. This is what I want to do for this country. And I would like for you to be with me." He was always positive in his approach to people. When they would get upset, he would listen and smile and say something charming, and they would relax.

GRELE: You speak of a number of people who came through Washington, whom you and your husband ushered into John Kennedy's office and, perhaps, for luncheon. Who were some of these people?

LAWSON: Well, one of them is [Theodore M.] Ted Barry, who is now the director of the Community Relations Service of the Office of Economic Opportunity. Once during the campaign, Ted went to Africa on a trip which was not connected with any government matter. When he came back through Washington, it happened that the candidate was going to be on *Meet the Press*, and he was going on to Ohio that night. I had made arrangements for Ted to develop a memorandum about his experiences in Africa, which I thought might be useful as background material in the campaign. He had prepared the

memorandum and had it. Meanwhile, I called somebody who was arranging the transportation, or maybe I notified somebody on the staff that Ted was returning and would like to see the Senator. When the Senator heard of it, he invited Ted to go back to Columbus with him on the *Caroline*. Anyway, that afternoon we had a very exciting time. I rushed Ted out to the station. We listened to *Meet the Press* being filmed and taped. We had a brief conversation with Senator Kennedy, and he said to Ted that he would be seeing him later on the plane. I took Ted down to the airport, and Ted got on the *Caroline*. When he stepped off that plane in Columbus, it became a political incident because the governor and various county leaders came to meet Senator Kennedy, and the first person off the plane was this Negro lawyer from Cincinnati who was at loggerheads with his own county chairman in Cincinnati and is now mayor-elect of Cincinnati, Ohio. This is the kind of independent thing that

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Senator Kennedy would do. He observed the political niceties, but on occasion he would also assert his independence and befriend whomever he pleased. I think he felt that in the area of Negro leadership he could be irregular because politicians always had been pretty irregular with Negro voters.

Another person we took to the Senator's office was Dr. Samuel Z. Westerfield, Jr., who was later deputy assistant secretary of state for economic affairs, and then U.S. ambassador to Liberia. He was then just returning from Harvard University where he had been a fellow, on leave from his post at Atlanta University. We thought that Senator Kennedy would like to know him as an intellectual rather than a politician because his speciality was in the field of the currencies of developing nations. Later, Dr. Westerfield became a special assistant to Secretary [C. Douglas] Dillon at Treasury and then moved over to the State Department.

BEGIN TAPE TWO SIDE ONE

GRELE: You say you introduced Senator Kennedy to Carl Rowan?

LAWSON: Yes. During the campaign Carl called me and said that he was coming to Washington to interview Senator Kennedy for his newspaper which was a Minneapolis daily and that he would like to talk with me before the interview. I met him one Sunday morning for breakfast at the Statler Hilton, and we had a long discussion about the same old issues — the Senator's vote on the civil rights bill and the Patterson breakfast and the general approach to civil rights. Then I suggested some areas of discussion and interpretation to Carl. The next day I called the Senator's office and told them who he was and how they might handle the opportunity to talk to a Negro reporter who was representing a white daily and, yet, who would be talking also about civil rights. This might give them an opportunity to get a wider audience than they would through the Negro press.

GRELE: Did they handle the Negro press in any different way than the white press?

LAWSON: Yes. Louis Martin's job was to handle the Negro press during the campaign. This means writing special releases to slant the news that concerns Negroes — not

necessarily to slant it, but to emphasize it — and those events and positions which were of interest to Negro readers, and to put campaign advertising in Negro papers. We developed some special issues and special brochures and things like that that became part of a particular edition of a paper. However, about 1960 the Negro press was not as important in the overall efforts to attract Negro votes as it had been in many earlier campaigns. There were those of us who thought that the important thing was to get Negroes involved and get to get the news of their

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involvement in the daily press; that more Negroes were reading the daily press than were reading the Negro press. This is where we should bring these things to their attention. The difficulty would be to get the white papers to carry the stories and to say things effectively enough in the daily press that would meet the kinds of strong statements that are needed in the Negro press. So it was a very delicate operation. Between Louis and Andy and me, I think we handled it pretty well; I think we had good coverage.

GRELE: Did Carl Rowan join the campaign at all?

LAWSON: No. Carl didn't join the administration until after the election. When the talent hunt began for Negroes who could be appointed to high office, Carl came to mind because he's very articulate and, I guess, he had impressed the Senator. When his name came up for possible appointment, it had not been very long before the election that he had come to their attention.

BEGIN TAPE ONE SIDE TWO

GRELE: Did the Senator take you into his confidence when it was decided to offer the vice presidential nomination to Senator Johnson?

LAWSON: I was saying that my reaction was one of surprise at the news. Contrary to the suspicion of the other people who seemed to have been part of that large pageant, the Senator had not taken me into his confidence on his plans for the vice presidential nominee. However, the total pose of the Kennedy staff — or at least its quiet acquiescence — had been to the effect that one of the reasons we had won was because we offered an alternative to Johnson; that we were with the candidate who would win and who would be liberal; that if Johnson won, we would not have a liberal candidate. Whether we promoted this line, I don't know, but certainly we benefitted with liberals by these implications. Consequently, those of us who did represent liberal blocs of opinion were temporarily on the spot, or so it seemed to many of the people with whom I had worked. They were very angry with me and sought me out and said that they felt I had betrayed them; that I had told them that the Senator's liberalism was believable; that all we needed to do was give him a chance, and, yet, his first act was to make his running mate a man that we had been opposing — or that they had been opposing. I had run into considerable Johnson sentiment among southern Negroes. I didn't have any anti-Johnson feelings myself. My only knowledge of him was as a result of my long

friendship with Mrs. Mary McLeod Bethune. I had been an officer and worker in the National Council of Negro Women for many years — since the days when Mrs. Bethune was in Washington, when I was a very young

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woman. I remembered particularly how she always spoke with great fondness of Lyndon Johnson. At the time that he was Texas director of NYA [National Youth Administration], she was in a national position in the National Youth Administration with respect to programs for Negro youth so that they were coworkers and great friends. She always spoke so highly of him. I remembered that at the time that his nomination came through, and I was not dismayed.

One of the last interesting conferences I had with Senator Kennedy, while he was still a Senator, was either that morning or the next morning — I think it must have been the next morning because it was before we had the meeting with Negro leaders. He called me aside in his suite — What floor was that? Tenth floor, eleventh floor? — of the Biltmore Hotel. We walked over to a window, and he said he wanted to speak with me about something. He said, "Marjorie, you know, I've run into some difficulty with the Johnson nomination. Do you think that you would be able to help me in persuading Negro voters that this is a good choice? Do you think you can be of help?" I said, "Yes, I think so." He said, "How do you think we should do it?" I said, "I think we should carry Senator Johnson on all of the campaign literature and expose him and carry him as a full member of the team. I don't want to pretend that he's not a part of it. We have to face up to whatever responsibilities we have. We must try to do a positive job of having Negro voters for him rather than to ignore the issue and thereby invite a feeling that we're ashamed of him or we can't sell him." I didn't want to be in the position that Stevenson had been in with [John J.] Sparkman when the Negro press was being paid for campaign advertising which would say nothing about Sparkman; they'd only speak about Stevenson. This was resented deeply among Negro voters. I didn't want us to be in that position. Johnson was part of the team. I believed that he could be sold to people, and I thought we had to just go right out and do the job.

GRELE: Who were some of the people who opposed his nomination?

LAWSON: Well, one of the people was that great white father of the District of Columbia [Joseph J., Jr.] Joe Rauh, who always wants to be the leader of the Negro people. You may remember that he took to the microphones on the floor of the Convention and wept loudly about the Johnson nomination. I'm sure that his protests will not go unremembered. There were others who were very upset at the moment — people like the Michigan delegation — and since they're always vociferous, they didn't change. You know, they were loud in their outcries that day. You remember that it was determined that there would be a meeting of all the Negro delegates and other Negro leaders who were present. It was held in a room of the Biltmore Hotel. When Senator Kennedy and Senator Johnson entered that room together

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that morning, it was an act of courage; they were walking into a lion's den.

GRELE: What occurred at the meeting?

LAWSON: Senator Kennedy was very cool. He said he was very glad to come to the meeting and pleased that everyone could be present and that he wanted to introduce Senator Johnson. He may have said some other things, but I don't remember too much what he said. What I do remember is what Senator Johnson said. He said, "Now we're a team. If you're going to work with me, I'm going to work with you. And I'll promise you that if you just go along with us, we will make more progress in the field of civil rights in four years than has been made in a hundred years in this county." He spoke in such a heartfelt way that I think he immediately impressed the people who were there, even those who had been crying — and some of the women had been. Among those who were most outspoken in their opposition to his nomination were Gladys Duncan of the District of Columbia delegation and Dorothy Atkinson. I remember that Dorothy Atkinson came up to me with tears streaming down her face and shook her finger under my nose and said I had betrayed her, that she had believed everything I said, and how could I do this to her. Later, she apologized — much, much later; like in January, 1961. One of the things that made that meeting possible was that Congressman Dawson had always been a great friend of Senator Johnson. He was at that meeting. He had really been put in a difficult position by Frank Reeves who, at this point, considered himself the leader of the whole United States because Senator Kennedy had been nominated, and he was the top banana in the whole operation. He regarded himself as being much more important than Congressman Dawson, and he was making plans and running around and doing things without consulting Congressman Dawson, who was also the vice chairman of the Democratic National Committee and a senior statesman whom both Senator Kennedy and Senator Johnson admired and respected. I think perhaps the Kennedy staff, on the other hand, thought that Congressman Dawson was a conservative old man whose days were waning and who did not have to be taken very seriously.

GRELE: Was Frank Reeves then on the staff?

LAWSON: Frank Reeves had been on the staff since right after the District of Columbia primary or soon thereafter. I'd say that Frank probably joined the staff around April or May of 1960, and Harris Wofford had come in sometime before. There was always this effort on the part of Harris and Frank to wrest the whole civil rights part of the campaign away from me — and away from Congressman Dawson, I guess.

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GRELE: Why?

