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Biographical Note

Martin was a journalist; deputy chairman of the Democratic National Committee, 1960–1969; consultant for John F. Kennedy’s [JFK] 1960 presidential campaign; political advisor to Presidents JFK (1960–1963) and Lyndon B. Johnson (1963–1968); and special assistant to President Jimmy Carter, 1978–1981. In this interview Martin discusses joining JFK’s 1960 presidential campaign and his role, including working with other campaign staff members; JFK and civil rights; using the issue of civil rights in the campaign; African-American leadership and the Democratic Party in the 1960 campaign; getting civil rights leaders involved in the 1960 campaign; and the National Conference on Constitutional Rights, among other issues.

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Oral History Interview

Of

Louis E. Martin

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Louis E. Martin – JFK #1
Table of Contents

<u>Page</u>	<u>Topic</u>
1	Joining the John F. Kennedy [JFK] organization, 1960
3	The Democratic Party and African-American press and leadership, 1960
6	JFK's record on civil rights up to the 1960 presidential campaign
8	Martin's role in JFK's campaign
11	A "New Deal in Race Relations"
16	JFK meets with African-American leadership during 1960 campaign
19	Contact with Robert F. Kennedy during 1960 campaign
22	Congressman William L. Dawson
24	Getting civil rights leaders involved in the 1960 campaign
25	JFK speaks at Howard University
27	The National Conference on Constitutional Rights

Oral History Interview

with

LOUIS E. MARTIN

Washington, D.C.
March 14, 1966

By Ronald J. Grele

For the John F. Kennedy Library

GRELE: Mr. Martin, when did you first come into contact with John F. Kennedy or join the Kennedy organization?

MARTIN: The first meeting I can recall took place on August 2, 1960. I got a telephone call from Washington in my Chicago office. Frank Reeves and Harris [L., Jr.] Wofford -- Harris I did not know but Reeves was an old friend -- they asked that I attend a meeting of Negro Democrats at the offices of the Advisory Committee of the Democratic National Committee in Washington. This meeting was scheduled, as I said earlier, on August 2. I came down for the one-day meeting and found gathered a number of ^{old} friends in the Democratic party, those with whom I had worked off and on in various political projects since 1944. There I met for the first time a number of the official Kennedy family, Mr. [R.] Sargent Shriver. Mrs. Marjorie Lawson and Frank Reeves were the two Negroes who seemed to be in the position of campaign leadership. Associated with them was Mr. Harris Wofford who I understand had been with the Kennedy team

long prior to the national Convention. It was a whole day meeting with sessions in the morning and the afternoon with a break for lunch. As a newspaper man, one of the chores that fell to my lot was to issue a press release -- write a press release, rather -- on the proposed structure of the Civil Rights Division for the campaign. There were some differences between Mrs. Marjorie Lawson and Frank Reeves. In a private conference with Mr. Woffard and Mr. Shriver we worked out an agreement on the titles and general structure of the Civil Rights Division.

GRUBB: What were the differences of opinion between Mrs. Lawson and Mr. Reeves?

MARTIN: I think the differences were more of a personality nature than any real substantive disagreement on program or policy. Mr. Reeves had been associated with another candidate in the primary and Mrs. Lawson had been with the Kennedys for about two years as an informal consultant. There was some feeling that. . . . Well, it was a personality difference more anything else. I'd better leave it at that. My role, in a small way, was doing a little mediating around this personality problem. We wrote a statement which all agreed upon and this was to be released at Hyannis Port. That is what happened. The release appears in

The Speeches of Senator John F. Kennedy -- Presidential Campaign, 1960, page 959. So there's a record of that release.

GRELE: At this meeting, what were your impressions of the participants?

MARTIN: I was very much surprised at the manner in which they approached the campaign and had the to voice some very serious disagreements with the approach.

GRELE: Over what?

