

Louis E. Martin Oral History Interview – JFK#3, 05/11/1966
Administrative Information

Creator: Louis E. Martin

Interviewer: Ronald J. Grele

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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 helping fill government positions after JFK is elected President, 1960; the appointment of African American judges, including Thurgood Marshall to the Supreme Court; providing African American candidates for different agency positions; civil rights crises during JFK’s Administration; Lee White as the White House advisor on civil rights; the civil rights bill introduced in 1963; religious groups in the civil rights movement; the issue of “white backlash”; and working for President JFK versus working for President Johnson, among other issues.

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Oral History Interview

Of

Louis E. Martin

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Third Oral History Interview

with

LOUIS MARTIN

May 11, 1966
Washington, D.C.

By Ronald J. Grele

For the John F. Kennedy Library

GRELE: How would you describe your role during the campaign?

MARTIN: Well, essentially it was the press and PR [public relations], and I was classified as a consultant. And I was relieved. You see, everyone else had been in this situation, and I came in there very late. Well, it was right after the Convention, but it was late for those people because they had had their eyes on him and all. It was in September, but I just don't recall

anything about that.

GRELE: I don't have any other questions on the election itself. Can you think of anything offhand that we haven't covered?

MARTIN: We went through the meetings in New York and the National Constitution; you know the things in the campaign, those leaflets and all that stuff we put out. Did I tell you about the final day where we got the head of the B'nai Brith to put on a television broadcast?

GRELE: No.

MARTIN: The last day to clean up the old man, clean up the Ambassador.

GRELE: No, no, you didn't.

MARTIN: Well, this had nothing to do with Negroes but I went to Chicago for the election. No, wait a minute, I want to use a name there. What's the head of the -- the guy that a big

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housing guy out in Chicago, the head of the Community Developers, who was formerly head of B'nai Brith? Do you know who that guy is?

GRELE: No, I don't.

MARTIN: I got him out of bed. This had nothing to do with this race business but I wrote the script for this guy. We had a big fight on how he should say it and Bob asked me to take a hand to this guy and try to work it out and he delivered it.

GRELE: What was the problem?

MARTIN: They were attacking the Ambassador for being anti-Semitic and I think it was Drew Pearson who had something in his column saying that the Ambassador tried to save Jews in Germany. It was a favorable comment. It was on that peg that we hung this little script, that the Ambassador was not anti-Semitic. In other words, it

was a countering the last minute efforts of someone to talk about the Ambassador. It reflected, of course, on John, Jack Kennedy too. Is that important?

GRELE: Yes. [tape recorder turned off -- resumes]
What happened?

MARTIN: Well, we were all going back home for the election day operations, and the day before I went into Chicago. The immediate chore was to make certain that those thousands and thousands of leaflets that we flooded Chicago with on the King thing were in all of the clubhouses and so forth. While I was at work doing that at night I got a call from Sarge Shriver, the night before elections -- rather the afternoon before elections; I was on one of these missions in a precinct in Chicago -- to meet him at the Merchandize Mart at a certain hour.

I've forgotten now when. Then we went to the Merchandize Mart at just about dark and a situation had arisen in which some of the principals thought it might be desirable to have a final broadcast to think at 11 o'clock that night commenting on the favorable statements. . . [buzzer interrupts -- resumes] Serge suggested that Philip [M.] Klutznick make a last minute T.V. appearance to discuss the favorable comments in this column about the Ambassador's role in helping the Jews escape from Nazi tyranny. Several writers and public relations guys were at work on the script and Klutznick was asked to come down late and hear it. He had retired but the chauffeur got him down there and we spent about an hour and a half fighting over the script and we finally worked some-

thing out that Klutznick bought and which served to counter some of the gossip and criticism of the Ambassador and his role vis a vis the Nazis. One of the things I remember, there was no time available that we could buy to put him on. We negotiated about twenty minutes with a commercial group called Polk Brothers who have chain stores who had that time and made a deal to exchange time with them. Through that swap we were able to put Klutznick on the air. That was the last. . . . This concluded the campaign for us. This however had no relevance to the civil rights operations that we had been conducting prior to that.

- GRELE: When you say you argued over the script what were Klutznick's main reservations?
- MARTIN: Well, one is a question of the role of

how he himself should be presented on the air. It was our view that he should be introduced and some little comment on who he was before he went into the script himself to describe the actions of the Ambassador. Originally the PR people had envisaged that Klutznick would just go on the air without any special introduction and discuss the matters at hand. So the content of the message itself was changed a little but there was nothing substantive. Most of it was just a matter of style.

GRELE: The information that you gave to Mr. Klutznick, was this part of the report that was drawn up by Mr. [James M.] Landis?

MARTIN: No, the material around which the script was built frankly was this columnist's comment. As far as I know nobody else was in the act but Sarge Shriver and some of the local PR people in Chicago and ourselves. It was just

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really a last minute notion and everybody anxious to do every little thing possible to bring about^a/victory. All through the latter part of the campaign there was some recurrence of the concern on the attitudes of Jewish groups toward Kennedy because of the stories about the Ambassador so this was just a last minute thing. This was the last act of the campaign as far as I know.

GRELE: Do you recall any other incidents similar to this when you were called on to do work outside of the fields of civil rights, race relations?

MARTIN: Well, during the campaign?

GRELE: Yes.

MARTIN: Not much that I can think of. Some of the advertising that was done, advertising layouts, we took them up there a couple of times. There was a general distribution. But most of the material had some very direct relevance to civil rights. We did one thing with Africa.

I don't know whether I mentioned that or not. This committee got Senator Kennedy to designate Theodore Berry, a lawyer from Cincinnati, to represent him personally at the independence ceremonies in Nigeria which took place during the campaign period. We made a little capital there indicating Kennedy's concern with African affairs. I think I mentioned that earlier.

GRELE: No, you mentioned Theodore Berry but not in this context as representative.

MARTIN: Yes.

GRELE: If we can move on ^{to} the post election period then. After the election were you asked to assume any positions within the new Administration?

