

**Frank Reeves Oral History Interview – JFK#1, 3/29/1967**  
**Administrative Information**

**Creator:** Frank Reeves

**Interviewer:** John Stewart

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**Biographical Note**

Frank Reeves (1916-1973) was a civil rights activist and Special Assistant to the President in 1961. This interview focuses on Hubert Humphrey's 1960 primary campaign, the role of civil rights in John F. Kennedy's 1960 campaign, and the campaigns' attempts to win support of civil rights leaders, among other topics.

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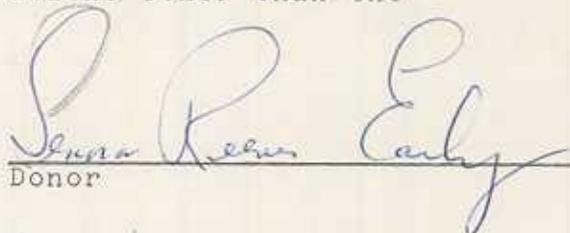
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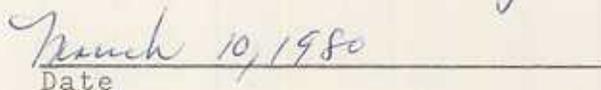
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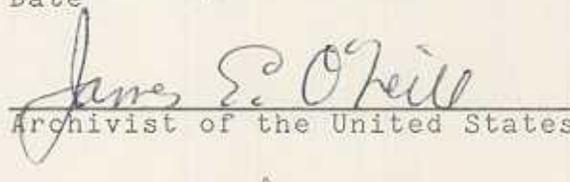
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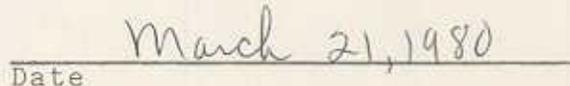
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Frank Reeves– JFK #1  
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Oral History Interview

with

FRANK REEVES

March 29, 1967  
Washington, D.C.

By John F. Stewart

For the John F. Kennedy Library

STEWART: Let me begin by asking you, Mr. Reeves: had you known John Kennedy before the start of the 1960 campaign, or before 1959?

REEVES: As I recall, I had met him. I don't even remember the occasion, but it was one where there was a large number of people, and I'm sure it was just an introduction and that was all that was involved.

STEWART: Weren't you in some way associated with Senator [Estes] Kefauver around 1956?

REEVES: As a matter of fact, interestingly enough, although I lived in Washington since 1929, in the 1952 campaign I first became sort of actively involved in politics. At that time, I was asked through friends whom I knew in ADA [Americans for Democratic Action] to become involved in the primary campaign of Averell Harriman. In the previous primary, I think it was Kefauver who had carried the District of Columbia. This was to be Mr. Harriman's first engagement in national politics. I became the vice chairman of the Harriman campaign in the District and [Joseph L.] Joe Rauh was the chairman. We mounted, apparently, a very successful campaign, particularly insofar as the important Negro community was concerned.

As the result of that--did I say '52? Yes, '52. As the result of my activities in that campaign here in the District, I was invited to become a part of Mr. Harriman's national presidential primary campaign staff and went to Chicago with him, and then, under [Franklin D.] Frank Roosevelt, Jr., became a part of the--he was his national chairman. Then when [Adlai E.] Stevenson was nominated and Harriman withdrew, at the Chicago convention, Mr. Harriman and others were instrumental in placing me on the campaign staff

of Adlai Stevenson so that I traveled with him and as a part of his campaign staff during his campaign. In the '52 primary I was also elected to the Democratic Central Committee for the District of Columbia. This, as I said, began my involvement in politics. It was sort of unusual in that we really didn't have any vote here. It was sort of a void and I was fortunate enough to step into it. In 1956 I was asked to assist Senator Kefauver. In his primary campaign I occupied the same role. Then in 1960 I was a member of the original committee sponsoring the primary campaign of Senator [Hubert H.] Humphrey. After West Virginia, at the end of the West Virginia campaign, that was, I guess, my first sort of formal meeting with [John F.] Kennedy. I was with Senator Humphrey and four or five of his other supporters when we went down to what's called the dugout, in West Virginia, for his concession to Kennedy.

STEWART: To back up just a little, how did you decide to back Humphrey's candidacy in 1959, or early 1960?