MARTIN: One, the attitude toward Negro press and Negro media; the proposals they had for involvement of Negro leadership; and the amount of financing that was being discussed. The original issue at which I took exception was the attitude toward the Negro press. I happen to know that some forty-five to fifty thousand dollars of outstanding obligations had not been met from the previous campaign and among the papers not having been paid was my own [laughter]. You can see why. It was very clear that unless these debts were cleared up we would start off with less enthusiasm than we might if the party lived up to its agreements. Mr. Shriver was immediately alerted to this problem and called me in the office to discuss it in more detail. I had no more idea of working in the campaign, nor had I been asked at that point, but I was very much concerned about the manner in which the Democratic party kept its agreements for the advertising that was carried in the papers for which they

received no payment. All of the money was for advertising and secondly, the proposals for financing the campaign were not very clear to me. I was disappointed in the attitude toward the campaign financing and told them very clearly that we would never be able to rally the Negro vote in the manner in which they were proceeding. I outlined what I thought was a more realistic budget with reference to advertising as well as campaign organization. Everyone in the room was trying to be helpful and that was about all I could contribute.

GRELE: What were their estimates of the budget that you disagreed with?

MARTIN: As I recall they were talking about a hundred thousand dollars or two hundred thousand dollars and I had spent more than that in 1944 myself when I was assistant publicity director of the Democratic National Committee under Chairman [Robert] Hannegan for about three months in that 1944 [Franklin D.] Roosevelt - [Harry S.] Truman camp. There were very few people present who had any experience with the expenditures for a campaign apparently. Under any circumstances we had a long determined discussion of these problems and I was assured by Mr. Shriver that the Democratic National Committee would live up to its obligations and pay all these papers for their advertising and at least start off with a clean slate?

GRELE: Did they?

MARTIN: Yes, ultimately they did.

GRELE: What were your disagreements over the role of leadership in the campaign?

MARTIN: Well, I thought it was very important that every effort be made to enlist the active support of the high Negro leadership irrespective of past associations, party affiliations and what-not. We had a very interesting day-long conference and I was pleased to participate. I found Mr. Shriver^a/very warm and personable and practical political personality. I had heard a great deal about him in Chicago where I edited The Chicago Defender but I really never got to know him.

GRELE: Who did not wish to enlist all the Negro leadership?

MARTIN: I'm not sure that I phrased that properly. In a discussion of who does what, who is given what assignment, there were some indications that the abilities, motivations, and attitudes of certain Negro leaders were under scrutiny. This person was not trustworthy or this person was a faker or this person was sonof-a-bitch and so forth. My view was, "Let's forget all of the petty things and let's move on a broad front and get everybody in the act. Let the chips fall where they may as the campaign proceeds."

GRELE: Do you recall offhand who wanted to exclude whom?"

MARTIN: I don't think the issue developed on so much exclusion as very pronounced preferences for certain people, but which had that

developed would automatically have excluded some.

GRELE: Was it at this meeting that the discussion of whether or not to seek the support of Martin Luther King was raised?

MARTIN: I'm not sure. It's been so long ago. I can recall some feeling that it was necessary to emphasize a need for total involvement of the Negro leadership. That's about as much as I can recall of that.

GRELE: What else was discussed at the meeting?

MARTIN: Well, aside from personalities and finance, structure, we were given some general view of the civil rights position of the President himself with which I was not familiar. Having been out of the country for a year, I did not know a great deal about the Senator or about any of the Kennedys except a few things I had read when I was in Nigeria. We were very impressed with Mr. Shriver. He seemed to be very sincere and very able. I was very impressed with him.

GRELE: How was John Kennedy's record on civil rights presented to you?

MARTIN: I think Harris Wofford detailed some of his accomplishments in the civil rights area. I remember feeling that he did not have a great deal to build a campaign on because his record, while acceptable, was not notable in civil rights it seemed to me at that time. I must say I was under something of a handicap because I had been away and I wasn't familiar with what had happened

in the past year. I knew he had appeared before Negro audiences in different places and had made the kinds of speeches that got a good response. His voting record was not any more notable on the civil rights thing than many others in the Senate.

GRELE: Was the question of his vote for the jury trial amendment to the Civil Rights Act of 1957 raised at that time?

MARTIN: Yes, I think that did come up. Several questions were asked about that.

GRELE: How was that presented?