MARTIN: Well, we received a telephone call the second day after the election from Mr. Shriver to come back to Washington to discuss the situation. At that time he said "assist in planning the New Administration

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with special concern on personnel." Much to my surprise apparently nobody had really been working on talent from the Cabinet level down in case of a victory which was a rather shocking thing at that time. So it was just a general sort of invitation: "Come on down and let's get going." Somebody commented -- I've forgotten now along the way who said it but said, "Well, you've been telling all those lies in the campaign. You'd better go on down there and help them make them come true." [laughter] So the first responsibility we had was to involve ourselves, along with three others, in what they called a "talent hunt." I compiled a list of seven hundred and fifty Negroes -- a sort of Who's Who of Negro experts of one kind or another. Then I joined with Shriver, Adam Yarmolinsky, [Thomas L.] Tom Farmer in a little committee in which we began to visit, meet with, rather, prospective office

appointees. One of the specific chores I remember most was that Mr. Shriver asked me to dig out all the material on a fellow in Detroit named [Robert S.] McNamara who was president of Ford Motor Company. I had to go through Standard and Poore, Who's Who in America, and got all the material I could on McNamara. I built up a pretty good dossier on him, all the stuff that was published, and I made some calls. I have a business in Detroit, and I have a little familiarity with the place so I knew some people out there. I made some calls to find out anything on McNamara that was not available in the printed word. Anyhow, he took this material with him on a flying visit out to Detroit to meet with McNamara. He came back very enthusiastic about him. Then they arranged for him to meet with President Kennedy

who did not know him. Kennedy at that time, I think, was in Florida or something. So this was one of the things that I remember. Further, when McNamara finally came down here, he was in his suite, the Ford Company suite at the Shoreham Hotel. Adam Yarmolinsky, Tom Farmer, Shriver and myself met with him to discuss the whole business of the Defense Department and secondly to come up with other names of people who might assist him in various categories in the hierarchy over there.

GRELE: How would you assess his comprehension at that time of the kinds of problems he would face?

MARTIN: I was rather amazed because McNamara came prepared with a whole stack of three-by-five cards with the names of everybody on it, a lot more names than we had had. It was the most business-like meeting that I have ever

seen.

GRELE: At that meeting with Secretary McNamara was that the first time that Mr. Yarmolinsky had met Mr. McNamara?

MARTIN: Yes. It was the first meeting that Yarmolinsky had and Tom Farmer and the first meeting I had, of course. We met for about an hour or so. There was some unfinished business, and McNamara suggested that we meet later on that evening and Yarmolinsky volunteered to represent the committee and meet with him that evening. We were involved in something else and the rest of us couldn't attend. I remember that either the next day or the day after Yarmolinsky was very enthusiastic about him. He made a great impression on all of us as a matter of fact. McNamara was very direct, right to the point, and he had an enormous fund of information on these cards about individuals that he got together on his own

personal talent. He probably had help by some of his friends in Detroit, I don't know.

GRELE: Who had initially suggested Mr. McNamara?

MARTIN: I don't know where the original suggestion came from. All I can remember is Mr. Shriver asked me to start checking him out in the financial publications and Who's Who and stuff like that. He had not met him either at that time.

GRELE: Do you recall any other people who became prominent in the Administration whom you conferred with or about during this phase?

MARTIN: I made several calls for Sarge bearing messages more or less to somebody in Long Island about the Secretary of State. There were about four or five names and I'm trying to think now who this person was that these calls were made to. But this individual was very hot on [Dean] Rusk but essentially there

was no real discussion nor did I have anything to do with the research on Rusk. Our committee, that same talent hunt committee, however, met with Rusk before he was named in a room in the State Department. It was pretty clear that he was going to be named. We had a meeting with him as we did with McNamara. I recall at the meeting with Rusk I tried to sell him on bringing Ralph Bunche into the State Department. He wasn't too excited about it because at that time he said that through the Rockefeller Fund or the Rockefeller Foundation which he had just left or to which he was still attached -- I've forgotten now which -- they had worked out some plan for Bunche whenever he retired some thirty-five thousand dollar job for a foreign relations expert emeritus operation. We weren't able to sell him any minority candidates at that

point.

GRELE: Did the question come up of Negro ambassadors?

MARTIN: I brought the question up. I had this list as I told you that we built up earlier of seven hundred and fifty or so

. We didn't get into any specifics.

He however indicated that he was amenable to those kinds of suggestions. We just never got down to anything specific. The only one that I can recall that we did discuss was Ralph Bunche.

GRELE: Who else did you confer with?

MARTIN: Well, the Postmaster General, [J. Edward] Day before he was named. He flew in and we met with him in our offices of the committee. He readily agreed to put a Negro in a very top job. He said that he had a friend out in Los Angeles in the postal department in a fairly superior position whom he liked very much. He was very, very quick to move in this area.

As a matter of fact he made the first Deputy Postmaster General -- the first Negro you had in the Post Office Department -- shortly after he got in, Mr. Chris Scott.

GRELE: Pardon?

MARTIN: Chris Scott, Christopher Scott. He was Deputy Postmaster General.

GRELE: Was there any serious discussion of Congressman [William L.] Dawson as Postmaster General?

MARTIN: Not in our operation. Most of the talk came from the Congress as I recall it.

GRELE: Were there any definite promises made?

MARTIN: None that I could find out from the Kennedy group. You see, in the last phases of the campaign -- no, I mean, right after the campaign, I'm sorry, Bobby maintained an office with the committee before he went over to the Attorney General's. There was a little office inside that same suite which Steve Smith occupied. I was brought out of the

civil rights thing and closed that up, and I moved into Steve Smith's office. So Steve Smith, [John] Seigenthaler, and Bobby, all of us were in the same suite. There was a lot of interchange and os forth and so on. Also we talked to [Arthur J.] Goldberg. I forgot that. I knew a little about Goldberg. I knew more about Goldberg than the others, and I was very keep on him. And the boys were laughing a lot about Bobby himself, and they would put me up to ask Bobby what he was going to do. I was stupid enough to ask him. We had a lot of fun with that. Then Seigenthaler one morning came and whispered to me, he said, "I think we've got him." And I said, "What happened?" He said, "Well, Jack Kennedy had him over for breakfast." I said, "Who was at the breakfast?" He said, "Well, there was the President and Bobby, and I was there." I said, "Well, what went on?" He said, "Well, Bobby didn't want to take the

job and the President was very emphatic.