REEVES: Well, I had, I guess, through my ADA and other activities, come to know and appreciate Vice President Humphrey as certainly representing the liberal position in the Democratic party. Certainly as a Negro interested in civil rights, I suppose it was natural that this was where I would be led, and, of course, many of the people with whom I had worked in the previous campaigns also were supporters of Humphrey in 1960. I remember just wondering at the--when the issue came up in Chicago with reference to the vice presidential nomination, I was certainly one of those who was quite surprised and probably unfairly prejudiced, prejudiced, unreasonably against Senator Kennedy at that time when he got the support of the southerners against Kefauver's candidacy for the vice presidential nomination. Under those circumstances I suppose if there had been a choice and there really wasn't between Kennedy and Humphrey at the outset of the '60 campaign, I'm sure I would have been influenced to have . . .

STEWART: Was this a big factor with many people, particularly ADA people?

REEVES: I suspect it was because, to many of us, Senator Kennedy's position on race and related matters was not very well known, I suppose, probably because he hadn't been called upon to take a position. We were aware of his position on the jury trial amendment to the civil rights bill and I think there were on one or two other matters which unhappily were, as you look back with hindsight, positions which certainly would be misunderstood by Negroes and others who were interested in liberal reform. Thus when, at the '56 convention, he got the support of the southerners for the vice presidential bid, this I'm sure, did a great deal to lead many Negroes to feel that if he was acceptable--I mean, sort of our measuring stick was if he was acceptable to the South--then his position was inimical to ours. Under these circumstances, I would expect that it did have some influence.

STEWART: What role did you play in the Wisconsin primary, if any?

REEVES: I was working for Humphrey in the Wisconsin primary.

STEWART: Were you with . . .

REEVES: I went into Wisconsin and worked with the Humphrey campaign organization in Wisconsin. Mrs. [Dale (Vel)] Phillips and Judge [Marjorie] Lawson were the principal Kennedy supporters in the Negro community in Wisconsin during that primary. We were happy that, as the results showed, apparently Senator Humphrey got the majority support among the Negroes in Wisconsin. As I said, I participated in that campaign and took some responsibility for his success.

STEWART: What role did Jackie Robinson have in the Wisconsin primary?

REEVES: Well, Jackie, as I recall, came in and made a couple of speeches. My memory is hazy as to specific activities, but, as I recall, at that time he was. . . . I honestly don't remember.

STEWART: It wasn't a significant or sizable role as far as you were concerned?

REEVES: Well, I think there were a number of factors. Jackie, I'm sure, would be an influence, but there were a number of factors. What happened, we were able in Wisconsin to get the support for Humphrey from many of the local people who felt that he was sort of a neighbor and who certainly had followed and readily accepted his position as a liberal. And, here again, I think that Kennedy was prejudiced by the fact there were many of the things that had happened previously that he just couldn't overcome at that time. And, although the Kennedy people apparently had and did spend considerable money, the outcome was favorable to Humphrey. Of course, we were very happy about that at the time.

STEWART: Were you at all involved in the Humphrey decision to go into West Virginia?

REEVES: Yes. I was a member of the group that. . . . I think there were about eight of us who constituted his campaign committee. I was a member of the group that aided him in making that decision.

STEWART: Were you definitely in favor of it after the Wisconsin primary?

REEVES: Well, I didn't know very much about West Virginia, so I can't say that mine was too important a role. I was guided probably more by the others who claimed to know more about the West Virginia situation and felt that in the light of Wisconsin, that West Virginia was critical for Humphrey and believed, and led us to believe, that we had commitments from West Virginia politicians which would enable Humphrey to win.

STEWART: After Wisconsin, were you still convinced that Humphrey could get nominated?

REEVES: Well, I suppose those of us who consider ourselves liberals sort of never die. I guess if I had been able to be completely objective about it, to sort of stand off and take a look, maybe I would have concluded that the prospects were very doubtful. But we still had hope.

STEWART: When did this whole problem of Humphrey's candidacy as being primarily a stop-Kennedy effort become a real factor. There was, of course, certain financing coming from Stevenson, [Lyndon B.] Johnson, and [Stuart] Symington people.

REEVES: That's true.

STEWART: Did this occur to any great extent in Wisconsin, or did this really start in West Virginia?