MARTIN: As I recall Woffard and Shriver explained it away and how I don't remember. [Laughter]

GRELE: Did the question of the [John] Patterson breakfast?

MARTIN: Yes, that came up. Then I think I asked a question which arose out at the national Convention four years earlier when he ran for vice president. After that a friend of mine, Earl Brown, was assigned to cover the Convention by Life Magazine, and he in some of the copy which I had an opportunity to read although it never got published -- some references were made to many meetings between the Kennedy forces in that Convention contest and a number of political wheels in the South. Some of these political wheels, of course, were arch-segregationists, arch-enemies of civil rights in our view. These associations were

politically inspired for a very specific politicalⁱⁿ and could be explained on the grounds of sheer expedience.

Following the day-long meeting I returned to Chicago without any part of having any official position in the campaign. I committed myself to doing everything I could in my own private capacity that could help as did everyone present. Upon my return to Chicago I received a telephone call explaining that it was very important that I return and discuss at greater length some of the things that had come up in the meeting.

GRELE: A call from whom?

MARTIN: Sarge Shriver. It was not clear to me exactly what he had in mind and shortly after Mr. Shriver called Wofford called. Frank Reeves also talked to me. It seemed that there was a need for someone to assist in publicity and to work with the Negro media -- press and radio. Within a week I was back in Washington and made an agreement to work as a consultant on matters of public relations and general campaign organization.

GRELE: Why did you choose to be a consultant?

MARTIN: Well, they were not prepared to pay the kind of money that I had been making. Originally I thought I could work three days a week and return to Chicago to my other businesses but I discovered soon that this was not the way you worked with the Kennedys. However I maintained the status of a consultant and

worked seven days a week. I had to ultimately disassociate myself from any immediate responsibilities in my other businesses.

The chief operation immediately presented itself. That was to begin turning out news releases, to start thinking about literature and appeals for radio and other media. Mr. Woffard was given an overall responsibility for coordinating the Civil Rights Division, with Mrs. Marjorie Lawson having the top title. It was decided that Frank Reeves would coordinate field activities and actually accompany the candidate.

GRELE: Were you at all involved in the discussion of whether or not to have a committee for a section with one particular head?

MARTIN: This issue cropped up at the original meeting and it seemed that the consensus was that a Civil Rights Division with a chairman and that type of structure was pretty much agreed upon.

GRELE: Why was Mrs. Lawson chosen to head the division?

MARTIN: She was one of the best known Negroes who, for two years, prior to the Convention, had been publicly assisting the campaign and the candidate. She apparently had done a very effective job of introducing him to Negro groups and arranging meetings with Negro leaders of the civic, fraternal and religious organizations. She had a prior claim in a sense because of her... . Frank Reeves who was the other person, probably the most logical contender for the top spot, had, as I said earlier, worked with

I think it was [Estes] Kefauver -- another candidate.

GRELE: [Hubert H.] Humphrey.

MARTIN: Humphrey, I mean. He was a leader with Kefauver in the Convention before. This, I think, pretty much decided the issue. There was no great debate over this, as I recall.

GRELE: How did you first begin to organize your activities dealing with the press and public relations?

MARTIN: Well, this was not too difficult. One, as a former president of the National Newspaper Publishers Association and having been in the business for twenty years or so, I knew most of the important publishers personally and my first job, of course, was to alert all my colleagues that we were going to get Mr. Kennedy in the White House and I wanted their cooperation.

GRELE: Did any of them have any reservations?

MARTIN: Well, we did not have many commitments but most of them were flexible and open minded. One of their considerations was the agreement that we had to pay those back bills and they were very grateful for that as a bonus rather. Politically they reserved judgment. Many of them were not familiar with Kennedy and I was reminded by several that both Mrs. [Franklin D.] Roosevelt and Congressman [Adam Clayton] Powell had made public statements to the effect that Kennedy would have difficulty getting the Negro vote. I recognized that it was early for con-

commitments and my approach, therefore, was that I was not concerned about commitments, editorial or otherwise. I was concerned primarily that the news and information about the candidate getting a fair play in the news columns of their newspapers. They assured me that we would get a fair treatment. There was no commitment with regard to money or advertising or anything in those early days but we had had a long association with all of them and had been in campaigns earlier and I think they had some little confidence in us. At least we like to think so. [Laughter]

GRELE: What kinds of materials did you use when it came time to turn out publicity releases?