He said, 'I'm running this show

and you are going to be Attorney General." And he made some very profane cracks which Seigenthaler said he laughed at and the President turned to him and said, "Now don't you go around there and write that down." [laughter] Anyway the deal was closed. It happened that morning and he told me just after that breakfast when he came down to the office. He said, "Well, the matter is settled." The President put his foot down.

GRELE: Were there any problems connected with the appointment of any of these men -- McNamara, Rusk, Goldberg?

MARTIN: Well, the only problem I remember centered around Stevenson. I got this little information, all of it second hand and indirect. But apparently friends of Stevenson had been

pressuring the President to appoint him Secretary of State. I heard various members of the inner circle grumbling about the pressure. I gather that the President was very, very annoyed at the pressure at that point.

GRELE: Did you discuss the appointment of judges at this time?

MARTIN: No. We did have one general discussion several times. [tape recorder off -- resumes] I said we had one general discussion. We had many discussions about Negroes going into the Administration. I consistently took the position that I never wanted to go through another campaign in which the question of a Negro in the Cabinet, a Negro in the Court would be brought into the campaign. I wanted some kind of commitment that we would proceed in that direction -- put a Negro in the Cabinet and a Negro in the Supreme Court. Everybody agreed that this was desirable. While I couldn't say I got a firm commitment to

that effect, I got as close to a commitment as you can get. In that same connection we were after a very high level job right away. Finally we decided -- I've forgotten now who took the leadership in this -- that the housing agency which was an independent agency, we might look to see what we've got in that field. One of the reasons we looked there is because [Robert C.] Bob Weaver was very well known to many of the Harvard boys and he had a tremendous reputation in housing and he had a very responsible housing job in New York. The thought was that we might be able to do something with him as head of an independent agency in housing. It would be in history the first time a Negro has everhead of an independent agency. I called Bob on the telephone and began to ask him about that possibility. He, however, didn't understand that I meant the job as head of the agency. He thought I was talking about deputy. I finally

got it across to him that he would run the entire agency. Of course, he was somewhat flattered by that. I asked him for his biographical sketch, et cetera. That was the beginning of the appointment which came later.

GRELE: While we're on the topic what did go wrong with the creation of the housing department as a Cabinet position?

MARTIN: Well, that developed much later than this fight. As you recall, I think the President was asked at a press conference if the department were created would he name Bob Weaver to head it since he was head of the independent agency. As you recall, the President indicated he would. And of course then the issue took on civil rights overtones and aroused the opposition of the South and anti-civil rights forces as far as the whole business of creating a new department was clouded around the issue of a Negro in the Cabinet. The President didn't have the votes.

and so we lost it.

GRELE: Could he have done it any other way instead of announcing it?

MARTIN: Well, you first had to create the department and had to change anything -- in order to get him into the Cabinet or put a Negro in another Cabinet position but that seemed to be the most logical one to most people at that time because there was concern that whatever Negro went in the Cabinet had to be qualified and had to see that his life was beyond reproach. Weaver was a fine candidate at that point. There was some little discussion of the press on the Post Office and of course that centered around Dawson. But the Post Office Department secretaryship or Postmaster Generalship was not regarded as a top or as one of the very choice Cabinet posts. Some felt that maybe if you're going to put a Negro in the Cabinet, put him on it, probably a little less political in its implications, less

transparent as a vote operation, so we then turned on this possibility of housing.

GRELE: Backtracking now to judges, you mentioned your desire to see somebody appoint a Negro, or see the President appoint a Negro to the Supreme Court. Was this part of the impetus behind the appointment of Thurgood Marshall?

MARTIN: Well, [Harry S.] Truman had appointed [William Henry] Hastie to the third circuit in Philadelphia and Hastie was a very live candidate in our minds, at least that's what we tried to persuade the powers that be that he was an excellent choice. Thurgood Marshall was not at that moment in the early days the number one guy in the thoughts of most people. One of the reasons was Thurgood was a leader of the civil rights movement at that point, and there was some doubt because of the climate of opinion then that he could get enough support for that position. It all has to be confirmed by the Senate and so forth.

Eventually we got around to working on Thurgood and that was an accident in a way because I met Thurgood in the airport in New York. I was taking a shuttle going back to Washington and he was getting off the shuttle from Washington to New York. We met in the lunch snack bar and we had a hot dog. I asked him what about the judgeships, the vacancies in New York. He said the only thing that he would be interested in was the circuit court. I had talked on the telephone several times before and he wasn't interested in district court judgeships at all. This time he said that there was a vacancy in the circuit court or something like that, court of appeals, I think. So I said, "Well, what do you think about it?" He said, "Well, I think it's a hell of a job." I asked him, "Would you take it?" He said, "Sure I'd take it any way I can get it." So I flew back to Washington and the next day got a hold of the Attorney General. I did

all I could to persuade him that this would be a tremendous stroke to get "Mr. Civil Rights" into the judiciary. He was not terribly impressed but he said he'd think it over.

GRELE: Why wasn't he impressed?

MARTIN: He envisaged immediately the outcry of the reactionaries. Here was the leadership of the NAACP, a top civil rights lawyer who'd done everything he could to beat down the South in the civil rights matters. Getting by the Senate seemed to be his greatest concern. Anyway we kept the pressure up for about ten days and two weeks later I got a phone call from him. He says, very abruptly he said, "Well, I think I might go for the court." I was at a loss. I couldn't remember. I couldn't think of what he was talking about. He said, "Your remember, Thurgood." I said, "Oh my gosh, you don't mean you're going to." He said, "Yes, I think I might." I said, "Can I tell him?" He

said, "Yes." So I called long distance trying to get Thurgood, and Thurgood was off on a vacation somewhere and couldn't be reached, and nobody would tell me where he was. So I told them, "You'd better find him." So they finally got him at some resort place up in New England somewhere. I've forgotten now. So I told him he was on, and he was very elated. I told him, "But the last thing you'd better do is tell anybody else about it." [laughter] So we went to work for him. Of course, everybody started working on the Senate, particularly the Judiciary Committee, to get him confirmed.

GRELE: Did he have any reservations about taking the appointment and realizing he would have to go through with it when it went up to the Senate?