REEVES: Well, to be perfectly frank, I wasn't too close to that part of the financing and the influences which were involved. I mean, I wasn't completely unaware of what was happening, but my specific role in the campaign organization was, of course, getting out the optimum support for Humphrey in the Negro community. As I said, in that area of the policy making I didn't play a very active role, so that I can't say that I'm really aware of the extent to which that was a factor.

STEWART: Was there anything more?

REEVES: Well, I think that up until the concession in West Virginia--I suppose that's a story by itself. It was certainly one of the most agonizing experiences in my life up to that point, those of us in those two hotel rooms . . .

STEWART: The election night you mean?

REEVES: . . . when we were trying to make the decision as to whether Humphrey would at that time withdraw from further active participation in the primary campaign. But once the decision was made, I was then a member of the group that went with Humphrey down to the dugout to make the concession to John Kennedy and Bobby [Robert F. Kennedy]. Jackie [Jacqueline B. Kennedy] was there with the others on the Kennedy staff. That was the first time that I had formally met Kennedy in the political arena.

I was impressed in meeting him, by the warmth and the sincerity in his reaction to Humphrey. I was conscious, at least, or felt that he was aware of what this meant to Hubert. Certainly there was no reaction on his part towards the senator or any of us which indicated that he felt that he was bragging about his victory or anything like that. His humaneness came through at this particular point.

STEWART: Were most people in the Humphrey camp conscious during the campaign of the probable need to eventually become reconciled with the Kennedy people?

REEVES: I think so, although there were some in our camp who, at that point, were interested in other possible candidates, Symington. . . . In other words, I think [Joseph L. Rauh, Jr.] Joe Rauh, from among us, was probably the one who was most outspoken or indicated that if Humphrey conceded he would support Kennedy. I think many of the others were interested in candidates other than Kennedy. At least, there weren't the expressions of outspoken support for Kennedy that there were for other candidates in the event that Humphrey failed.

STEWART: When did you make up your mind as to your choice?

REEVES: Well, that was another very interesting experience. After we got back from West Virginia, the Democratic Central Committee, of which I was a part and also the Democratic national committeeman for the District at that time having been elected in the '60 campaign, some of the members in our delegation arranged sort of a garden party, a lawn party to which we invited Senator Kennedy to meet our delegation. It was held--I'm trying to remember. I think it was the friend--I won't say because I'm not sure. But it was held in one of these outside gardens in Georgetown. Kennedy came and was moving around among the people, shaking hands and talking. When he came to me he startled me by--of course he remembered my name--saying he would like to talk with me and asked me if I would call his office, or call Bobby, to make an appointment the next day or next couple of days to talk with him. So I agreed and was quite taken aback. Almost immediately after he spoke with me, Joe Rauh, I think it was, came up and asked me if Kennedy had said anything to me. This led me to believe that apparently Joe Rauh knew or anticipated that he was going to say something to me. And I said, "Yes. He asked me to come and meet him." [Interruption]

Meanwhile, on--I guess it was prior to that. I have difficulty in putting these times together. Some friends of mine, notably Harris Wofford, had invited me to a lunch one day to ask me if I would be interested in assisting the Kennedy campaign now that Hubert had withdrawn. Well, I really hadn't given that any thought up to that point. What they said was that there had been a meeting of Negroes in New York that had been called by someone interested in the Kennedy campaign. The subject matter of the meeting had been what could be done or what might be done to help gain support in the Negro community among Negro voters. I understood that one of the suggestions made, which apparently received considerable support among these people, was that it would be helpful if he could get me to help in his campaign for that purpose and to that end. So at this luncheon meeting--I don't recall who was there other than Harris, I think there were two or three other people who at that time were actively working with Kennedy--I didn't make any decision. And then, of course, this direct invitation from Kennedy to come and talk with him. . . . So I, feeling that since personally I was committed to continue to support Humphrey just as long as there was any possibility of his nomination, I went to see him. I think it was the morning of the same day that I was to go see Kennedy. I told him what had happened, and he told me that Kennedy had come to him to ask him if he would have any objection to his speaking to me to ask me to aid him in his campaign. Hubert had said, no, that he had no objection, and

and apparently had sort of given me a boost, a recommendation. Then many of, of course, who were interested in the Humphrey campaign were hopeful for a Kennedy-Humphrey ticket, and to that end I felt that I would be serving, or might be serving, a dual purpose if I would go to work with Kennedy.