LAWSON: Well, Harris just wanted to be like Joe Rauh wants to be a — a leader of the Negro people. He was just about a hundred years too late for that because the Negroes had decided they would be their own leaders by this time. But he wanted to be the one who understood everything and knew everything and knew everybody and who would report everything to Sarge; together they would decide what was to be done about civil

rights. As I say, they were just about a hundred years too late. But they made the effort; they made a real, serious effort.

I'd like to talk for a moment about Harris and Martin Luther King.

GRELE: Certainly.

LAWSON: One of Harris' first efforts was to bring Martin Luther King and Senator Kennedy together. We were agreeable to that. Belford and I had made several efforts, but they were rather low-key. We didn't want to give Dr. King the impression that we had to have him come up here. But we tried in casual ways when he was going to be in town, to arrange for a meeting. He would always say, yes, he would like to meet with Senator Kennedy, but that he would want to do it in a way that would not appear to be political because he was going to try to stay free of politics. We respected this attitude on his part. At the same time, we told Senator Kennedy that we didn't think he should try too hard to pull King in, that King was operating at a different level for a different purpose, that he would probably stay independent, that he was not predictable in his course of action, and that too close association with him was a two-edged sword. It might prove useful, but it also might prove damaging because we didn't know and we couldn't contain what Martin King would do. So Harris came in with great enthusiasm about Martin Luther King, and I think it's understandable. Harris and his wife had lived in India and had worked and written books about India and were very interested in Ghandi and in the nonviolent movement. So they came to the confrontation with Martin Luther King with this perception of experience and attitude which they thought was comparable to Martin's approach to the whole civil rights movement. Accordingly, Harris began a wooing of Martin Luther King which never stopped. He immediately took off for Atlanta, he immediately insisted that there be a luncheon and dinner meetings which did later occur, and it was he who conceived the idea of the telephone call to Mrs. King when Martin was in jail in Georgia at the very end of the campaign. It was an idea that he sold first to Sarge; then Sarge called Senator Kennedy and found him in Chicago. The call was made.

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Thereafter, Harris took credit for having won the election because it could be mathematically proved that the Negro vote had elected Kennedy. It could also be mathematically proven that every other voter segment had elected President Kennedy. If you took away any one of them, you didn't have a winner. This was a kind of claim, I'm sure, that didn't please President Kennedy too much — to think that you could point to any one group and say, "These are the people that elected him." However, I resented it because I thought it was a disservice to Negro voters to say that they were so childlike that one telephone call made to one woman would turn a whole voter group to, or against, a candidate.

What about all of the years of work that Congressman Dawson had done to build Negro strength in the Democratic Party — years and years of effort, thousands and thousands of dollars which he had either raised or had contributed from his own pocket? He had well-organized groups of Negro voteress all over the country. We built on that. We built on the years that I had toured around the country — all of the correspondence; all the telephone conversations; all of the meetings both with Senator and Mrs. Kennedy and alone with me, or with the Senator in his

office. Here were years of concentrated effort. For the first time, a candidate had made a staff and funds available in recognition of Negro voters and had helped them organize and get out the vote. Were we to say that Negroes were so childlike and so unsophisticated that they cared nothing for the organizational work that had been done and the recognition that they had received but had responded to one telephone call and had rushed then to the polls and voted for Senator Kennedy? I thought it was ridiculous; it was a great disservice to the people who had worked so hard in the campaign both nationally and locally. All of these interpretations that were given to the *New York Times* by Harris Wofford and by those who felt that they had somehow directed the Negro vote, all of these stories, I think, did a lot of harm to the sophistication and maturity of Negro organizations or those interracial political organizations which we had been able to develop in many communities and states. We had been pressing state leaders to include Negroes in the delegations, in the party councils, in the executive committees. We had sent money that was intended to enhance their budgets so that they would include Negroes. Now were we to say that all of that was foolish because one telephone call could do the job?

You may remember that Martin's father said he had a basket of votes in Atlanta and, after Senator Kennedy had called his son, that he was going to see that those votes were for Senator Kennedy. The fact of the matter — and, I think, the real test of the Wofford assertion — is the fact that Atlanta Negroes voted Republican; they went for [Richard M.] Dick Nixon.

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GRELE: Were you with Senator Kennedy when he made his comment on Martin Luther King's father? Martin Luther King's father came out and said he didn't think he'd vote for a Catholic but now he would. President Kennedy supposedly said, "Imagine that! Martin Luther King's father is a bigot!"

LAWSON: No, I wasn't with him when he said that.

GRELE: Back to the Convention. Did you have any contact or dealing with Congressman [Adam Clayton] Powell?

LAWSON: During when?

GRELE: Prior to the Convention or during the Convention.

LAWSON: Of course, we're old friends. Whenever we'd meet, he and I would have a big joke about it. He would laugh and say something about the fact that I was for Senator Kennedy. We never had serious discussions. We understood each other too well. It was not necessary. You may remember also that all during that spring, and even on the floor of the Convention itself, he was very cagey. He was in a difficult position. If he came out too openly for Johnson as a delegate from New York, he would have been in trouble, and he knew it. That's why everybody was laughing. The New York delegation was a favorite son delegation so they didn't have to be for anybody, and they fooled around, and they got left out, too.

GRELE: What was your impression of his reasons for supporting Senator Johnson instead of Senator Kennedy?

LAWSON: I think it had to do with their congressional experience, their friendship from working on the Hill. But he also was friendly with Kennedy; they were great pals. They were not out of communication prior to the Convention, and after the nomination, of course, they drew quite close together during that period. At that time Adam and [Raymond] Ray Jones were still together. It was Ray who would come down and talk to the staff about what kinds of cooperative effort he was interested in. But they all would take Ray off by themselves; I never had much talk with him. He would talk with Sarge and Harris.

GRELE: When you lined up your strategy, it seems to me you talked about Congressman Dawson and what a pivotal role he played, but Congressman Powell did not play that pivotal a role. In terms of power within Negro leadership, does Congressman Dawson have more power than Congressman Powell?

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LAWSON: Nationally, yes. He had because he was the vice chairman of the Democratic National Committee. The question arose early in the campaign, "What do we do with Congressman Dawson?" Nobody could agree. We sat around and talked about it for quite some time. I think that probably Bobby didn't want to do anything about him. At one point we were sitting around at the headquarters talking about organizational matters — this must have been very early before Congress adjourned and before we got out on the campaign trail — and somebody said, very loudly, "Marjorie, Senator Kennedy wants to speak with you." So all heads turned. What he had in mind to discuss was what do we do with Congressman Dawson? He said to me, "There's been some discussion about what role we should ask him to play, what he would like to do, where he should be, whether we should have a separate setup, or..." He went on talking and said, "What do you think we should do?" I said, "I think we should ask Congressman Dawson what he would like to do. And then we should let him do whatever he wants to do. I'll guarantee you we'll never find out what he does because this is how he operates. He will do whatever he thinks ought to be done. If someone helps him do it, fine. If they don't, he'll do it anyhow, and he'll do it out of his own pocket. You know, he has all of the names of all of the strong Negro politicians who raise the moeny and who have been doing this job the hard way. Now, for the first time, we will be able to help them. We should just give Congressman Dawson all the latitude in the world." That's exactly what happened. We built an office for him at headquarters, we staffed it, and we asked him to come over and to be in charge and told him we would do whatever he wanted us to do. He came over a few times, but he ran his own operation as I knew he would. He didn't want us to help him do that very much; he didn't want to be bothered with us either. On the other hand, I wouldn't have wanted to think of him as not doing what he traditionally did. I would have been happy if he had been in charge of the whole operation that we had, if he had been willing to undertake it. However, he is a very practical politician, and he knew where he stood with the Kennedy staff and how they regarded him. He's a man of great dignity so he didn't humiliate himself by coming over there to be ignored or bypassed.

GRELE: Which members of the Kenendy staff would have treated him in this way?

LAWSON: Probably all of them. They wouldn't have been impolite; they just would have ignored him. They wouldn't have asked him anything, and they wouldn't have done anything, really, that he suggested because they were running a tight ship. I think they didn't understand what he had done, and they didn't value it. They didn't know what it was.

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It had been a long uphill fight. Some people made jokes and said that some of the people in Congressman Dawson's list were dead. This was cruel. Of course, when you have a list of people from one campaign to the other, nobody is indestructible; a few people die or move. But he still had a big, thick black notebook with a lot of names and addresses.

Through friendship with Mrs. Christine Ray Davis, who was his chief assistant always, we organized women who were on his list. We kept the literature going to them; we talked to them on the telephone; we kept them happy and working; we brought many of them here to a big luncheon that was given in honor of Mrs. Kennedy.

GRELE: This was during the campaign?

LAWSON: This was during the campaign. This was practically the only public appearance that Mrs. Kennedy made. She came to this luncheon in her honor that Christine Davis put together for the Democratic National Committee.

GRELE: We were talking earlier about Frank Reeves and Harris Wofford coming onto the staff. Wasn't it a bit embarrassing for Frank Reeves to come on the staff after he had been a Humphrey candidate in the District [of Columbia] primary?

LAWSON: I would have thought so. The words that he had said about Kennedy must have been ringing still in his ears. The time had been very brief; yet, he came on bouncing and happy and on board and trailing Kennedy around like a little puppy. During the pre-nomination period and thereafter, he wanted to be along. I must say that I think President Kennedy endured it a little while but not for very long.

GRELE: How did Harris Wofford come onto the staff?

LAWSON: Come on the staff? I think he must have appeared certainly after 1958, probably in the fall of 1959.

GRELE: Being from Notre Dame, was his name suggested by Father [Theodore M.] Hesburgh?

LAWSON: That was my understanding. It was also my understanding that he had done some research on a Kennedy book — the one about immigration — and that that is how

he came to their attention. He was brought on the staff to work on minority affairs.

GRELE: During the campaign you handled the civil rights section of the Kennedy organization, or you were chairman of the

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civil rights section. What work did this involve?