MARTIN: No. He was not interested in the district court. You
q have the trial court, and I guess he felt that. . . .

One of the reasons I think he wasn't interested was that Hastie was also a great NAACP civil rights lawyer for many years but he was not as nationally acclaimed or as popular with the masses as Thurgood. But here was Hastie in the circuit court, a step above the district court, and I think there was a little feeling that Thurgood wouldn't take anything less. Frankly I think that's what it was basically.

GRELE: What were the objections to Judge Hastie as a member of the Supreme Court?

MARTIN: There was not enough steam and the so called civil rights revolution really hadn't gotten off the ground at that point. I think there was general respect by all the lawyers of his calibre and his knowledge and his abilities and all that. Finally it was just not as right as to say that today with the educational job that Kennedy did on the American mind and that Johnson's done on the American mind on this whole issue was yet

to bear fruit.

GRELE: Were you at all involved in the appointment of Marle McCurdy or Cecil Poole?

MARTIN: We had all of those names on our master list and those lists we had made available to the President and groups that were considering their personnel. As a matter of fact for almost six months we met almost daily on candidates for various jobs. We went through agency by agency. In each one of these meetings -- usually the meetings were in the morning at about around 10 o'clock and lasted a couple of hours -- and agency by agency I had a candidate for almost every job in the federal government. So I was agitating. . . . I turned out to be an inside agitator. I don't give a darn what the job was, I came up with a Negro. It got to be a joke in a way. I never will forget that we would call either the secretary or his second man in to these meetings to discuss

his agency. I never will forget that they had the Federal Trade Commission and someone, he's still there. . . .

GRELE: Dixon? Rand.

MARTIN: [Paul] Rand Dixon. He saw me in the meeting and before I had a chance to say anything he said, "And I am also missing one of your boys." [laughter] But we pushed our Negro candidates very vigorously and we were fairly successful. The biggest breakthrough of course was the head of the independent agency. That was the single biggest job at that time. As a matter of fact we're still doing the same thing [laughter] along with a lot of other things. Big choice. [laughter]

GRELE: Do you recall any particular agencies where there was resentment at having Negroes appointed?

MARTIN: I don't recall any specific dissent from the idea of getting qualified Negroes in a job. The only problem I had with them. . . . As I recall

most of the top guys had to be convinced that Negroes could be qualified. Everybody could take a Ralph Bunche type thing. Somebody who wasn't national known, why, had a real problem. I had the names and a description of these guys. I had the big job of getting detailed resumes on all of them. This was a mammoth undertaking, but I had a lot of help. Judge [Irvin C.] Mollison, who was the Negro appointed to the Customs Court by Truman, did a great job in helping me with these names and with the biographical sketches of these people. And I called on all of my friends in the publishing business. That's where I used to be, in the publishing business. One way or another we got these resumes together. As a matter of fact, we're still using that same list. [Laughter] One of the people that was named Sunday at the ranch to be ambassador to Upper Volta was on the list in 1960. [laughter]

GRELE: Was Carl [T.] Rowan's name on that list?

MARTIN: Yes. I called Carl Rowan after some discussion about trying to get a Negro in the State Department. That was a big job. Finally it was the White House press secretary. . . .

GRELE: Pierre Salinger?

MARTIN: Pierre Salinger, who told me that it might be possible to put somebody in the press section over there at the State Department, technically the Assistant Secretary of State, and that he'd heard about this guy Rowan and asked me did I know him. I said, "Yes, he's on my list." He said, "Well, why don't you work on that." So I called Rowan up in Minneapolis. He's got a newspaper out there and publication. He was attending the Rose Bowl game and they found him in some hotel or motel. I asked him. I knew him of course and I asked him would he consider a job in the State Department as

Assistant Secretary of State for Information
and stuff like that. He said, "Yes, ^Iprobably
would." I said, "I'd like to get your biographical
sketch." He said he'd get on it and his secretary
would get it to me. That's how we started that
ball rolling. We did agitate; we met every day about
this thing; Everybody was rather pleased with
his background. He had won honors, which helps.
The only difficulty is we found out that
they weren't really talking about Assistant
Secretary of State; they were talking about
Deputy Assistant Secretary. So I had to break
that news to Carl. Carl wasn't particularly
excited, so I did all I could to twist his arm
and said, "This is a breakthrough. We've never
had a Negro in the State Department at that
level in Washington." We had one or two
ambassadors, an ambassador to Liberia, and that
was just about it. So he finally agreed to play

ball so he was named Deputy Assistant Secretary.

GRELE: Was there ever any discussion about what position Mrs. Lawson would take? Or was she offered any?

MARTIN: We had a little problem there because it was my impression that Bobby and some of the others -- I did more business with Bobby than anybody else in that period on actual appointments. While we talked to a lot of people I finally had to go to Bobby Kennedy to get some action. They weren't terribly interested in women it seemed to me. We negotiated on Majorie Lawson for at least six months and I remember Bobby told me once, he said, "Either she takes this juvenile court job or. . . . You handle it and don't bring it up to me. Get her okay on it." She didn't want the job. She really, I think, was more interested in a district judgeship/^{rather} than a D.C. judgeship. I was flatly told that the district judgeship was out. The D.C. judgeship

was what. . . .

GRELE: Because she was a woman?

MARTIN: I don't think that was the total reason but I think part of it was sort of, as they told me, typical Irish attitude. They see women, you know, as more concerned with the home and so forth and leave the business to the men. [laughter] It was always so much fun, you know, because the Irish was in complete command and it was an all male operation. [laughter]

GRELE: That's right it was.

MARTIN: Kenny O'Donnell, Larry, and all the rest of them. So I finally broke the news that this was the best we could do and this was the final thing. She accepted it.

GRELE: Were you at all involved in organizing the civil rights advisors in the White House?