MARTIN: Well, the most important thing, of course, was to get the statements of the candidate on civil rights across to emphasize the determination and dedication of this candidate to a "New Deal in Race Relations" and explain his views on some of the controversies of the moment, specifically the right for Negroes to sit-in and picket and so forth and demonstrate. The candidate at that time had made a number of good statements and the statements were in that respect far more liberal than those [Richard M.] Nixon was making.

GRELE: Just as an aside, whose phrase was the "New Deal in Race Relations?"

MARTIN: I don't really know but that's the way I got into politics — the

New Deal -- and I've always used it. I can't remember. Of course it was brought up under Roosevelt. It could have been made by anybody. I just don't recall.

The one thing that sticks out most in my mind about the period -- that first period -- was that in a discussion with some of those in the Civil Rights Division we had the bright idea that we could draw Nixon out on a one or two issues. I made the suggestion that the candidate send Nixon a telegram in which he called for a statement from Nixon on several issues. I've forgotten the specific issues now but I remember that Sarge Shriver suggested that I accompany him to his hotel very near midnight and that he would place a call to Hyannis Port and explain what we were up to to the candidate. He finally reached Senator Kennedy and began explaining this suggested inquiry to Nixon. In the course of the explanation he felt that he was not getting it across and he introduced me to the Senator by telephone.

GRELE: Is this the first time you had met him?

MARTIN: The first time I ever heard him and of course I had never seen him. He introduced me over the telephone to the Senator and I tried to explain to him what I had in mind. I recall being taken aback by the reply. The Senator said, "That idea might sound all right but you just don't know that s.o.b. Instead of answering directly he will curve and come back with another

question. I don't think we can pin the bastard down that way."

[laughter] That was my first introduction. That was my first brush with that salty language that he used on occasion. I finally had to agree with him. Following the call Sarge turned to me and said, "Now you see why he's going to be president, don't you." [laughter]

GRILLE: What were some of the other ideas that you had for stressing Senator Kennedy's record on civil rights?

MARTIN: Well, my first thought was to arrange for meetings, personal meetings and all kinds of group meetings, with the candidate and the leadership, all kinds of leadership. This was one of our early gestures.

My first introduction to Senator Kennedy came on August 31 when Sarge Shriver had arranged a conference off the civil rights section with the Senator in his office in a conference room off the Senate floor. As we arrived the Senator was on the floor. He was taking part in a debate. When he appeared we filed into the room and I sat at the one end of the long table facing him and tried to study him and see what I could from physical appearances the kind of man he was. We were introduced, of course, individually and he shook hands and gave each of us a general smile but I was impressed that he did not waste much time. He went immediately into the issues. We had the

problem of arranging the first press conference on civil rights. That conference was to take place in the Capitol.

GRELE: What advice did you give him on this first conference.

MARTIN: Well, Harris Wofford and I had been working on a statement. I don't recall now. The immediate issue concerned the position of the candidate regarding Republican strategy to put a civil rights bill in the rump session of Congress. It had been decided earlier that Senator Kennedy, along with Senator Joseph Clark and Congressman [Emanuel] Celler and several others that a committee would be named to draft a meaningful and comprehensive civil rights bill for the next session of Congress. We debated this at length and all of us agreed that rather than to come up with some gimmick for the rump session that we should produce a meaningful bill for the next session of Congress. The Negro leadership was divided somewhat and there were some calls for action immediately. We had, we thought, a problem. In order to clarify there and explain the posture of Senator Kennedy we decided that a press conference would be held. At this press conference he would explain why he was not moving in the rump session and why he felt that it was better to come up with a substantive measure for consideration in the next session of Congress.

GRELE: Did Negro leadership at the time feel that this was an adequate

explanation?