LAWSON: I think my title was “director.” I suppose this involved the continuation of what I had been doing for about three years, except to bring it into focus and to concentrate the effort for organizing Negro voters and getting out the vote. It meant keeping in touch with people, keeping them interested and involved, and making them feel that they were part of something that was new, that Democratic politics was really going to include them on a decent basis for the first time. This was what got many of them very fired up, and they worked very hard. A lot of new people came in. A lot of my lawyer friends around the country and society women who had never done any political work before it because I asked them to and because it seemed to them that they were engaged in some kind of a crusade. I think a lot of Kennedy people — both Negro and white — felt this way. I had what I called a coordinator in every state; I had somebody who was responsible for the effort to get to Negro voters in every state. In some cases these people were chosen by the state chairman; in some cases the state chairman wasn’t interested, and we made our own choices. I would talk to all of the community leaders or the political leaders who had been active over the past and ask them to agree on somebody. When they didn’t agree, I just put somebody in anyhow to do the work. This was the Kennedy technique. You could join us if you wanted to, but if you didn’t, we went right ahead.

GRELE: Who were some of these people in the key states — New York, Illinois?

LAWSON: I guess in New York and Illinois we didn’t bother too much. What we did, really, was to organize the states that didn’t have very strong political organization or where Negroes had not been active. For example, in Indiana there had always been local participation but not any connection with the national apparatus. I got a friend of mine whose name is W. Henry Walker; he’s an attorney in East Chicago, Indiana. He came out to Wisconsin and made some speeches for me because the distance is really not very great between Chicago and Milwaukee. He became fascinated by the whole thing, and I asked him if he wouldn’t take on Indiana; he did. He’s given credit for having elected the governor. He didn’t win for Kennedy in 1960, but he elected the Democratic governor. He’s been a political leader in that state ever since. He was typical of the new kind of politician that went in, gave his time, spent his money, raised money, organized people, got out the vote, made speeches. They were wonderful.

GRELE: Who did you work with on that staff?

LAWSON: What staff?

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GRELE: The civil rights section. Who else worked on that?

LAWSON: I would say that Sarge was our liaison to the Kenendy family. He spent a lot of time originally, but then later I guess, Harris was there to represent him. He and Harris talked about what was going on so that was how he stayed in touch. Harris spent a good deal of his time trying to find out what I was doing so that he could report it to Sarge. Also, we had Louis Martin who had joined us just before the Convention. He was a former editor of the *Michigan Chronicle* and also of the *Chicago Defender*, both Negro newspapers. He had been in Nigeria with BBC [British Broadcasting Corporation] for a year or so and had come back to the United States just about the time we were beginning to wonder about how we were going to handle the Negro press in terms of the campaign. We were in Minneapolis when we discussed having Louis join the organization. It was at the same time that Pierre Salinger asked me if I would agree to having [Andrew T.] Andy Hatcher come on the staff. He said that he and Andy had worked together in California and that he had been talking to Andy. Since he knew him, he would like to have Andy help him with the Convention. I had known Andy when he was working in the Stevenson campaign. He had also been connected with Congressman Dawson — well, not with the Congressman but with the national committee — in the Stevenson campaign. I knew that Mrs. Davis knew him very well so I asked her before we went out to Minneapolis to the NAACP Convention what she thought about Andy. She said she thought he was a very hard worker, but that he had made some bad mistakes in the past in terms of his arrangements with people so that he had had some financial difficulties. In the Stevenson campaign he'd been left high and dry. She said she didn't agree with some of the estimates of Andy's ability, and she thought if we wanted to use him that he would be a hard worker. So when Pierre spoke to me about it in late May, early June, I said that there were people who had questions about Andy's ability, that I thought we should give him a try during the Convention to see how he worked out, but that we should not commit ourselves to him for the campaign. That's about what happened. Louis came onto the staff, and Andy stayed with Pierre over in that operation.

Another person who came on the staff early was a former administrative assistant of Governor Williams, whose name was Charles Brown. He didn't stay with us throughout the whole campaign. He's now an administrator of unemployment compensation in Michigan. He left during the campaign to go back to Michigan to take a job.

GRELE: Why?

LAWSON: I guess he thought he'd rather be connected with Michigan than worry about the outcome. He was from Detroit. I guess he

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thought he'd rather be there than wandering.

GRELE: How were the relations between these people during the campaign?

LAWSON: All right. I think there was a great deal of resentment of Harris Wofford because it was so obvious that he was a stooge.

GRELE: Of whom?

LAWSON: Sarge's. And that he was reporting. So when we really wanted to think about a problem or something, we would decide and do it. As I say, poor Harris didn't know what was going on half the time. Originally, the plan was for Frank to travel with Senator Kennedy.

GRELE: Reeves?

LAWSON: Frank Reeves. Therefore, that avoided the conflict as to what his relationship was to the civil rights section of the campaign and whether he was working under me or with me or above me or what was the rank. This was solved by saying that he would be traveling with the Senator and would be his advisor — his direct advisor — out in the field during the campaign itself. This didn't last very long, however, because I think Senator Kennedy didn't like having him around. He changed that quickly. This was very embarrassing to Frank, too, but then he was out of my office. He couldn't come back there and find a foothold anywhere, and he didn't want to just come in and do some work. What Frank wanted was a title and position; you know, he wanted to be telling everybody else what to do. But we had an organization; it was my organization that I'd been working with for a long time so there was really no place for him there. The result was that he was sent out to various places where they thought things were needed. Like they sent him to New Jersey for a while, or he got lost down in Florida for a long time. He was in Georgia at the time that Martin Luther was arrested. I think he claimed credit for having suggested to Harris that a telephone call should be made. I had forgotten that, but maybe it was Frank's original thought. I think it doesn't matter because in my book that isn't what won the election. I think it was useful. I have nothing against it. It was a fine thing to do, but I don't believe that telephone calls win campaigns — thousands of pushing doorbells, writing letters, calling people up and showing an interest in them, sending them telegrams.

GRELE: The last time you mentioned Harris Wofford and a list. You had a disagreement with Harris Wofford over a list of names that you wouldn't give him that he wanted?

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LAWSON: Yes. Harris was learning, of course, from the day he came with us. He was learning who were Negro leaders, what did they do, what were they talking about, what did they want. It was a great experience, and opportunity for him, and he meant to make the most of it.

I can remember that no arrangements were made by the Kennedys for me to have a room at the Biltmore [Hotel] — this was the prestigious place to stay during the Convention — and they made no arrangements for me to get a pass for the Convention floor, which was plain suicide. Here were all these people coming in from all over the country that I had been working with for two or three years, and they were going to be looking for me. So a friend of mine who's an attorney in Los Angeles got me a room at the Biltmore and paid someone on the desk a hundred dollars to get the room for me. When Negro delegates began to arrive, they began to look for me, and they found me at the Biltmore, which was where they expected to find me and where I should have been put by the Kennedys to begin with. The result was that my room was an open house. It was just full of people — hundreds of people — all the time. Harris was in a state of delirium. He had known the names of those who were delegates in 1956, and here were the flesh and blood people, and he could get his hands on them. He would come in my room and sit on the floor and talk to them and be so happy that here at least he was meeting these people. This was generally his attitude. He tried, then, to establish his own rapport with them and to get their names and addresses and telephone numbers and to talk with them directly. They would give him their numbers, but they didn't care because when they really wanted to know something they would call me up anyhow.

This was his general method of operation; he was trying to be the one, himself, who had this information. This was characteristic of the whole period of the campaign. We were getting literature out to the state coordinatives and we had some city coordinatives, too. We'd have tons of stuff to get out, and we would need to know from them how much they needed, how much they could absorb. Harris was always trying to get the list. Louis and I would be working on... Louis would have lists; he'd have some of Congressman Dawson's list. I had some of them; I had my own; I had the national committee list. We were just feeding into the thing all of the time. Harris always wanted to know the last name and address. He would have to report to Sarge, you know, about what had been sent out. So one day he came to me, and he said that he had this new batch of literature, and he wanted me to make up a list of where it should go. I said, "You just tell me what we have, and I'll get it out." He said, "No, you give me the list." I said, "Well, I don't have a list; I have many lists. I don't have time to stop now and compile lists. They're the same

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lists I've been working with." He was dejected and walked away. He came back; he said, "Sarge says he wants a list by twelve o'clock." And I said, "Well, I don't have a list." So he said, "What can I say to him?" I said, "I don't care what you say to him." So he walked over to my desk, he stood in front of it, and he said, "I've got to have the list! I insist that you give me the list!!" And he stamped and screamed. He upset the whole office; everybody who was busy working turned around to look at him. He was almost in hysterics or crying or something. I looked at him, and I said, "Harris, I think the thing that you should do now is go out to lunch." He went back and sat down at his desk; he was a picture of real frustration. But I never gave him the lists.

GRELE: For any particular reason?

LAWSON: Oh, yes. Lots of reasons.

GRELE: What were they?

LAWSON: Well, I didn't know what he was going to do with them. These were people who felt loyal to me, and I felt loyal to them. I didn't know what kinds of positions or uses he would make of the lists or of their confidences. I was sure that it would make no difference. Whatever he'd ask them to do, they would check back with me. I think he would have done us harm because if he had called, they would have said, "What's the matter. Where is Marge?" They would have resented that he was somehow trying to supervise me or to act over my head. He couldn't have lifted a phone to anybody with any success. Therefore, I was really protecting our position, not to turn him loose to make mistakes and to say the wrong things to people.

GRELE: What were your relations with Sarge Shriver at the time? Were they colored at all by the West Virginia experience?

LAWSON: Oh, yes. We never recovered from that really. When we came back from Los Angeles, we had the job of setting up the campaign in this area. Sarge tried a number of things to discourage me from taking any real role. He was very interested in demoting me and to be the one person in charge of this section of the campaign. He suggested, for example, that the civil rights section be composed of a committee of people, both white and Negro, and that I would be the secretary of the committee. I said, "No. We're running a campaign. There's no time for that kind of organizational setup." I said to him that I had been working with the candidate, and I didn't intend to set up a committee between me and the candidate; that I was responsible to the candidate, and I intended to stay that way. I think that he and Harris must have

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made many proposals both to Bobby and to Senator Kennedy about what should be done with me, they didn't succeed.

GRELE: Did they want to turn the civil rights section just into a sort of publicity item for the campaign?