MARTIN: The top man legally in this civil rights business and intellectually of course is Harris

Wofford, who was a civil rights lawyer and well trained. He attended law at Howard University as well as Yale. He had been very helpful in a great many of the civil rights speeches, et cetera. So it was a natural choice for Wofford to go to the White House as special assistant. Frank Reeves who was also a civil rights lawyer who had been associated with a lot of civil rights cases, particularly with NAACP. He was also suggested. However Wofford was named shortly after, well two or three months after the election. Then a discussion developed over the Commission on the District of Columbia. In a series of discussions, why, it was felt that Reeves might well do that job. Somehow there was a premature announcement of Reeves going in to fill a vacancy, and it turned out the vacancy was the chairmanship. When it leaked out that a Negro might be chairman, we understood -- at least we were told -- that there was a

revolt on the Hill. So the news hit the [Evening] Star, an afternoon paper and by night the action had been reversed. Reeves was in a very embarrassed position. He had a long talk with Kenny O'Donnell as I remember and Kenny tried to find some way to save face all around, and Reeves suggested that he be also named Special Assistant to the President. It would be a face saving thing. And the next vacancy on the commission -- it would not be the chairmanship -- he would get that. So a deal was made that Reeves would become a Special Assistant to the President and when the next vacancy appeared, he would go to the commissioner-ship. And this is why when the next vacancy did occur, Reeves figured in it because this was a part of an understanding that he had made with Kenny and the others.

GRELE: That leak to the press, was that the famous leak that everyone talks about when they talk

about Harris Wofford in the White House?

MARTIN: I don't think. . . . No. I don't which leak that was but I don't think Harris had anything to do with **this** one.

GRELE: Everyone talks about Harris Wofford and then he somehow leaked something to the press. The President got very angry.

MARTIN: I remember now that you say that. There were stories every now and then. There was something about it but I don't specifically recall any specific instance.

GRELE: Why didn't Harris Wofford stay on in the White House?

MARTIN: I'm not quite sure. Harris is very active and a gung-ho type. I think he became convinced that the push on civil rights legislation was not going very far and that it took the President an awful long time to sign that piece of paper about the executive order on housing, by a "stroke of the pen." I think he was a little

frustrated by the beurocracy and the people surrounding the President and that the civil rights itself was sort of a, not a primary concern at that moment of the Administration. I think that played a part in his ultimate resignation. Then Sarge began to build the Peace Corps concept and he got all involved in that in the early talks over at the Mayflower Hotel. I think this excited the latent romantic spirit and idealism of Harris since Sarge was also the one we dealt with most in the early days so I think there's a real affinity there. I think it was a natural sort of a development that he should finally move over to the Peace Corps.

GRELE: Would you say there was a general letdown among those people who had worked on the civil rights section once it became apparent that legislation was not going to be asked for and that the problems in signing the "stroke of the pen" or

the order were going to be far greater than first envisioned?

MARTIN: I think some of the civil rights thinkers were perhaps a little dismayed. I'm not sure that we felt too much frustration simply because we were succeeding and moving Negroes into key positions and while we weren't moving on the legislative front we were moving on the executive level. At least I had something to talk about in the public relations business. And so while timing of the legislation was always a bit of a controversial thing we were making progress all along. We weren't making the top but we also established the so-called sub-Cabinet group on civil rights. Wofford was the mover on that. I always attended those meetings although I was not in government. A great many things were done in the machinery of government which indicated that progress was possible although we weren't getting the kind of thing

that we wanted originally.

GRELE: Were you at all involved in the decision to set up the President's Committee on Equal Employment Practises?

MARTIN: I was a part, just another member, of the civil rights group around town and discussed these things. One thing -- this was done earlier, incidentally -- there was a general discussion of rearranging these by telescoping some of these committees. It was thought that the one that they did come up with would combine the best of the approaches that were posed. But I was just another one of the persons involved in it. And then another thing. You see, my role through all of these basically was to establish strong liaison with the Negro leadership and Negro masses and keep the Negro media fully informed. I was still doing public relations all the time, you see.

GRELE: When did you come to the National Committee?

MARTIN: As I recall, it was in September of 1960. I've forgotten the date. It was right after the Convention when I moved in here -- the Convention was over. I was first in the National Committee in 1944 for these years.

GRELE: Yes, that's true. In those early days of the Kennedy Administration did you have any particular problems with Negro leadership who expected the President to move faster?

MARTIN: Well, you have problems all the time, but these appointments were being played up in the Negro press, and I thought they were fairly effective as propaganda, if you want to call them that. We were always promising some action. Things were moving along.

GRELE: Were you at all involved in any of the various civil rights crises of those years -- Montgomery, Birmingham, Oxford?

MARTIN: We were up to our necks in most of them. The '63 Birmingham deal, I think I told you. The President called the Cabinet up there -- I was

also invited -- to discuss the so-called Negro revolution culminating in this big Birmingham deal. Our views were among those of a lot of others. It was just, you know, what the Administration might do. I think I told you about this, though.

GRELE: Yes.

MARTIN: One of the things that I remember most. I was sitting next to Bobby. The President was next to him on the other side of Bobby, the Vice President was across the table, [W. Willard] Wirtz and [Anthony J.] Celebrezze was there, Kenny, O'Brien, and five or six others -- I've forgotten now -- other people with the committee, probably. The President was very, I thought, very testy and very unhappy about the state of affairs. He went around the room asking various people what they thought about what was happening and what he might do. Finally, he asked me. I started out by saying while I was very concerned by

what had happened in Birmingham -- this didn't surprise any of us who had been in this business -- I had a greater concern for possible explosions in the major urban centers in the North -- New York, Detroit, Chicago, and so forth. The Negro was restive and they weren't doing enough. I was very critical at that time of our failure to do certain things. I remember on housing we had a number of Negro members of the Administration who tried to move into a house out there somewhere in the suburbs. A committee that was formed to help on it had done nothing on it. I said that apparently we didn't really want to get to the bottom of this and to demonstrate through action to the American Negro our real concern about this, and we had to do more than make speeches. I wound up by saying that "I know that all you latter day liberals don't think much of WPA [Works Progress Administration] and the programs of [Franklin D.] Roosevelt, but I came up under

Roosevelt, worked under Roosevelt, and I think that that prescription is the prescription needed right now for Negroes. I don't care what you call it today or whether you call it WPA but we've got to find jobs for the unemployed Negroes, particularly Negro youth. As far as I'm concerned you ought to figure on putting one billion dollars (I remember I repeated this) one billion dollars now through some way into this business of economic relief of unemployed and idle Negroes." This caused quite a little flurry. I never will forget that Celebrezze followed me and said that in Cleveland he didn't see any unrest because they'd worked out some sort of interracial committee to keep the peace. He thought that the Negro ought to be praising Kennedy for what he's been doing on this. So I told him. . . . I interrupted everybody and answered him and said that I had just toured this country in ten cities, including