MARTIN: We did our best to explain it through calls, press releases, et cetera. I think the Republican strategy became transparent as a pure political gimmick and there was some feeling that our course was probably the correct one. We were also assisted by the fact that Nixon had not been very active and was not saying very much about civil rights.

GRELE: In the early days of the campaign was there a fear that the large part of the Negro vote would indeed go Republican?

MARTIN: Most of us felt that the majority of the Negroes would vote Democratic because of the liberal tradition of the party but we recognized that our concern was to keep the defection down and to recoup the Democratic majority under [Franklin D.] Roosevelt. So it was a play for percentages in the vote and we were out for all of it. We prepared a statement which was accepted and the statement reads:

"We have not tried to match the eleventh hour Republican tactic of substituting staged political maneuvering for effective legislation. Rather than yield to the efforts to play politics with a great moral question we would take the issue to the American people. The Republican leadership of the Senate knows full well that under the parliamentary situation of the final crowded week and in the political atmosphere of rancor that developed no civil rights measure could have passed."

[laughter] This was one I was rather proud of.

GRELE: How did you get Senator Clark to introduce the motion that finally killed that bill?

MARTIN: Well, I don't recall that ploy. As a matter of fact you must remember that my concern basically was with the writing and the so-called propaganda. I think that we were able to sell our point of view because as you can see what we were up to in that statement. We charged the Republicans with playing politics with a great moral issue.

GRELE: At the time, did you and the candidate think that that was an adequate appraisal of the situation?

MARTIN: This was our sincere view on that because it was just impossible,, and every legislative authority around agreed, that something was going to be accomplished. We merely underlined that view.

GRELE: What other work did you do at the time of the rump session?

MARTIN: Well, the first major group meeting that we participated in in those early days was a meeting of the candidate with representatives of the National Bar Association, which is a group of Negro lawyers. We helped draft the statement for the candidate to be used in that meeting. The lawyers wanted to get a commitment from Senator Kennedy that if elected he would appoint qualified Negro lawyers to the federal benches. Of course, the posture of the candidate was excellent. We helped to pre-

pare this draft which the Senator used. I had copies in my pocket. While the candidate had seen the early draft he had not seen the final. I met with the lawyers prior to the Senator entering the room and many of them, of course, I knew. I began to tell the stories of how impressed I was with the candidate whom I did not know, having been in Africa, but I felt that here was a young, vigorous champion of the cause who really could initiate a new era in race relations in this country. The President walked in. Just before he began he searched for the draft and fortunately I handed it to him out of my pocket. I was a little concerned because I knew he hadn't read it at all but he read it beautifully and with emphasis on this business of committing himself to making certain that qualified Negroes could aspire to the federal judiciary.

GRELE: Did you arrange the meeting with the candidate and the Fair Rent Committee in New York?

MARTIN: No. A great many of us were working on arranging meetings. I don't recall that one.

GRELE: That was the meeting wherein he claimed that "with the stroke of a pen" discrimination in housing could be eliminated.

MARTIN: Well, we were involved, of course, in those statements but he met with a number of groups in which he used this statement. My role in most of these situations was, of course, writing and

helping Woffard and others.

GRELE: Did you write this statement? Did you write this up?

MARTIN: I wrote part of the. . . . I don't think I wrote the statement on the stroke of the pen. That was Harris Woffard, I believe. We were doing so many things in conference and so many people were writing at the same time that I'm just not sure whether Woffard. . . . But I'm sure it was not mine. I think it was Harris. Harris was a very excellent writer, very deeply involved in civil rights, and familiar with many of the younger crowd of civil rights leaders -- particularly the sit-ins, the pickets, the young people. He understood the issue very well.

GRELE: What were some of the other meetings for which you prepared statements for the candidate?

MARTIN: Well, we had our hand in practically all of them in the civil rights field, but the authorship was always diffuse because so many hands were in it. Mr. Shriver contributed things; everybody contributed something. Incidentally the response of the lawyers was very good, as were most of those meetings. He had an electric quality, personality which gave added emphasis to almost any statement. There was some enthusiasm and warmth there. He made the most prosaic pronouncements sound like poetry.