LAWSON: I'll give them credit for this. Whatever they wanted to do, they didn't know what they were doing. They had no real understanding of the importance of the Negro vote or what could be accomplished with it or how it should be handled. Perhaps this is what they did want — just a facade rather than an operation. I think particularly Sarge thought the whole thing could be downgraded and that he could flimflam through it all with people promising much and giving nothing. I wanted to keep it honest. I had to fulfill some of the hope that I had held out to the people in all these years I'd been talking to them. I couldn't abdicate at this point; their hopes were raised that they were going to be part of the campaign. If I had turned the operation over to Sarge and Harris, it would have been nothing. There would have been no real campaign. They wouldn't have known where to take hold at that late date. Neither would Frank because he'd been with Humphrey. We would have been left with Congressman

Dawson's operation. Since he was really quite distant from the Kenendys, and they were not. . . . I'm not speaking now of the Senator but rather of Bobby, who seemed not to think it very important to deal with him. I think his greatest effort would have been diminished. As it was, I think we gave him room to operate by the way the thing was done — and some money to work with. We backed up his efforts.

GRELE: Do you recall the campaign pledge to eliminate discrimination in housing with a "stroke of a pen?"

LAWSON: Yes.

GRELE: How did that evolve? That pledge which later came to haunt the President?

LAWSON: I know. I don't know who drafted that promise, but I would be surprised if it was Harris. Do you know?

GRELE: No.

LAWSON: I think that would bear investigation. It did not come from my pen.

GRELE: You wouldn't have advised this as a tactic?

LAWSON: I would have been for it as an objective. But since my field is housing, I know how complex the question is. I

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don't know that I would have made just an easy campaign promise that would have been hard to fulfill; this was something people would remember. I had been working with this very group of people to whom the promise was made. I was and I still am a member of the board of directors of the National Committee Against Discrimination in Housing, and I had developed very good feelings with those people. At one point they wrote to Senator Kennedy and asked him about something. He wrote back and told them that they were to stay in touch with me, that I was his representative to them. I kept them happy. So I don't know who stirred them up and gave them such a promise at the height of the campaign. I would have told them to relax and wait until he was elected. Then we'd see what we could do.

GRELE: Who were some of the leaders of that group?

LAWSON: For the national committee? The NAACP representative was a fellow by the name of Jack — oh, I can't remember the name. He's now one of the co-directors of the committee. Algernon Black, Hortense Gable — all of the New York people who were identified with housing. The committee's executive director was a lawyer by the name of Frances Levinson. It was a real peppy committee. They were right, but their politics weren't very good.

GRELE: Their politics weren't very good?

LAWSON: They didn't understand that John Kennedy's chances to get elected depended on walking a very tight rope, and that if he got too far off center with anybody, one way or the other, he was risking his neck. They should have had faith that here was a man from Massachusetts, who was a Catholic, who had given enough evidence of where he stood on things, that they could have had the good sense to be quiet and let him get elected, then press him.

GRELE: Would you describe that as the overall strategy of the campaign?

LAWSON: Yes.

GRELE: How did this affect civil rights?

LAWSON: It was hard for me to accept, but I think that I sensed it from the beginning and I was willing to take the risk. It was like a decision you make — whether you're going to accept this method of working, or be for something in an intransigent way and lose all. I was ready to compromise the tone and style of the campaign in order to win.

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GRELE: What was the general reaction on the part of the Kennedy organization to the more intransigent civil rights leaders or advocates?

LAWSON: How do you mean?

GRELE: Well, did they scorn them, or did they attempt to convince them that the strategy they were following was proper, or did they ignore them?

LAWSON: I think they never tried to say, "You come with me on this basis, and later we'll do something else." I think they felt if you couldn't read between the lines, they weren't going to spell it out. That was dangerous, too. They made their offer, and you could take it or leave it. My role was to try to interpret this to Negro leaders. This was what I spent all of my time doing, saying, "You've got to have confidence. He can't say that now, or he won't get elected." The things they did have to go on, of course, were the Patterson breakfast and those two civil rights votes. And they said, "Well, give us an omen the other way."

GRELE: In the election, how successful was John Kennedy among Negroes? You've already said that you think Nixon took the Negro vote in Atlanta.

LAWSON: Yes, he did. I remember someone asking me — somebody official, John Bailey or Bob or somebody — "What do you think?" down towards the end of the campaign. I said, "I think that the question is whether we win by 75 percent or 80 percent." That's about how it turned out. There were, of course, pockets of resistance; there are

traditional pockets of Republican Negro voters in many places. Many of them didn't desert. But the great, overwhelming city majorities were solidly Democrats.

GRELE: Did you ever confer on the election with John Kennedy after his election?

LAWSON: No, I never did.

GRELE: Were you at all involved in the post-election formation of the new administration? Was your opinion asked on appointments?

LAWSON: Not immediately after the election. It was much later than the White House began to call me.

GRELE: What did you do right after the election?

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LAWSON: Said goodbye, went back to my office, and that was the end of it, except that I was invited to be on the Inaugural Committee. I did work on that. After that, the only discussions I had with anybody had to do with what jobs was I going to get or what did I want.

GRELE: What jobs were you to get? What jobs did you want?

LAWSON: I didn't want any. The speculation, however, ran very high because I was, perhaps, the Negro who had been longest associated on a national basis with the Kennedys. So everybody thought I was going to get maybe the number one appointment. There was speculation that I would be named an ambassador, that I would get a federal judgeship, or that I might be an assistant secretary of some department, or that I might go on the White House staff. I didn't seek any of these things. I was not interested in an appointment of any sort. But I think I did wonder that I never heard from any of them again about such things as: Whom do you think should get jobs? Who really worked hard and deserves something? Is there anything you want? Would you like to come and be with us at the White House? Things like that.

GRELE: Were any offers made?

LAWSON: Offers were later made. At one time, Ralph Dungan, who was doing part of the talent search, asked me if I would like to be assistant attorney general. I said I wouldn't.

GRELE: Why?

LAWSON: I didn't think I could get along with Bob. First of all, I didn't really want to be Assistant Attorney General. That's probably the best reason. But even if I had

been persuaded that that was a useful thing, an important thing for me to do as a Negro woman lawyer, I would have felt at that time, as I understood Bob, that I really couldn't endure the way he would shout at people and be so abrupt. I couldn't have stood it. I would have shouted back, and then we would have been angry with each other. That's no way to work with someone.

Then later Bob called me. I guess this was maybe about February or March 1961, after they'd been in the White House just a brief period of time. He called and said the President had spoken to him about this the day before. He would like for me to take a position as Judge of the Court of General Sessions. I thanked him and said I really couldn't be that bored. He said he thought that there was a big job to do down there, that they'd like for me to be in the

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domestic relations court where all the divorce cases and support cases were being handled, and it was a real challenge. I told him I thought that there were probably a thousand lawyers in the District of Columbia who were competent to handle that assignment, that I didn't think I could go and do something so routine. He asked me if I wanted to consider it, and I said no, I didn't. I was sure that it was not anything that I would want to do.

GRELE: How did your appointment as judge for the Juvenile Court come about?

LAWSON: It was not until the spring of 1962 that Congress passed legislation which increased the Juvenile Court from a one judge court to a three judge court. I was immediately aware that my name would be considered for one of the vacancies because, in fact, there had been discussion for some fifteen years or more about my going to the Juvenile Court if the number of judges was increased. This was because I am a graduate social worker, and I'd had experience in social work in the District of Columbia before I studied law. It was generally known that the problems of the Court had to do with the social questions as much as with legal matters. It was felt that I would understand the community and children and could do a job there. By the time the vacancy existed, however, I felt there were things I could do for the community that were more important. For example, express my interest in the development of low and moderate income housing, which is what I'm doing now. I hoped they wouldn't come to me. However, I soon got a call from the Department of Justice asking me to come in and to consider the appointment. I tried to put them off; I made a lot of suggestions as to other people. I know they did interview some twenty-five or so candidates, but they kept coming back to me. In the end I accepted not so much as a solution to the problem of what were the Kennedys going to do about an appointment for Marjorie Lawson, but because I felt I owed it to this community to go and do a job if I could.

GRELE: Did they ever ask your opinion on any of the civil rights legislation that they were attempting to pass or on the housing "stroke of the pen" or the March on Washington or any other issue that involved race relations?

LAWSON: I can't remember that they did. However, in January 1962, President Kennedy appointed me to be a member of the President's Committee on Equal Employment

Opportunity. Later on, President Johnson told me that when President Kennedy suggested my name, he had opposed the idea because he had an editor in Texas that he wanted to put on the committee. He was at the time the

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chairman of the committee. The President said to him very quietly but very forcefully, "Oh, no, I think you'll enjoy having Mrs. Lawson on the committee with you. I think you'll find her very helpful." President Johnson said to me later, "Once again, the President was right."

GRELE: Did you serve on that committee?

LAWSON: Yes. It's just been disbanded recently. I continued to serve on it. Of course, you remember Harris Wofford was on the staff after the election. He was on the White House staff working on race relations. Harris called me one day and asked me if I would consider membership on the President's Committee on Equal Employment Opportunity. He said that the administration was very embarrassed that I had not taken anything. He thought that this would be one answer to the problem and, yet, it would not be the end of the matter; this would be without regard to any future assignments that the President might want to consider for me. I said I was a staff person on the old Roosevelt committee — you know, the Fair Employment Practices Committee — and I would be delighted to be a member of the President's committee. I thought I had something to contribute. It was not a job and wouldn't take up very much of my time. If I could be helpful, I'd be delighted to do it.

GRELE: There has been a lot of criticism of that committee among civil rights groups as to its effectiveness or its ineffectiveness. What are your opinions of the group?

LAWSON: I think the criticism was in the beginning before we really got a program going. In the end, there was a great deal of approval of the job that President Johnson and Hobart Taylor [Jr.] did. I think we ended up in a blaze of glory. I'm so amused now when I read comments of civil rights people about the Equal Employment Opportunities Commission under the Civil Rights Act because they're already complaining about the procedures that are required of a complainant. They realize now that in the old committee they had a very effective tool where relief could be instant.

GRELE: Were you at all involved in the discussions of hiring practices and government contractors?