Cleveland, and "I want to assure you that Cleveland's going to blow just as quick as any place else and as far as your committee is concerned I don't think it's going to work at all in these times." I was probably a little too strong on it. I replayed my argument that we've got to do something about these unemployed and we've got to put some money in it and we've got to do something, not just talk about it. At that point, I think President Kennedy tried to cool things off and called on the Vice President. The first thing the Vice President said was, "Louis was right." [laughter] I wrote it down in my because I was so shocked you know. He also came up under Roosevelt and he had a feeling for this economic aspect of the problem, because I had been making the pitch that when people are unemployed and idle and standing around on corners, you know, I mean this is a . . . and with racism all in the air and you've got

this unrest. . . . So I was very shocked, but I was very pleased too. And so I remember somehow or other in the same conference I repeated this billion dollars, and Bobby was sitting next to me and punched me on the leg and whispered at me and said, "Well, we might think about a half a billion." [laughter] He tried to shut me up. But this was the high point of my fight because I was really upset. Of course, I at that point really didn't care, you know, whether anybody liked it or not because I thought I was telling the truth and I thought I understood this thing. I had gone through crises in Detroit. I was a witness to that riot in '43, and I knew it was possible in these big cities. Frankly, the Birmingham thing was terrible, but if you've ever seen a major race riot where you have whites and Negroes fighting each other in these major cities where there's great concentration -- these poor Negroes and poor whites -- you've really

got a civil war on your hands. The mood of Negroes was getting nastier and had all the time and of course the Birmingham incident as I pointed out to them was appearing in all the press in the northern cities and it was infuriating Negroes who had grievances locally and was doubly infuriating when they found out about these bombings. But anyhow I made the great pitch for the economic movement as well as civil rights. I think Wirtz and several others also -- after the meeting we talked around to each other -- and most of them agreed that we had to do more than just pass civil rights. They had to think about the economic problem. It's always been my gravest concern.

GRELE: What was John Kennedy's reaction to your request
. . . .

MARTIN: He listened and he didn't indicate one way or the other what he thought. Following the meeting he called Wirtz and two or three others

into his private office. I didn't go in. Bobby was in there too and came back and asked something, I can't remember. But I think the discussion was still going on in the office; but most of us were not invited. I guess it was Bobby and Wirtz and one or two others. I think the Vice President was.

GRELE: I don't know, I may have misheard you, but did you say King was there?

MARTIN: No, no, no. In fact, I was the only Negro. Harris Wofford was there and Lee White but I was the only Negro invited.

GRELE: What about the other incidents -- Oxford, the integration of the University of Mississippi?

MARTIN: There was no formal meeting like this. We were talking to Lee White and I think Lee was
and talking to the Attorney
General about the resolve of the President,
making some public statements, and giving

suggestions right and left. He finally came out and did those things. The only difficulty I ran into in the Oxford thing was I got calls from southern Negroes that they had pulled Negro troops out of the units in Oxford. I couldn't find out where these orders were coming from until somebody told me that [John] Stennis -- I think it was Senator Stennis -- had gotten a hold of McNamara or [Cyrus] Cy Vance or somebody and told them to get those Negro troops out of there.. My memory is vague on this. I recall getting a hold of Yarmolinsky and was screaming mad. I raised so much hell and Yarmolinsky tried to cool me off and said, "Well, I've got a meeting at 2 o'clock with Cy Vance and we'll take it up." I said, "Well, you either take it up or. . . ." Oh, we just had a. . . . It was a nasty conversation. Anyhow he put the troops back, put the Negroes back in there in twenty-four hours.

[laughter] So it was really hot ~~then~~.

GRELE: I have to change the tape. [End tape II, side II. Begin tape III, side I] How was Lee White chosen to be White House advisor on civil rights?

MARTIN: Well, that was the choice of the President. We had begun to work with Lee White in the sub-Cabinet meetings on civil rights by then and we were all very impressed with his form. His manner and general orientation were natural for this position. I was very enthusiastic about the appointment and I think Bobby was also impressed by the job he did. But this was general.

GRELE: How effective was he?

MARTIN: Lee? I think Lee was exceedingly exceptional. Lee ~~is~~ an excellent judge of minds and completely unemotional about everything -- a very, very practical type. He weighed everything. Lee was accessible and available. That's another thing you look for. One of the jobs you have

to call it. They used to laugh at me.

GRELE: Marshmallows?

MARTIN: Yes. Boy Scout, or marshmallow operation.

They had to come up with something that was virile and made a little sense and wouldn't be a do-good, Boy Scout type thing. This is the danger when you're following an idealistic line in a practical field that could give us a lot of trouble. I guess we met several times a week for a month or so before we finally put it together. I was only one, of course, of ten or fifteen others.

GRELE: If we can move on now, what was your opinion of the civil rights bill first introduced in 1963?

MARTIN: I thought it was a step forward. It wasn't the total answer. We were guided by the advice that was given on what would get the votes and what wouldn't get the votes. Of course, you know in this business this is a

grave concern. I was very much disturbed by these proposals that would stir up hopes of people and not get anywhere with it. So I felt that we had a fair package. I wanted it stronger naturally, but I was told by those who studied the Congress, who had the head count, what kind of votes we'd get for this, what kind of votes we'd get for that and so forth and so on. My big concern -- and one that I later finally persuaded the Attorney General on -- was the trigger for unrest, I thought, that we ought to tackle was this business of public accommodations originally. Civil rights people, at least in the government, were not as keen on public accommodations as some other things. And it was all based, but not for very long probably, on the emotional reaction of Negroes to failure to be accommodated in public places. In a period of general unrest

I thought this was a sort of trigger issue for mass violence or something else. We met over there in the Justice Department with all the lawyers. We had session after session. I think we made some impression on them that public accomodation had to be concluded; we had to fight for it because, no doubt, some action there argued that mass violence could be prevented. I never will forget that Bobby and [Nicholas deB.] Katzenbach and several others were sitting around at the close of one meeting, and I was very excited about this public accomodations issue. I remember making the statement that there was a restaurant in Silver Spring, an Italian restaurant, and it had thrown out some Negroes. I live about three blocks from that place, and I said, "If one of my daughters got turned down there I'd shoot him. And I feel I'd shoot him." And I said, "I'm an old man.

and if I feel like shooting someone ~~who'd~~
~~throw her out~~ what do you think about Negroes
who aren't trained and haven't been disciplined?"
And I think it shook them up a little. I said,
"That's exactly the way I feel about it, and I
feel it every time I pass it. I feel like
throwing a rock at the damn place." And I
said, "If I feel that way, what do you think
about Negroes who have not had the training
and the discipline and so forth that I've had.
This thing can be most explosive, and we've got
to move." But this was just one of those
emotional moments that you have every now and
then.