So I went to see him with the feeling that possibly I could go to work for him and that it would be certainly not inconsistent with my loyalty to Hubert. It was a very interesting conversation. It lasted I guess, about an hour in his office, in the Senate office building. The thing, I believe, that impressed me most about it and probably was most influential in my decision to help him was his frank admission that he had had little or no contact with Negroes in his life up to that point and that therefore he didn't claim to know and sincerely and honestly wanted to help them. We reviewed some of the things that had happened, including this jury trial amendment position.

STEWART: What was his explanation for that?

REEVES: That he had sought advice from some of his lawyer friends at Harvard and that this was their advice, and that he had taken this position without feeling that it was inimical to Negroes but rather that it was a sound legal position, and that this, of course, he said, was again evidence of his lack of appreciation of the Negro viewpoint about these things and that what he really wanted was then that, surprisingly . . . [Interruption]

So that, as I said, this was the area of our discussion. So what we finally concluded was that, in view of the fact that I had been so prominently identified with the Humphrey effort, that I was willing to help and that I had had Senator Humphrey's approval of helping, but I thought my assistance would be best understood, or at least not likely to be misunderstood as merely representing his paying for my changing or something like that, if I would sort of remain in the background and advise and counsel him and assist those others who were active in his campaign until the convention. And he was agreeable to this and then suggested that I make an appointment to go see and talk with Bobby. But, as I said, the thing that impressed me most was his honesty and his sincerity in a desire for help.

It was interesting. I discovered in that conversation with him that many of the Negro leaders, like Roy Wilkins and others, he'd never met, he'd never had any conversation with. As he put it, it was one of the areas of life that he just missed in his political career. It wasn't that he had any reluctance or reticence about knowing about it, but just the chain of events, the circumstances, he just never had the time or the occasion or the opportunity to get to really know and understand what was the viewpoint of the American Negro on the American scene. [Interruption]

I next saw and talked with Bobby and we discussed my role in more detail. One of the things that I was anxious to avoid was any problem with Mr. and Mrs. [Belford W.] Lawson, who until then had been sort of his principal advisors. We worked that out in a way that, at least we thought, would be satisfactory.

So then I just was more or less. . . . Well, one of the things that I then undertook to do was to arrange for him to meet with Roy Wilkins, [A. Phillip] Phil Randolph, and others. Of course, one of the other meetings in which I got involved was that well-publicized . . . [Interruption] . . . was in that meeting with Jackie Robinson.

STEWART: This was before the convention?

REEVES: This was before the convention. This is the meeting that we had at [Chester] Chet Bowles' house. Jackie [Robinson], the senator, Bowles, and myself were present. They were the four people present at that meeting.

STEWART: I think I've heard of that. What . . .

REEVES: Well, that was the famous meeting at which afterwards Jackie said that he couldn't support the senator because the senator didn't look him in the eye when he talked to him. His mother had always told him not to trust anybody who doesn't look you in the eye. The funny thing, the sidelight of that meeting was I picked Jackie up at the airport and brought him to Chet's house, and he and Kennedy had the discussion. Jackie was principally concerned with the fact that the senator had had this breakfast meeting with . . .

STEWART: Governor [John M.] Patterson.

REEVES: . . . Governor Patterson and this other fellow from Georgia. The Senator explained that it was one of those things where he really had not known or anticipated that it either had or would have the significance that people attached to it, that this guy had asked to talk with Patterson and he saw no reason why he shouldn't talk with him, and that, as a matter of fact, he had certainly made no commitments or given them no reason to believe that his position on racial matters and others would be anything other than what it was and the position he had taken during the campaign on these issues. But, I said, the thing had been blown up all out of context and Jackie made an issue of it. So as I say, he attempted and did explain all of this to Jackie.

Jackie made no commitment, but it was interesting that, immediately after he left, he then asked me to drop him off at [Richard M.] Nixon's house. He apparently also had a prearranged appointment with Nixon which, as matters subsequently developed, led me to believe that he had already committed himself to the Republican candidate even before he came to see the senator. The senator, he was--I don't believe I ever had occasion to tell him this. Even so, when Jackie made his statement, I think he expressed disappointment that Jackie, for whom he had a high regard at the time, should be. . . . Well, I think he didn't accept the reason Jackie gave as the real reason. Probably he knew or understood that Jackie had already made commitments to the Republicans because he considered it as beneath what he perceived to be Jackie's intelligence to base a position on this idea that the senator didn't look him in the eyes when he was talking to him.