LAWSON: As a member of the committee? Oh, yes.

GRELE: There has been some debate on President Johnson's position at that time. Do you recall it?

LAWSON: What particular position?

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GRELE: Someone has told me that his position was to go slow.

LAWSON: That's not true as far as I understand it. There was one instance when the staff sent out a telegram to a North Carolina contractor saying that his contract was going to be rescinded if he didn't comply. That man was in President Johnson's office the next morning saying, "What do you want me to do?" The question that President Johnson asked is "Do we want this man producing the goods he's contracted to produce or performing the services, or do we want to rescind the contracts? Do we want performance and compliance, or do we want to cancel contracts?" I think that had the issue really developed where people would not comply, President Johnson would have been completely willing, as a last resort, to cancel the contract. It just really never became necessary.

GRELE: I'm going to change the tape now.

BEGIN TAPE TWO SIDE ONE

GRELE: Who were some of the other people who worked on the civil rights section?

LAWSON: Well, for example, Adam Yarmolinsky did some research and wrote some material which may have been incorporated into speeches. He liked to come over to our section and talk with us and see what we were doing. Another fellow who drifted in and out on sort of the same basis was John Szlard. Another one who was more or less full time came to us from Senator [Phillip A.] Hart's office, John Feila. He later became the executive director of the President's Committee on Equal Employment Opportunity. He was one of the group of NIRA [National Inter-Racial Association] officials and connected with the Potomac Institute. This is a group that causes consternation among civil rights groups because it's largely a group of white sociologists and people in political science and related fields, who try to give leadership to the civil rights movement. These people are greatly resented by many civil rights leaders. There were others. I may think of their names as we go along.

GRELE: While you were a member of the President's Committee on Equal Employment, do you remember the argument between the then Attorney General and the Vice President at one of the meetings of that committee?

LAWSON: I remember it very vividly.

GRELE: What was the issue?

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LAWSON: We were having one of our usual meetings. The attendance was very large this day because it was the first meeting after the Birmingham riots. The administration had said that it wanted to explore all the possibilities of improving

conditions in Birmingham so that some of the causes of the riot would be removed. President Kennedy asked that we look at all of the government installations and agencies in Birmingham to see if they could provide more employment and more opportunity for Negro workers. He sent a task force to Birmingham, which included Civil Service Commission Chairman John W. Macy, Jr. and others. They were back and ready to report at this meeting so that it was a very full meeting. Vice President Johnson and Hobart Taylor, who was then the executive director, and a few other people were sitting at the head of the conference table; the rest of the members of the committee were arranged in a semicircle around; and staff people were sitting behind us. The room was full.

In the middle of our discussion, Bob Kennedy came in with Burke Marshall and sat down and began to interrupt the proceedings by asking questions about how much the committee's records showed about progress in Birmingham. He wanted to know what agencies had how many Negroes, how many vacancies there were, who had done what to get more jobs. He wanted to know what defense industries were in Birmingham, what their employment patterns were, and what the compliance reports were showing.

He first starting talking to James [E.] Webb of NASA [National Aeronautics and Space Administration.] Mr. Webb did not have the information that Bob asked for and turned behind him and asked one of his staff people what the answer to that question might be. This man who was the manpower specialist got up and started talking in a very flannel mouthed way about man-hours. He said he had one and a half men on the Washington desk keeping charge of the statistics from Birmingham. Bob said, "What does that mean?" Then instead of pressing the poor man too far, although he did press him, he went back to Webb. This became a very embarrassing confrontation with Mr. Webb being less and less specific about the information that Bob wanted and getting redder and redder in the face. He thereupon turned on Hobart Taylor and asked Hobart about the compliance reports. Hobart said that a new form had just been developed, that no compliance reports were in yet, that this program was a new one, and he was making arrangements so that in time we would have this kind of information so that if we could look at a defense industry in Birmingham and see that it was not doing a good job, we could say to them, "You must do better," and perhaps tell them exactly what we wanted them to do. So Bob said, "Well, where is the form?" Hobart said that it was being processed by the Budget Bureau, that it would be printed and mailed out immediately, and he expected to have some reports by the next meeting. So Bob said, "Where in the Budget Bureau is it?" Hobart was now getting quite upset, but very patiently and very deliberately said that it had been discussed with whomever in the Budget Bureau it had been discussed. Bob said

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he wanted to know where it was right then because he would help Hobart spring it out of the Budget Bureau and get it printed and on its way. Hobart said, "Mr. Attorney General, I don't believe that I need your help. I think that the matter is progressing in an orderly fashion. I expect to have an answer at once, and I will pursue the matter. It really won't be necessary."

Vice President Johnson had watched this play between Bob and Hobart and was beginning to be embarrassed because, after all, Hobart was his selection and his own dear Texas boy of whom he was very fond. He interrupted, and he said, "This is our position, Mr. Attorney General." He made a very careful review of where the committee's work stood. Bob snapped a

few more questions. Vice President Johnson's voice got quieter and more deliberate, and he went over the whole thing again like a father explaining something to a small child. It was very obvious, though, that he was angry his face was dark red and his voice was almost inaudible — but he was clearly more in control, or more dignified, in the encounter than Bob was, who was beginning to be shrill.

At this point, Bob turned to somebody and wanted to know about the apprenticeship program. I was sitting next to [William] Bill Schnitzler who had done at that time more than a year's work on the apprenticeship program. You know that he is George Meany's chief assistant. He had a stack of material in front of him, and he started talking to Bob in answer to this question. He had the material. While he was speaking, Bob got up without saying a word to excuse himself, and Burke Marshall got up behind him, now they stomped out of the room while Schnitzler was still talking.

GRELE: What did the other people on the committee say about this?

LAWSON: There was a great silence for a while, and then we went on with the meeting. Later, Hobart Taylor was contacted by Burke Marshall and other people in the Department of Justice and asked please to overlook the incident. Hobart was stomping around and breathing fire and threatening to resign. All of the members of the committee were astounded by such a performance. They thought it was completely uncalled for. They were very angry, both those who had gotten caught in the line of fire and those who had been forced to sit there and observe it and be embarrassed for them.

GRELE: What kind of work did you do specifically on the committee?

LAWSON: The first thing I did was to suggest the very thing that you were saying, that civil rights groups were not enchanted

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with the committee because it had inherited the do-nothing reputation of the Eisenhower committee. So I felt the first thing we ought to do would be to improve our image; that Negro leaders should come to know Vice President Johnson personally so that they could see how he operated and have confidence in him as a person. I suggested that we have a National Leadership Conference on the committee's work. He agreed, and I became chairman of the conference. He gave me staff people to work with and any other members that I wanted to have work on the program.

We brought about eight hundred leaders to Washington from all over the country. They paid their own way. We had a meeting in the State Department auditorium. It was a day-long session. The Vice President stayed with us all day long. Members of the Cabinet and other members of the committee were on the program and stayed with us. That evening Vice President and Mrs. Johnson were hosts at a reception in the Benjamin Franklin Room on the eight floor of the Diplomatic Reception Offices in the State Department. Vice President Johnson paid for the reception himself; it cost him over a thousand dollars. During the planning, I kept saying, "We've got to have a little party when this is over. People will be tired, and they'll want to talk

and relax a little.” He didn’t have any funds. There were no government funds to provide for this. But I kept insisting. I said, “You can’t ask people to come here from California and Florida and Texas and all around and show them no hospitality.” So he agreed.... He always agreed to do it; it was just the question of how it could be done. He went home at the end of the day, got Mrs. Johnson, and brought her back so that she would be hostess. He spoke to the people from a platform, introduced everybody, and told jokes. He completely sold himself to the people at that day. He made many friends who were convinced that he meant to do a job in the committee. I would say that from that day forward the committee was in a climate where its staff could go ahead and do a job. Later on that night — that same night — Louis Martin and I had a party for the people up at the Hotel 2400 for those that were still here and staying over so that they could still unwind and talk some more. We followed that up with a series of regional conferences in St. Louis, Chicago, Detroit, and Philadelphia. We had one in Los Angeles on November 15, 1963. We came back to Washington just a week before assassination.

GRELE: Did President Kennedy ever take a personal interest in anything that the committee was doing?

LAWSON: He never came to the meetings, but he did stage a few conferences at the White House for the Plans for Progress companies. Every time a new group signed up, he would receive them at the White House.

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GRELE: Did you have any social contacts with the President after the election?

LAWSON: No, I never did. I should say we never did. One night in 1957 or ‘58 my husband had been at a meeting where Senator Kennedy spoke. After the meeting they came home together. My husband wasn’t driving, and Senator Kennedy left him off at our house. He said, “You know, Belford, if I ever get to be elected President, you can have anything you want.” My husband said he said to him, “I don’t want anything except to see you President and maybe once in a while to see the White House.” So we were surprised and disappointed that we never got invited to any social function at the White House except those that we would normally have been included in in a representative way. For example, we always went to the judicial receptions, and when the big civil rights reception was held in, maybe, 1963, we were invited to that. I was invited to the Civil Rights Conference of Women Leaders in the summer of 1963. My husband was invited to several meetings that were held for lawyers in connection with the drive for civil rights at around that same time when the President began to meet with national groups about civil rights problems in the summer of ‘63. But we were never invited to a state dinner or to any parties. We thought it was very strange, and we concluded that it was probably the result of two things. As far as my husband was concerned, it may have been that the damage that Frank Reeves did to him had something to do with it.

GRELE: What damage?

LAWSON: When Frank joined the Kennedy team, in a way he supplanted my husband as the Negro man who was advising Senator Kennedy. He wasn't content to come on the staff as the Negro who had won the Democratic primary in the District of Columbia. He felt that it was necessary to undo the friendship that existed between my husband and the Senator. He came bearing gossip, saying that my husband was not a national leader but only had influence in the Alpha Phi Alpha fraternity and therefore should not be the person who was closest to Senator Kennedy. Of course, later, I guess my husband realized a very sweet victory because his position in this community is still unassailed and is as good as it was then, or better, whereas Frank's has diminished.