GRELE: What was your comprehension of John Kennedy's or
Robert Kennedy's comprehension of the civil
rights movement?

MARTIN: Well, I think he understood it because I think
as an Irishman from Boston there was some
latent understanding of what it means not to be

persona grata in some place. However, he was not a terribly emotional type and gives the impression of being very cold. I think he is not half as cold as he appears to be. I think he understands what it means to be pretty angry about a blatant and flagrant injustice. In the experience of his own family, as I understand it, it probably motivated the Ambassador at one point to move out of Boston. He was not regarded as a liberal by many of the professional liberals.

GRELE: This is Robert Kennedy.

MARTIN: Right. But I felt that we all were able to get to him on this issue. I don't feel he was as callous about this as some would say.

GRELE: In the attempt to pass the civil rights bill were you at all involved in mobilizing support for that bill?

MARTIN: Of course, everyone had some part to play. We called upon, first, our friends in the publishing business and got about a hundred or so newspapers

-- Negro newspapers and magazines, et cetera. My job was overseeing that responsibility, and to make sure that they were getting the people behind it. Of course, everybody was talking to the civil rights leaders. I talked to them quite often about it.

GRELE: What were their opinions of the bill?

MARTIN: You're talking about the '63 bill?

GRELE: Yes.

MARTIN: Some of the professionals, of course, thought it could be a lot stronger. Attempts were made, as you remember, in the Congress to add certain things to it, all of which I personally agreed with myself. But we needed their support.

GRELE: Do you recall any of the specific criticisms of specific leaders of the civil rights movement?

MARTIN: Well, Clarence Mitchell and what they call the

Leadership Conference on Civil Rights here they were very vigorously supporting FEPC [Fair Employment Practices Commission] and other things in it along with Adam Powell in the Congress and several others. I knew there was a general feeling on the part of the NAACP leadership that other things had to be strengthened. So while I could not join with them in any criticism of anything I could understand it because I felt if it were possible to strengthen it certainly we should do it. The main thing I was concerned about is that they and the articulate leadership throughout the country kept the noise up and kept the impact on the Congress itself for civil rights legislation per se so that we could count on the political support for whatever was finally decided on in the various subcommittees and committees that review this stuff.

GRELE: In this light do you think that the March on

Washington was effective?

MARTIN: Well, I think the March on Washington was a magnificent demonstration of Negro or civil rights concern on the part of the people of the country. The Vice President at that time -- Johnson was Vice President -- he had a meeting every month with a few of us. I remember at one of the meetings six months before I told him that I heard the boys were thinking about a March on Washington. One of the members started to laugh and he turned around and said, "Oh, they tried that before, they won't get that." I said, "I don't know whether he can get it or not, but I just want to report that this is what I heard." Three months later there was more substance to it, and pretty soon things were beginning to happen. My original concern about it was that it appeared to me that it might be ^a all Negro thing and I thought that an all Negro March on Washington was not

necessarily the answer if he wanted to get any real -- make an impact on the American people and get some real popular strength for a movement on civil rights. So I went to Bobby again and somebody else, maybe Lee White, and I urged that they personally get a hold of Walter Reuther and some of our great liberals and get them involved in this and get their people involved so we would not have a Jim Crow rally. This was not an original thought with me. I guess I just felt the same way but anyhow we got the integrated march concept going and pretty early. Then we were very close of course to all the leaders and talked to them.

GRELE: Was it realized at the time how effective the religious groups would be in this battle?

MARTIN: Well, not fully at the beginning. But what happened -- King, being a churchman and being one of the great civil rights leaders, I think had influence. He not only influenced the

Negro church, but I think he influenced church groups generally. I think that was one of the key things, one of the top drawing cards. In fact a lot of the other things that had happened '61, '62, '63 that King was figuring in it and did it always with some relevance to religion and the morality of everything and kept pressing the moral issue. This was incidentally one of the things that Kennedy said earlier, that it was a moral issue. I think the emphasis on the moral aspects of the issue helped to excite the concern and interest of great many liberal clergymen. We didn't know at that time how they would become personally as active as Martin Luther King but in the buildup to the march we, as I told you, were concerned about the integrated concept and then began to figure out ways to involve more people. The idea of having all the faiths represented was very important and that integration. This ultimately is what happened. The leadership

finally invited the Catholics and the Protestants and Jews and everybody.

GRELE: Did you confer with any of the leadership on this particular issue?

MARTIN: Not in a formal way. I had informal talks with all of them. I spent more time with King, I mean with Roy Wilkins, about it.

GRELE: Was this general Administration policy -- to spend more time with Wilkins?

MARTIN: No, I just knew Roy better. Roy, thirty years ago or forty or thirty-five years ago, was a newspaper guy in Kansas City. I started business in '36 and he visited my little one office and I got to know him early so I knew him since '36.

GRELE: In your mind, would that bill have passed if John Kennedy had lived?

MARTIN: I think ultimately it would have.

GRELE: What was your general opinion of the Kennedy Administration ~~in its work~~ on civil rights?