STEWART: Did you have any further discussions with Jackie Robinson?

REEVES: Yes, because, as you recall, there subsequently came a point in the campaign when Jackie indicated that he felt that he had been wrong about the senator. I did have two or three conversations with Jackie in the interim, as a matter of fact, up to and including questions as to what he might do to aid us in the campaign at that point. But they were rather late in the campaign. Between the time I first made a commitment to work with him and the time of the convention, I sat in on some strategy meetings and, as I said, helped arrange for him to meet and talk with some of the Negro leaders and then, of course, went out to the convention.

STEWART: Could I go back just a minute here to one question about West Virginia? What, in your estimation, was the big reason for the reversal as far as the Negro vote was concerned? Kennedy, it's estimated, got about 90 percent of the Negro vote in West Virginia. Money, strictly?

REEVES: Mrs. Lawson and the people with whom she worked did a very effective job. As I came to know West Virginia politics, it's almost traditional, political support has been bought and sold. There was no question by the time that we got to West Virginia, the Humphrey campaign, we didn't have the money with which to compete. As a consequence, they did do a very effective job organizing both for the Negro and in other areas in West Virginia because, subsequently, many of the people in West Virginia that I talked with indicated that their support for Kennedy wasn't necessarily the fact that they preferred him over Humphrey, but this was just the way the cookie crumbled under the circumstances, and that they had been led to support Kennedy because of contributions. Other considerations given for their support in West Virginia.

STEWART: Who were some of the other people that you brought to Kennedy in this pre-convention period? You mentioned Roy Wilkins and . . .

REEVES: I remember I arranged for him to talk with Roy. I believe I made arrangements, or was involved in making arrangements, for him to talk with Phil Randolph. I'm not certain at this time whether I had anything to do with his talk with Martin Luther King. I know that he did. The questions then arose as to whether Martin could openly support him. What we ended up with, as you may recall, was Martin's making the statement that he would vote for Kennedy, which was sort of a compromise arrangement that we worked out.

STEWART: Were most of these meetings satisfactory as far as the people were concerned?

REEVES: So far as I could tell, they were. Many of these people did not feel and did not indicate that they were going to make any open commitment or take any active role in politics because their positions were such that they couldn't. But I think that with most of them, after talking with him, they were satisfied or better satisfied than they had been

previously, as to his personal position in regard to civil rights issues. Not having previously had an opportunity to talk with him personally, they had in many instances misunderstood or misconstrued some of his previous actions. They then got the opportunity, and I think that everyone who talked with him was persuaded of his sincerity and his honesty and that the positions which he had taken, with reference to which they might have had some objection, were not taken out of any lack of feeling or support or belief on his part in the civil rights cause. I think that this helped many of them, although, in talking with these people, it wasn't necessarily aimed at getting them to support Kennedy. As a matter of fact, my view of it was that the purpose in these meetings was educational both ways--both for them to get to know him and for him to get to know and understand Negro leadership, which prior to that time he had not done, had not had an opportunity.

STEWART: Were the Kennedy people at all involved in the local D.C. primary or the race for national committeemen in the election?

REEVES: No. You see, at that point . . .

STEWART: There was some dispute wasn't there? Oh, I guess it was between [Wayne] Morse and Humphrey.

REEVES: That's right. At that point, he had not, in other words, he did not run in the D.C. primary. Some of those who originally were Humphrey supporters broke off from the original group and supported Morse. Then there was a group who, although Stevenson wouldn't consent to run in the primary himself, ran a Stevenson slate. But Kennedy was not directly involved. It may well be that some of the Stevenson people or the Morse people were really pro-Kennedy but at least that wasn't the basic premise of the campaign as it was run.

STEWART: Yes. Yes. No real clash.

REEVES: There was no question but that there were a number of the people in the D.C. delegation who were pro-Kennedy; in other words, after Humphrey, were for Kennedy. As a matter of fact, as I recall, this was the basis upon which our delegation was lined up for the convention--that we would probably vote for Humphrey on the first ballot, as we were committed to do under the D.C. primary law, then the bulk of our support apparently was going to Kennedy, although there were some Symington people and some who were included in our delegation.