It could be that we were not invited because I had difficulties with Sarge during the West Virginia campaign. He had promised me a sum of four thousand dollars to conduct the campaign and later sent only part of it, sent some of it late, and finally owed me eight hundred dollars which I advanced out of my own funds. In the course of the West Virginia campaign, we had numerous arguments over the telephone. He was extremely crude and rude. I resented very much the way he

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spoke and the way he behaved. We had correspondence after the campaign in which he apologized for his behavior, but he still didn't send my money. In time I wrote back and asked him for it. He replied by saying that he was spending all of his time in Chicago trying to raise money to pay off campaign debts and pay people like me who had been extravagant. To that I replied that if he didn't care to send me a check, I would bring it to the attention of the Ambassador, meaning Senator Kennedy's father, who had earlier said to me that if I had any problems with respect to financing in the campaign, I should bring them to his attention. Immediately after I wrote that letter to Sarge, he sent the check, and he was forever angry with me after that.

During the Wisconsin primary, I had a brief argument with Bob when I asked him to carry out a commitment that had been made to me by Steve. We had real trouble with Negro voters in Wisconsin, and I was trying to do all kinds of gimmicky things to win a few votes. I didn't want us to come out of Wisconsin with nothing. After Jackie and Frank Roosevelt had spent this day with us in the Negro neighborhood in a restaurant with a group of Negro ministers, we had all of these pictures. I said to Steve I thought it would be a good idea to get a lot of them printed up and to put them around in store windows in these two precincts. He agreed with me, and we made an arrangement with a local photographer to give us two hundred at a dollar a piece. When the photographer came from his money, Steve was in Washington. The photographer was threatening to get rather loud and to upset the whole headquarters in demanding to see this one and that one and to get his money. So I asked Bob if I might speak to him. I told him that we had this bill and that Steve had agreed to pay it, and since Steve wasn't there, would he pay it. He asked what it was for. I said it was for pictures to help in the Negro districts and explained what had happened. He said, "Well, how much?" I said, "Two hundred dollars." He said, "Why that's outrageous! What do you mean two hundred dollars' worth of pictures!" By this time he had stopped all of the operation of the office, and everyone was turning to stare. Ethel [Mrs. Robert F. Kennedy], who was standing there watching him, called him to her side and tried to quiet him down. I walked away, and the photographer put on his

scene. It was quite a thing. Ultimately, of course, Steve paid the bill. When Bob raised his voice, I raised mine, too, and walked away. Most people in those days were cringing; when any Kennedy raised a voice, he was supposed to cringe and slink away. But I wasn't an employee, so I didn't cringe. You know, I could raise decibel for decibel. Anyhow, you weren't supposed to behave like that; I would suspect that this was responsible for our not being included.

I think there was maybe something more. The Kennedys separated their professional and political lives very much from their personal

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lives. While we were around them a great deal of time in the pre-campaign days and the campaign days, and you got the feeling that you were a close friend. As soon as the election was over, of course, a lot of people found out they weren't close friends at all. In other words, that they had been used, and that these measures of friendliness were only politically skin deep. They tended to revert to their old family friends and childhood friends. I can understand this. This is perhaps a protection to people in public life. They cannot have too many strangers around. Yet. I would say that the Negro effort was a large part of the success of the campaign, and it had been based on the theory that we were going to have an integrated society. Yet, when they began to have their first private parties, the people they invited were people like Sammy and Mae Davis and Nat Cole and Maria Cole — people like that, artists, musicians. It seemed to me that if they were going to show something about the excellence of American life, they should have started by inviting the people who were excellent in an intellectual and productive sense in the total society. They had people that we had introduced them to that they could call on if they were going to choose some personal friends. One doesn't want to choose personal friends, but still a president and an administration which are setting a new style could have given emphasis to this kind of society, too. Instead, they reverted to the stereotype of the musician and the athlete in Negro life rather than the intellectual or the professional person.

GRELE: Had you had any contact with Mrs. Kennedy?

LAWSON: Yes. Before the campaign. Yes, I had. Not that we'd been to their house to any private parties, but we had been there to dinner and breakfast and lunch for gatherings which had political purposes. So I couldn't say that I was a personal friend. And yet, for people who were as important as they were, they didn't have many personal friends. I think you'll find this; they did not have a wide circle of intimate friends. This may be because the Kennedys were very ingrown and lived a great deal to themselves, but as far as society people are concerned, they did not have this kind of close social contacts. I remember, for example, that William Walton, who was down in West Virginia with me, said to me one time that he was rather astonished to find himself an intimate of the Kennedys. And he remained so. He said that he had met them rather casually and that they had taken him up and made him part of their circle. He didn't understand why; he had been really rather shocked to find himself a part of a very small circle of intimate friends. There were not many people around the Kennedys on this basis. He often wondered why he was one of them.

GRELE: Moving on now. It has often been commented upon that to a

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remarkable degree the Kennedy staff was male. Do you have any comments on this proposition?

LAWSON: I would say that's true. You may remember, the Kennedy staff was largely Catholic, too. If there could be a consensus among them about a woman's place, I would say it was in the home plus being pregnant.

GRELE: How did you get along with this attitude?

LAWSON: Well, it's a real handicap to be discriminated against on two bases — both race and sex. I would say that I probably came closer than most women to being part of the inner team. I certainly didn't have any rivals around. There were no other women. I think they were very glad to shake me out of their hair as soon as the campaign was over and revert to their all-male method of operation.

GRELE: Did they ever show embarrassment about dealing with a woman in a political situation — the President or his brothers or his advisors?

LAWSON: Yes. They're very shy people really. I think it was embarrassing to them. They seemed rather ill at ease in discussing political matters or business matters with me or with other women — any intellectual matters. Most of their conversation with women was about children and houses and the babies and "How's your husband?"

GRELE: You were telling me earlier about Katie Loucheim.

LAWSON: Well, Katie Loucheim was the vice chairman of the Democratic National Committee and chairman of the women's division at the time of the nomination. But when we came back and the Kennedys took over the Democratic National Committee, they installed Margaret Price in Katie's place. They installed her, but they then immediately ignored her. Her main function in the campaign was to trail around with them, but they spent a great deal of their time ignoring her and being annoyed that she was along. She always was struggling to get to the platform, to set up on the platform with the candidate, and they were always kind of elbowing her out and ignoring her. Meanwhile, back at the office, the organizational work had to be done by staff without her direction. I think that her place really was to have been in Washington trying to organize women for the campaign. Katie, meanwhile, who was a great favorite with Democratic women across the country, continued to work hard in the campaign. She was always a good sport about it. After deposing her, the Kennedys gave her a job in the State Department, but it was not what she deserved nor what she now has.

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GRELE: Why did they depose her?

LAWSON: It could be that when they made their deal with Governor Williams, Margaret Price, who was then the national committeewoman from Michigan, came along as part of the support.

GRELE: Do you recall offhand any other women who were appointed to positions?

LAWSON: I remember only Esther Peterson who became Assistant Secretary of Labor. I would say that was a result of Arthur Goldberg's interest in having a woman because he also was responsible for George Weavers' becoming Assistant Secretary of Labor for International Affairs. At that time there was no other Negro assistant secretary of any department nor was there any woman who was assistant secretary other than Esther. Both of these people were with Arthur Goldberg. I think that says a lot about what the intentions of the Kennedy administration were to appoint women to important posts in government.

GRELE: Did you ever have any dealing with the Cabinet level of the members of the administration, such as Arthur Goldberg?

LAWSON: Yes, because he was the vice chairman of the President's Committee on Equal Employment Opportunity. I saw him frequently in that context. I had known him before.

GRELE: What was your impression of his relations with the Kennedy administration?

LAWSON: My knowledge about his contacts with the total administration isn't too full, but I know that he and the President got along well together. The President found him a very practical advisor and did rely on him in this area. Arthur is also the kind of person who cannot be ignored; his performance is so sterling. You remember, he had a success immediately in settling a strike at the very beginning of the administration.

GRELE: Why I asked that question, I was going to then ask if anybody on this level ever conferred with you about an appointment they were about to make. Did they call up and say, "Marjorie, what do you think about this person?"

LAWSON: I've had lots of contacts with John Macy on this level. I have recommended people to him, and he has asked me about people. Our conversations and friendship had developed as a result of our work together on the committee. I would say that he called me. There were people on the Kennedy staff from time to

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time who would ask me about people. But, you see, by this time they had become quite close with Louis Martin. The secret, I think, of that relationship is that he was very close to Sarge. They're both Catholic, and they hit it off very well. Louis is a very agreeable kind of fellow who would not oppose Sarge in the kind of way I might so they got along very well. And, of course,

Louis is a man. They turned to him for lots of advice about Negro affairs. The other Kennedy people like Dungan and O'Brien and O'Donnell, who were always near Andrew Hatcher, turned to Andy for advice. So here you had two newspaper people advising them about professional matters where they should have had a sociologist or a lawyer or somebody in political science. They tended to rely on the people who were close and whose loyalty they believed in. In other words, the Negro nearest you is the one to be believed.

GRELE: Were you at all consulted about the March on Washington or the reaction to that march — what the administration should do, shouldn't do?

LAWSON: I was on the bench at this time, and there's no limbo like being on the bench. Nobody says anything to you about anything. It was very difficult for me suddenly to be unrelated to the kinds of community involvement that I'd always been in even before the Kennedys. Offhand, I can't think of anything.

GRELE: Can you think of anything we've missed?

LAWSON: Oh, I'm sure there are a great many things we've missed. We were in the White House attending a judicial reception on Wednesday night before President and Mrs. Kennedy went to Texas. We didn't bother to go to them because there is always such a crush at these things. People are always trying to see the President. So we were just standing quietly in the room talking with some other people, and Jackie looked up and said to the President, "Oh, there are Belford and Marjorie hiding over there. Let's go see them." So they came to us and stood there chatting. The President said, "Belford, how's the practice of law?" My husband said.... First, the President said, "Why don't you come to see me, Belford?" Belford said, "Well, Mr. President, you seem to have one or two little things to do." Then he said, "Tell me, how is the practice of law?" Belford said, "Mr. President, I manage to eke out a precarious existence." The President threw back his head and laughed. He seemed really to enjoy that; he really laughed. Then he said, "We're ducking out of here. You know, we're going to Texas tomorrow morning, and we've got to get to bed. So, good-bye." They turned and went right upstairs after that. That was Wednesday night, and Saturday afternoon we were right back in the White House paying our respects.