MARTIN: Apart from some substantive executive action, I mean, this appointing of Negroes to important positions, setting up committees and promoting legislation and promulgating it and so forth, I think one of the latent things was the use with which he made of the presidency in educating the American people of the necessity for action, and secondly the recognition he gave to the moral aspect of the issue. I think this is what we lacked in earlier years particularly with Eisenhower, He refused or failed to give his personal view on the moral value of this thing. I think that Kennedy was an exciting personality. This new spirit he brought with him symbolized by everything he ever did and said, ~~thought~~, put the civil rights issue in a perspective that we had never had it before. It became not only good Americanism, it was also a sophisticated thing. Everything... I mean he really excited people. So I would

say that he helped build a kind of climate in the country at large for a greater tolerance and greater concern about the inequities of society and a greater receptivity to the forward movement. Although he didn't live to actually make the moves, I think he did help create a receptivity to them.

GRELE: As Vice Chairman of the Democratic National Committee were you ever called upon to assess white backlash or the possibility of white backlash?

MARTIN: Well, frankly, I'm Deputy Chairman, not Vice Chairman. There's a variance. The Vice Chairman is elected. Deputy Chairmen are staff guys, titles which we gave ourselves. Well, we went into the backlash very vigorously and studied every poll and sent them back and forth. I never felt that we had much of a problem as many people, the press and other sectors, said because we find that in motivating voting

behavior more than one factor plays a part. Many people who would be very much opposed to the civil rights posture of the candidate on the other hand might be very strongly in support of his economic program. So when a guy goes in the poll booth it's more than one factor that influences what he does. I felt that we had an affluent society and there was prosperity. A guy would think twice about voting against a guy who helped him that way simply because he didn't like his racial views. So it was that point of view that lead me to not feel quite as alarmed about the backlash because America was moving and becoming more affluent. Further, I was sustained in that thought by studies that had been made in academic areas on motivation of voting behavior. In fact, Dr. Moses Rischin, I think his name is . . .

GRELE: In San Francisco.

MARTIN: Well, he was at Harvard, and he wrote a book in

1960 on what motivates voting behavior. He places the most dominant factor in motivating a vote is economic. People vote their pocket-books first and these other factors are important but they're secondary. So this is one of the reasons I wasn't quite as alarmed. We took no chances. We did everything we could to overcome this backlash by stimulating Negro registration and so forth at least to get some new voters for those we might lose. [laughter]

GRELE: During this period do you recall any conversations you had with the President which are not part of the public record that you would like to make part of the public record?

MARTIN: I don't know anything that I could say that probably hasn't been said many times and much better. I've had a few personal experiences, none of them terribly noteworthy. He had a sense of humor. I remember once I told him that the NAACP Convention gave him a big hand

and was very enthusiastic about him. He said, "Yes, that's what they think right now. But what are they going to think in July" or something. Anyhow he was sort of skeptical of that applause. He was doing it in a very humorous manner though. And I rode with him over to He made a speech at a Delta Sigma Theta Sorority function over here at the International Inn one day. I got in the limousine with him and rode over there. I had prepared some statistics and drafted him a little talk and so forth. He hadn't had time to look at it so he read it while we were riding over in the car. When we got to the Inn, he gave it back to me. I felt he really didn't want it and all this work for nothing. And he got up there and started speaking, and I almost fell down listening to him because he used all the statistics and figures that I had in the speech. And I don't think he'd get them anywhere else. It

was just incredible to me that he remembered the speech. I felt very elated after the speech. I went back to the White House with him in the car and on the way back he started asking me about some of our operations. I mentioned something about the nationality aspects of our work. I told him I was a little concerned about some disaffection among some Italians. He told me that he beat an Italian in the primary up there in Massachusetts and so forth and the Italians voted for him. He was very proud of that. He said that, "The ethnic thing isn't all of it, you know," I said, "I agree with you but I still love problems with it." [laughter]

GRELE: What were the problems with the Italians ?

MARTIN: They were voting Republican in some areas and as far as I was concerned they were voting the wrong way. Among the problems I think arose out of ^{some of} this business of Carmine De Sapio and I

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had a few New York Italians give me a little trouble.

GRELE: Were you at all involved in this kind of state and local politics such as the situation in New York?

MARTIN: Oh yes. That's part of our regular work. It's making soundings on public sentiment. While I gave more attention to Negro sentiment I moved from that into nationality, foreign law, and et cetera. This is a regular part of what we do.

GRELE: How would you assess John Kennedy's appeal to the various nationality groups?

MARTIN: I think he had the same appeal there that he had with the public at large. I think you've got to remember this: he was a terribly handsome, attractive man, just great personality, this charisma, natural. Then your whole image of President and First Lady fitted into sort of a fairy story concept of the prince and the princess.

Everything about them helped enhance this image of especially special people and worthy of love and admiration. I think he affected minorities the same, probably even more so because in his campaign and in his actions he indicated great concern for their cause. So he had the double impact of real relevance to something touching them plus this fairy story-book types of prince and princess. He appealed to all people. Just ideals, living ideals.

GRELE: Having worked for both presidents, Kennedy and Johnson, would you care to compare and contrast your working conditions with them? I know at one time you told me that with President Johnson you never go to sleep but with President Kennedy you did get a night's sleep.

MARTIN: I think you probably couldn't get two men with
But
a sharper contrast./ I think their ideals and motivations are basically similar. The only difference is approach and style. I think that

President Johnson is far more experienced and is basically an achiever. I think Kennedy was basically an inspirer, a motivator. I don't think they're far apart on objectives and ideals at all, but in cold practical terms Johnson has in his way been able to do far more in this area than Kennedy did or I think could have done. But I think we needed both. We needed the motivation and inspiration and I think we needed the achiever. And Johnson is the achiever. He is much slower on the rhetoric but he's much faster on the action.

GRELE: I have no more questions unless you can think of something that we haven't covered. Would you care to make any final comments?

MARTIN: No, I just feel so sad that I can't recall in more detail so many things that I felt in those years, and I regret that I didn't do more writing about it. But I wouldn't have given anything for the experience that I have in the

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world. The greatest experience that can come
I think
to anybody in my position, in my group, /is
to have had the opportunity to work with Kennedy,
and now the opportunity of working over with
Johnson, because I'm past fifty and very for-
tunate of the material side of life, and so
this is sort of a valedictorian sort of an
experience. I don't feel like working at
anything else. I think if I got out of this,
I'd just be lost. [laughter]

GRELE: Thank you very much.