[Laughter]

CRUELE: Moving on now to the organization of the civil rights section, how closely was this section coordinated into the campaign organization?

MARTIN: Originally, we were housed at the offices of the Advisory Committee of the Democratic National Committee. After a few weeks we were moved to the investment building at 15th and K. There Mr. Shriver housed all of the minority group operations, special interest group operations -- the farmers, the civil rights, the Businessmen for Kennedy, et cetera. We were a very separate division in many respects however Frank Reeves accompanied the President on a great many of his swings around the country. We were alerted to the movement of the candidate. Many of us, of course, telephoned teams of leaders in every area to see the President. Frank carried it through in seeing if they had the chance to shake hands and talk with them and

CRUELE: Did you come into contact with Robert Kennedy at this stage of the campaign?

MARTIN: I met Robert Kennedy at a general meeting of the Civil Rights Division with him at the headquarters at 1601 about five or six weeks after coming to Washington. I recall at this meeting that he questioned each person present on exactly what they were doing in the campaign and, of course, I had heard a number

of stories about his matter-of-fact approach to affairs and stories about his being a pretty tough cat. I was a little taken aback at the meeting, however, to find that neither Harris Woffard nor Shriver nor any of the others made it very clear, more specifically, what we were doing. When my turn came I tried to spell out in detail what I was doing and there was some concern that I was perhaps a little too bold in some statements that I was making. I recall later that both Sarge Shriver and Harris Woffard interrupted me to tell Bobby that, "You know, this man is from Chicago." I didn't know what that meant but I took some exception to the manner in which Mr. Kennedy was conducting this meeting.

GRELE: Any particulars?

MARTIN: Well, specifically, he began to ask several others then to answer his questions. He began to say that nobody was doing anything. I told him that I thought -- I was speaking for myself -- we were doing certain things but I didn't think that he was doing nothing. This caused a little excitement. I said, I told him that he had not officially met with Congressman William L. Dawson, the leader of the Negroes in the House, who was the traditional vice chairman of the committee, and he should by all means touch that base. I thought this was very unfortunate that he had not touched bases in his

position as overall chairman that he should. It was done in a friendly manner but it was misinterpreted. John Seigenthaler, who was in the room, decided that I should remain after everyone left. I found that, having been out of the country and all, I was not aware of the legend that surrounded Bobby Kennedy and didn't understand that he was supposed to be a very strong little young man. I think that because there was some concern about the manner in which I had addressed him that Seigenthaler told me to stay. So we finally had a private meeting with him. At that time I unburdened myself even more.

GRLEE: What did you tell him then?

MARTIN: Well, I explained the needs of our group -- that we didn't have enough money and that I was wondering whether they really wanted the Negro vote. I said, "If you want it, you can get it but you're going to have to work for it and you're going to have to fight for it and you're going to have to spend money" and so forth and so on. I was not trying to impress him in anything other than the facts that anyone would have from having had the experiences in the past from trying to do something in a national way. I was pleasantly surprised he took it all in very good spirits and we developed a relationship that was beautiful from that moment on. [laughter] Subsequently

when he wanted things he would call me directly and we began to work very closely.

GRESE: If we can stray for a moment, how was Congressman Dawson integrated into the campaign, or was he?

MARTIN: He was not. Following the meeting he told me to get the Congressman and bring him to him. I did. I got a hold of Congressman Dawson, took him in a cab and brought him up there and put him in the room with the Senator and closed the door and walked out. I wanted the Congressman to explain the past relationship and the party structure and that Chicago was terribly important and he was the leader of the Negro Democrats of Chicago but also he had been on the national scene as the leader of Negro Democrats since 1944.

GRESE: The Senator or Robert Kennedy?

MARTIN: Robert Kennedy. No, I'm sorry. I meant Robert Kennedy. They talked for probably a half hour or more. Anyway, when the meeting was over I took the Congressman back to his office. I asked him, "How did it come out?" He said, "Well, now, he's a young man," and so forth, and "We had a nice uneventful little chat." I never got any more out of him on that. But I was very concerned that the position of the Congressman would be upheld as an important Democratic leader with a national reputation who had been vigorous in many years past, since '44.