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GRELE: Where were you when you heard of the assassination?

LAWSON: I was making a speech at a day-long conference at Eastern Senior High School. It was a seminar of teachers. I was talking about the Juvenile Court and the relationship of the school system to the Juvenile Court when a young man from the principal's office came in and whispered just "President." The principal interrupted me after a few moments to say that there had been a bulletin on the radio that the President had been shot, but that it was not known what his condition was. He said, "We're supposed to get another report in fifteen minutes." So I said, "Well, I'm sure no one in this room wants to hear anything further I have to say. So why don't we just close the meeting?" He said, "Oh, no. I think you should

keep on talking until we hear more news. There's nothing we can do, and we'd like to hear what else you have to say." So I went on talking for another fifteen minutes. Then this young man came back and brought the radio with him. We turned it up, and there was still no final word. People were beginning to be very upset. This was to have been a day-long conference, and many of them said they couldn't stay anymore, they wanted to leave. The principal walked me out to my car. I turned the car radio on and drove slowly home from Eastern Senior High School. While I was driving home, the final word came over the radio that the President was indeed dead. I came in the house and told my housekeeper who immediately started to cry. Like most other Americans, we didn't stir out of the house nor from in front of the television set except to go to the White House on Saturday afternoon to pay our respects and then to go to the funeral on Monday.

GRELE: You've had close contact with two administrations now. How would you assess the differences and similarities between those administrations?

LAWSON: That's a very large order. I would say that President Kennedy opened the door to opportunity and made the accomplishments of the Johnson administration possible by bringing the affairs of the nation to the attention of the average citizen in a way that hadn't been true before, perhaps since the Roosevelt administration. People had walked away from their concern with public affairs all during the dull years of the Eisenhower administration, and in the lackluster last years of the Truman administration, people had lost interest. I think that the real service that President Kennedy did was to arouse people again to their obligations as citizens and to interest people who had real fights for the nation into making those gifts available. Then President Johnson has completed the task by actually carrying out these things and doing more. I think that while President Kennedy sort of made a call to arms, it was on a high level that some people also couldn't respond to, except to admire him. I think President Johnson is more

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in tune with the people on a realistic level. I mean, I think they regard him as a man not a god, and are not in awe of him but have a warm personal response to him which is warmer and more realistic — less full of romance — than their feeling toward President Kennedy.

I followed the Kennedy campaign in the last three days: I went out with the campaign. I picked them up in New York, and we went campaigning all night in Connecticut.

GRELE: You went through my hometown.

LAWSON: Oh, we did? Hartford?

GRELE: No. Naugatuck, a little mill town on the Naugatuck River.

LAWSON: We went on up to Maine and came back down through New Hampshire and ended up in Boston, went to the big rally and then to Faneuil Hall. The next day I went

down to Hyannis Port and stayed until the morning after. I was in the Armory. You see there's a lot more.

GRELE: Yes, there is.

LAWSON: I was in Hyannis Port all that night while we were waiting for the returns. We finally left the Armory about four or five o'clock in the morning, went to a motel, and stayed awhile. We just couldn't rest so we came right on back, and we followed the final returns as they were coming in. I was right there when the Kennedys all came in, and the President said, "Now we go to prepare for a new administration and a new baby." When he walked out, I just happened to be standing there. We shook hands, and he thanked me for what I had done. A lot of people said later they had seen me on television.

GRELE: Did you discuss with the President or with one of his intimates — his brothers or the staff — the election returns? Were you sitting there and saying, "Well now, the tenth precinct of New York is coming in; we pulled that one because of...."

LAWSON: No, because they were all over at the house, over at the Kennedy's house. I wasn't over there. I was at the Armory. But there were still some staff people at the Armory, and we did discuss that. Yes. Pierre and Andy were at the Armory. We were talking to Washington.

GRELE: Do you have any recollections that would be interesting or significant to put on the tape about that time? In a period

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of such tension was there any conflict between members of the staff or disagreement over who had done the job, who hadn't done the job?

LAWSON: No. I don't remember any. I do know there was conflict in the staff, though, from earlier times in the campaign.

GRELE: Between whom?

LAWSON: Well, you know, there was the Sorensen side of the staff and then there was the Bobby side of the staff.

GRELE: Who was on each side?

LAWSON: Well, all the people who came over with Bobby, presumably, like.... Well, Ken certainly was always a Bobby man, and Ted had been before that. Before even Ted, there was Ted Reardon, I guess, who didn't really fit in with either side. The pace was swift, and the prize went to the fastest. I guess Ted Reardon sort of fell by the way when the game began in earnest. Ted Sorensen guarded his own position very jealously; he

wouldn't let and anybody get in a word that he didn't approve. His assistant was [Myer] Mike Feldman, who was very loyal to Ted. They represented, maybe, the intellectual and non-political side, except that Ted was so close in putting words into the President's mouth that obviously this was also political in the highest way. On Bobby's side were Ken and Larry. They tried to control the thing politically and control the candidate. I think the President enjoyed the tug-of-war. He just let them suffer.

GRELE: Were there ever any open conflicts between them?

LAWSON: I'm sure there were. There was a constant, running, open conflict between them. But, of course, I would say that Ted couldn't be so open; Bobby had to win in the long run. So Ted could only win by being smarter than anybody. He couldn't really test his influence or lay it on the line he just had to keep on writing good speeches while Bobby would call the shots. I was never around because the President was always a gentleman in front of me, but among the people on the staff — among the men — the general understanding was the President would cuss them out and be very rough with anybody who made mistakes. This was hard for me to understand, how they could command loyalty as they did because they were very sharp spoken with people. Maybe I'd never been in politics before, or maybe it was because I am a woman, but I didn't see how you could keep people going that extra mile all the time that you have to do in politics. Nobody in the world could pay you for what you do;

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you're working for yourself really; you're working for something you believe in. So why would you take it? But they did. This can be part of the price.

GRELE: Did you ever notice a tension in the staff between those who were with Kennedy before the Convention and those who came afterwards?

LAWSON: Oh, absolutely! This was really a big thing. In this case they would join up and be against all the people who were, say, after Wisconsin. Anybody who hadn't been before Wisconsin really didn't matter in the final analysis. They would take from them whatever they wanted, but they regarded them as being very low in the order of importance.

GRELE: Can you think of anything else?

LAWSON: Probably not anything else of any great importance. I've had some personal notes from Mrs. Kennedy; I've had telephone conversations with her. She has sent me flowers. She's been to my home. We weren't living here but on Logan Circle. I'm sure there have been many conversations in the course of the early days that I've had with President Kennedy that are not recorded here. I remember once a conversation with the Ambassador that we don't have down here. That had to do with the time that he moved his family from Boston to New York because one of his girls who was then of an age to be invited to be a member of the Junior League was not invited. He was deeply hurt that she was snubbed

because she was Catholic and Irish. So he moved to New York. Later she went on to be the Marquess of Hartington and came back to Boston for a visit. Then, of course, everybody wanted to invite her, and he was delighted to be able to report that she was not willing. He also talked about Joe [Joseph P. Kennedy, Jr.] and could cry in a moment. He could still cry about Joe. There was a book that the President had written about Joe which was not published but was distributed within the family. He was always saying, "I want you to read that book about Joe because he was a great fellow."

GRELE: Did you ever read the book?

LAWSON: No. Nobody ever sent it to me, and I got involved.

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GRELE: There has been a lot of discussion that John Kennedy took Joe's place in terms of the Ambassador's grooming him for public office.

LAWSON: I would say that's probably as true as anything like that can be. I think, had Joe lived, that he had, according to legend, the personality to have been a very successful politician.

GRELE: Do you have any final comments to put on the tape before I turn it off?

LAWSON: Well I have a memory of Mrs. [Joseph P.] Kennedy in the Wisconsin primary. She came to attend one of those innumerable teas. It was in Vel Phillips' home. There were some others. We spent a day with her; we took her around to a number of places. When she was talking to women about why they could be for her son, she would tell charming stories of them as children — about the President's illnesses as a child, during the war, and since then. She said that she was sure they could safely vote for him because he would never want to have war. She came in from Palm Beach into a snowy March day in Milwaukee, and she said that probably the women there had some vision of her coming from a beautiful, tropical palace — or villa to Wisconsin. She said they should throw that kind of notice out of their heads because she didn't have central heating, and it was very cold in Florida, too; that they had fires in all the fireplaces, and everybody sat huddled around in sweaters and freezing to death, so she was just as happy to be there. There was some discussion among the staff as to whether she should come to Wisconsin. Bobby was very much against it. He thought that Wisconsin was so "iffy" that his mother might say something that would be hurtful. She said that right out; she said, "Bobby didn't want me to come, but here I am. Jack said I could."

GRELE: Did she at any time say anything that could be harmful?

LAWSON: I never heard her say anything that could be hurtful. I think she was a pretty aware, intelligent, wonderful campaigner — to look as good as she did at her age, you know. She said, "People say I'm seventy-something; I have no comment about that. People are always interested in how old I am and how much money we have. I'm not

going to tell how old I am, and the Ambassador has never told me how rich we are.” She was quite witty and handsome, considering her age — very trim.

GRELE: Is there anything else?

LAWSON: I remember a meeting up at the Senator’s house on N Street.

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GRELE: A meeting of the Negro press?

LAWSON: Yes. This was one of the things that I had recommended. This was early in the campaign, right after the nomination. I had been introducing him to individuals — individual editors and publishers — but since Washington was the capital and since a lot of the press services were here, I thought that he should have a meeting with the Negro press so they’d really get to know him and ask him questions and so on. I’d been asking for this meeting for quite some time. Then one day Bob called me up and said, “Well, Marjorie, you can go ahead” — he didn’t say Marjorie; he said Marge because that’s what he called me — he said, “Marge, you can go ahead and set that meeting up.” I said, “What meeting?” And he said, “With the Negro press.” I said, “All right, fine.” And I did. It was one evening at the Senator’s house. Jackie was a wonderful hostess and served cocktails and hors d’oeuvres. I remember the evening particularly because her sister was there. Princess [Lee] Radziwell and her husband, [Prince Stanislaus Radziwell] Stash, were visiting. They were supposed to go over to Walter Lippmann’s for dinner — no to Joseph Alsop’s for dinner — and they couldn’t tear themselves away from this meeting. They were just fascinated by the talk that was going on between the Senator and these Negro press men who were pressing hard on questions they wanted to ask and on positions. Everybody was having a wonderful time. When we came out of that meeting, Pierre Salinger was just coming in. He was supposed to have been there because he was just starting out to do the press work, and he had missed the whole thing. I said, “Oh, Pierre, how could you be so late?” He said he was sorry; he hadn’t been able to get away. He came on in, and he and the Senator sat down and had a conversation. He later said that this was one of the first times that he felt that a rapport had been established between himself and Senator Kennedy — when they really began to talk. One of the questions that I asked of Senator Kennedy at this meeting was this: (Of course, it was exactly why I had called the group together.) “Senator Kennedy, don’t you think that it would be very helpful if the Negro press took more of an interest in political matters and would write more on political subjects and discuss the issues of this campaign?” He said, “Marjorie, you’ll not get me into that one. You said it; I didn’t.”

BEGIN TAPE TWO SIDE TWO

GRELE: You have remarked that President Kennedy was always willing to have his picture taken with Negro leaders.

LAWSON: Yes. From the very beginning — say, from 1956 or '57 on — I'm sure that if we could collect all of the pictures of the President with Negro leaders all over the country, we would

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have a remarkable collection because he made himself available to Negro leaders as no other candidate ever had. He went to places where he would be in such situations where pictures could be made. He spoke at luncheons and dinners here and other places. He attended meetings where Negroes would be, and he would be very gracious about having pictures made. This made the kind of pictorial record that we could use in the campaign. We were always able to get out a wonderful brochure because we had all these very heartwarming pictures of President Kennedy and Mrs. Kennedy and of the people back in their own hometowns. This was just an irrefutable argument. If he knew all those people and had been all those places with Negro leaders, he must be really interested.

GRELE: Was this part of the strategy? Of your strategy.

LAWSON: It was part of my strategy because there was so little that I could say in the beginning. I just was making personal contacts and trying to show what a warm and friendly person he was. Then the thing just snow-balled until, finally, we had a great pictorial record.

GRELE: Did you have any contact with people in civil rights organizations, like Martin Luther King or people in CORE [Congress of Racial Equality] or SNCC [Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee]?

LAWSON: You will remember at that time CORE AND SNCC were not very important, but I had contacts with civil rights organizations. I was a delegate to the Civil Rights Leadership Conference. These were the traditional civil rights groups.

GRELE: During the Kennedy administration, were they won over to John Kennedy or did they still remain cool?

LAWSON: I would say that Martin Luther King kept on testing and pushing and stretching things out, always asking for one more thing, and that probably not until the March on Washington was he satisfied. Immediately thereafter I would say that it was a temporary thing; that he considers his primary allegiance to be to advance the cause of the Negro people, especially the downtrodden people of the South. Therefore, he could not really make an allegiance with the President of the United States; he has to stand at arm's length. Therefore, it was a ridiculous effort to try to embrace him or to give him an appointment or to send him off to Africa as an ambassador. There was no reason for Harris Wofford, for example, to have thought that was the way to handle Martin Luther.

GRELE: He did?

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LAWSON: Well, I'm sure they would have thought that was a great way to dispose of Martin Luther King. They would probably have tried to give a job to Roy Wilkins, and maybe they did.

GRELE: How did they deal with Harris Wofford?

LAWSON: Immediately after the election, he went to the White House as a special assistant. You may remember that Frank Reeves did, too. I don't know which one of them was supposed to handle race relations; perhaps together they were to. Frank's official assignment was that he was to work on District of Columbia affairs, but he didn't want to do that. Frank really didn't want to be in the White House. He wanted to be the first Negro commissioner. But Harris wanted to be in charge of Negro affairs, as I've said. He was like our friend Joe Rauh. He wanted to be the... Joe was the big white father and Harris was the little white father of Negro leadership. Harris' difficulty in that position was that he was in the executive offices not in the White House, and he wasn't able to get an appointment with the appointment's secretary. O'Donnell wouldn't speak to him or give him any kind of an inside track. I'm sure that all of those hard-nosed Kennedy people just gave him the backs of their hands. So he was very frustrated in this position, and he couldn't get anywhere. They wanted him out of there. He was not a Kennedy type. You know, he was kind of bumbly and too talkative, not cool. So they finally exported him over to Ethiopia in the Peace Corps.

GRELE: Who took his place?

LAWSON: Nobody.

GRELE: Louis Martin?

LAWSON: Well, Louis Martin was always advising and consulting with the staff from his position at the Democratic National Committee. I'm sure they relied on him more than anybody, other than Andy Hatcher. In time Lee White became the advisor on Negro affairs. I remarked to somebody — I don't remember who it was, but somebody inside the White House — that I thought the time had come to have a... I had pressed for a Negro advisor on race relations in the White House. I had discussed it with Ted Sorensen. Ted said that they didn't want to have a special interest representative in the White House. I took the position that race relations was one of the real domestic crises in the United States — of course, at that time I didn't know how truly I was speaking — that it was destined to become even more important, and that I thought the President was entitled to have a spokesman that he could turn to, whose loyalty he

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didn't question, whose judgement he did trust, at least to get a considered, reliable point of view. It might not be the one one, but it would at least be informed, and it would be based on an

intimate knowledge of Negro leadership and their personalities and their goals and so on. But they didn't agree to it, and then Lee White, who was on Mike Feldman's stuff, was sort of given minority affairs to deal with. I quipped one time that I thought it was pretty ridiculous for a white man by the name of White to be the White House race relations man.

GRELE: Did they deal with anyone outside?

LAWSON: Yes. Roy Wilkins was called in for consultation and, later, Whitney Young. I'd say that Johnny Johnson, who owns the Johnson Publishing Company and publishes *Ebony* and *Jet*, was called into conference. And Louis Martin and Andy. I suppose occasionally, on some congressional matter, they might have called Congressman Dawson, but they didn't make a habit of calling him. One of the first things President Johnson did was to call Congressman Dawson.

GRELE: What was your general impression of the civil rights activity in the Kennedy administration?

LAWSON: I'd say it was a public relations effort for the most part. This technique of moving Negroes into high places in government was wonderful. It was the first time it was done — Thurgood Marshall, Carl Rowan, [Robert C.] Bob Weaver, George Weaver. I was for that. But this does not disturb nor alter the hard facts of poverty and discrimination of the average Negro in the cities and in the South. Something much more was needed to cope with that.

Early in the administration, the President said, and Bob reiterated, that no additional civil rights legislation was needed. This was something they didn't need to volunteer. I think they would have been better advised to say, "Well, we'd like to see what we can do with what we have; we don't know whether something else will be needed." They painted themselves into a corner and made a lot of enemies by saying that. Later they had to retract and propose additional legislation anyhow. Then the President was in the position of having it look as if he was forced into proposing legislation against his will. Then people thought, "Well, he's not really for the bill either because he had to do it." When they decided that they would go for some additional civil rights legislation, they were known to have said — I guess they said publicly; I was kind of away from these things by this time — that they didn't think there need to be any legislation on equal employment

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opportunity. In other words, nothing more was needed in the employment field. This angered a great many people and showed an unsophisticated approach to the problem.. While they may have thought that it was enough to have the President's committee covering the government contracts and government employment where they were making a good showing, the man on the street never did fully understand until now the real power that the old committee had, and his legislative goals for twenty years had been for fair employment legislation. There was no need for the Kennedy administration to put itself in a position where the Celler committee had to add the section on employment opportunity to the civil rights legislation. This was something

anybody could be for — you know, jobs for people. They refused and had to have it forced on them. That's exactly my point. If they had had somebody in the White House of real professional intelligence in these matters to explain to them why they should say this or that, or do this or that.... But they would turn to a fellow like Andy Hatcher, who's a newspaper man, and ask his advice. He simply wasn't equipped to give that kind of advice, nor, in fact, was Louis Martin, although he was more equipped than Andy. What they needed was a first class lawyer and sociologist on the staff who really considered these things: they're going to do this, what will be the result? The kind of performance they brought into the O'Brien operation they should have had for this. But they knew everything, you know; they knew everything about race relations. They didn't really know that they didn't know anything until quite late in the game.

GRELE: Did they make that claim that they knew?

LAWSON: Oh, they brushed aside all suggestions. They didn't want to hear anything anybody had to say. They would handle it. To an extent, I think this was always true of the President. He thought of it as something that had to be manipulated; the problem was one that had to be faced and manipulated if possible, but not fundamentally. They would deal with this thing. But later — I'd say by 1963 — he was beginning to understand, beginning to realize that it was fundamental, that fundamental things had to be done, that it could not be brushed aside. He was beginning to be ready to face up to the whole thing, but it had been a long learning process.

GRELE: As a long-time resident of the District, did you ever talk to him about District problems?

LAWSON: I talked to him about home rule when we came back from the Convention that August when Congress was still in session and the petition had been signed. We were in the same position we were this year. You remember, the petition had been signed by all but, I think, ten or twelve signatures — more than

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were on the petition this last time until President Johnson got behind it. I said, "We've got to have a gimmick to go into the campaign. What do we have?" They took the position that we were carrying Johnson, that this was a problem, that we had never effectively answered the earlier arguments, and we didn't have a single plus thing to go into a campaign with in the civil rights area. So I said, "What about pushing home rule? I think we can quickly get signatures in the Senate; it seems to me with you behind it, it could go somewhere in the House." Of course, I didn't really understand the complexities. I was just looking for something that we could use. He said, "No, it can't be done." So I wrote a memo about it, and they said, "No." And then I mentioned it again, and they got kind of impatient with me the third time so I dropped it.

GRELE: Did he ever discuss his plans for the beautification of Pennsylvania Avenue or Washington, or did that come later?

LAWSON: That came much later.

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