So we prevailed upon Sarge Shriver to do what many of the others also suggested -- that is, open a special office and give him some respect as the vice chairman of the Democratic National Committee.

GRELE: I have been told by members of that section who were probably more in touch with younger Negro leaders that Congressman Dawson did not have the support or contacts with young Negro leadership that was needed for this role. Do you agree or disagree?

MARTIN: I think there is great truth in that. *to some degree.* I agree but you must remember that in a tight contest you must have the organizational support absolutely intact and work like the devil to capture the imagination of the uncommitted. You don't leave any stone unturned. I was concerned that, while I did not expect Congressman Dawson to be able to galvanize the younger, more militant Negro element, he would at least keep under complete control the organizational groups and to inspire them to do more and participate fully in the campaign. When I consider the count of the Chicago vote after the election I think we were on the right track. [Laughter] We needed everybody. As I told you earlier, my theory had always been that you get total involvement. I don't like to play -- and this was a part of our thinking in those days. . . . We didn't want to play one

group against another or give any preference to this or that. We needed everybody. So I mean I argued just as vigorously to enlist the old guard as we did in welcoming the new. I think that in a tight contest you must do that.

GRELE: At the same time, I believe, there was a dispute about whether or not the members of the civil rights section should go out into the field. How was that dispute resolved?

MARTIN: We developed a small field team headed by Reeves. We brought people to man the Speakers' Bureau. When we got around some of the field operation was to enlist the help of Democrats in various states who were eloquent and able on a platform to fill certain speaking engagements in areas where the crowd wasn't large enough to warrant the candidate himself. Mrs. Marjorie Lawson worked very vigorously with the religious leaders and all of us pooled our resources in terms of friendships and so forth to get the important Negroes committed and to get them active.

GRELE: Was there ever any discussion of getting a direct endorsement from Martin Luther King?

MARTIN: Well, from the very beginning in this program of total involvement, it was our personal view that we had to get as close to a commitment as possible. As a matter of fact, the issue of Martin Luther King arose in the first meeting with Bobby Kennedy.

It was at that time that I expressed very grave concern that we get these leaders committed if we could possibly do it. There was some disagreement on the approaches. I made it clear that from a public relations standpoint we could never give up on this idea because while no one leader at that time could possibly be credited with swinging the entire Negro group every big leader we could get committed we were that much further ahead. Frankly, this view was shared by ~~Jeffard~~ and most of them and it was terribly important to my function as PR -- public relations -- operation. Plans were discussed to create conditions and situations that would lead leaders to join with us and probably the most significant was the National Conference on Constitutional Rights -- I think it was called -- in New York City.

GRELE: Can we get into that conference? Now I'm going to turn the tape.

[End Tape I, Side I] Prior to the conference the candidate appeared at Howard University?

MARTIN: Yes, we were anxious to have the Senator speak before a Negro audience in which he would make a very clear deliniation of his stand and explain his views, et cetera. We arranged through a third party -- Frank Reeves and several others from Howard, graduated from Howard -- to work out a meeting. We got the American Council on Human Rights to invite both candidates --

Nixon and Kennedy — to address the student body. It was scheduled on October 7, just a few days before the National Conference on Constitutional Rights in New York. Fortunately Nixon turned the invitation down.

GREER: Why?

MARTIN: It's not clear what happened but he did not show and we had the Howard University student body to ourselves. The appearance of the candidate accompanied by his wife was quite a significant event because this was a move that had a great appeal to the so-called Negro middle class. Howard University is a very unique institution in Negro life. Here we had the candidate along with his wife and the whole university with Nixon not showing. In fact, the Senator in his opening statement took note of the fact that his Republican opponent had ignored the meeting. He said, (quote) "I regret that the Republican member has not shown up as yet to debate with us." (unquote) Congressman [Edward P.] Boland had preceded him and began talking and the Senator said, "I would like to present their case for them," speaking of the Republicans, which got a great laugh." Then he finally said, "But I'd rather speak for our own case." He was in excellent spirits and his wife was a show-piece on the platform. Among many things he said, as follows; (quote)

"I think we cannot afford in 1960 to waste any talent which we have. It is a matter of our national survival, as well as a matter of national principle, and I believe that the President of the United States must take the leadership in setting the moral tone, the unfinished business, in setting the sights of Americans to the goal of realizing the talents in an equal way of every American. Every American's talents are not equal; every American will not finish through a college or own a house. But that should be on the basis of his contribution to society, his energy, and his vitality, his intelligence, his motivations, not based on the color of his skin. That is the goal in society which I think we should work toward in the 1960's."

This statement along with many others brought great applause and the Senator and his wife were mobbed following the meeting. From a public relations point of view we explored quite a significant thing because every college trained Negro in America got the message. It was at a place that tradition had made important to them and Nixon had failed to show. So this was followed a few days later by the Constitutional Conference in New York. But for the Negro press it was a great story and we happened to make the most of it. I think I'm going to end this. This thing's going to take forever if I keep on like this.

GRELE: Maybe you could do the meeting on constitutional rights.

MARTIN: The constitutional conference was an excellent project from our point of view.

GRELE: Was Nixon invited to this conference?

MARTIN: No. What we did -- in the planning of the conference in New York

we developed panels and all of us made suggestions for panel members. We called on almost every significant person in the civil rights movement to participate. In addition we got many of the academic type, the middle class types in business and other areas, that normally would not participate in a partisan political operation. We made it very clear that this was not a partisan approach, that we were holding a constitutional meeting, a meeting that transcended party politics.

GRELE: Were there any Republicans there?

MARTIN: There were Republicans. As a matter of fact, we suggested some for panels. This exposure that the Senator finally got at this two or three day meeting to leaders who had never been active in a Democratic campaign in my view was one of the most hopeful and helpful things in the whole campaign. It was of course the source of a number of newspaper stories and comment from that day until election day. Harris Wofford did a magnificent job along with many others in giving the conference a substantive base and projecting proposals that made sense to both the militant as well as the more conservative Negro leadership. A number of Negro celebrities. . . . I remember I accompanied Frank Montero to appeal to Harry Belafonte to show. We went up to Belafonte's office in Tin Pan Alley and spent a half hour or so convincing him that he had to be there. Belafonte

was very vigorous in his demand that this business of civil rights has got to be taken seriously and he wanted some action. We promised him that the way to get it was to come on and get into this conference and strengthen the hand of the forces that were working for a real new/under the leadership of this vigorous new champion. We were fortunate that he and a number of other celebrities appeared. We developed something of a swing of the leadership to our cause. The NAACP [National Association for the Advancement of Colored People] which had for all of its history maintained a non-partisan posture -- some of the NAACP leaders were reluctant but we finally prevailed on some of them to show. We did everything we could to assure everyone present that whether he was a Republican or not this was a conference dealing with the basic issue and that their voices should be heard.

GREER: What did John Kennedy do at the conference?

MARTIN: He made a major speech at the close of the conference. I'll have to consult my notes but as I recall Mrs. [Franklin D.] Roosevelt, Senator [Herbert H.] Lehman, Mayor [Robert G.] Wagner, Governor [Averill] Harrison, Senator [Wayne] Morse, Congressman Celler, a Senator [Phillip A.] Hart and a great many people were on the platform. His quote runs like this:

"I am grateful to all of you. I am grateful to Senator Humphrey. He permitted me to grab his coattails once more in Minnesota by coming East. I must say, to take time out in an intense campaign which involves his future greatly which is hard fought in Minnesota, to give up two days at this crucial point in the campaign, I think, first, indicates how strongly he believes in this cause and also how great a man he is. You can tell who isn't running for office by that relaxed posture that they assume up here."

The Senator, of course, payed tribute to delegates who came from forty-two states to take part in the conference and he expressed the hope that similar conferences would be called after the election.

GRELE: What were the impressions of the conferees when they left the meeting?

MARTIN: I think they were immediately convinced that we had a great champion and he made it clear that he was going to move in executive action and legislative action and that he acknowledged the moral aspect of the issue and I think just electrified the group with his views and his determination.