STEWART: Were you aware or fearful of any negotiations in this preprimary period that were taking place to gain southern support on a possible second ballot at the convention?

REEVES: No. I mean, I had no fear of it because what I thought or felt had happened up to that time was that Kennedy had so much more forcefully expressed himself on the civil rights issues that. . . . As a matter

of fact, there came a time in the campaign that it was fairly well decided that the Kennedy position would be taken (it was a calculated decision) on the basis that it probably would alienate any southern support in favor of the more liberal position. I have to believe that the Kennedy position was moved to the left by the Humphrey campaign. The Kennedy strategists were moved, felt that the Humphrey camp had forced Kennedy to a position farther left, possibly, than they would have liked and might have taken but for the Humphrey campaign. In that respect, I think the Humphrey campaign had a significant influence on the ultimate position that Kennedy took in the 1960 presidential campaign.

STEWART: Were you involved at all in that meeting, I think it was in June, with the group of Negro leaders from Michigan? They flew a number of them down . . .

REEVES: I didn't attend the meeting. I had some role in arranging and talked to some of the people who had come to the meeting. But this was during that period when it was agreed that my activities would be more in the background. Here again, things that happen that no one anticipates--an issue was made of the fact, as I remember, that Kennedy served southern fried chicken or something.

STEWART: I think I remember that.

REEVES: But the meeting itself, as you recall, was very favorable, except for that little incident I'm thinking of. It was during this period that we began to have expressions of support for Kennedy from Negroes, a much greater body than previously. I can recall that when we went--on the eve of the convention, the NAACP [National Association for the Advancement of Colored People] had this big meeting to which it invited all the candidates. There was some feeling among some of the senator's advisors that possibly that he shouldn't go because he would be embarrassed or whatever. Well, we succeeded in convincing him he should go, and he did go, and it came off rather well in consideration of all of the others who were present and their positions. The thing that impressed me more with the senator as time went on was, given the opportunity to meet and talk with people, he could carry the ball for himself. He had that quality that was very effective in persuading people of his honesty and sincerity on these issues. I was more and more impressed. When questions would come up in the campaign, tactical questions, if I could get to him, nine times out of ten he would come up with what I thought to be right decisions on these issues. He had a sort of uncanny ability in deciding these things for himself, when the matter arose, deciding them the right way.

STEWART: Were there any real problems among the advisors on civil rights in the preconvention period?

REEVES: Not in the preconvention period. I think that most of the problems that we had arose during and after the convention. The preconvention period, I think that all of us were pretty well agreed that it was necessary and desirable to improve the senator's image among Negroes. I can't

remember any occasion that I didn't get complete cooperation from Bobby and everybody else who was involved at that time.

STEWART: Unless there's anything else about this preconvention period, let's move on to the convention. What was your primary function during the convention?

REEVES: At the convention again, and at this point it was open that I was the senator's, I guess, principal advisor insofar as the Negroes were concerned. Our purpose and objective was to line up support for him among the Negroes in the various delegations. They had an organizational structure for the convention which I'm sure others have talked about.

BEGIN SIDE II

They had these early morning meetings and people assigned to various delegations. Mine was sort of a moving assignment in light of the special purpose which I was to serve. I found that during the convention in talking with Negro delegates and even with white liberal delegates in delegations that apparently there had been a significant change in their attitude toward the senator, and that, with Humphrey, at that point, out of the presidential picture, more or less, and being accepted, hopefully, by a lot of people as the vice presidential candidate, it would appear that we had the majority of the Negro delegates to the convention and the liberal delegates, at that point, appeared to be for Kennedy. And, of course, we were making these daily checks and tabulations and keeping up. As we got closer and closer to the time for the vote, it appeared that he had more and more support from these elements.

STEWART: In any of the state delegations, were you getting involved in any intramural squabbles, so to speak, that you were fearful of in order to gain the support of the delegates that you were concerned with?

REEVES: Well, in many instances I found that the Negro delegates were in the position where, as minorities in their delegations, that they were committed to other candidates. On that basis, of course, many times it was a matter of my relaying this information back to Bobby and the others for them to work on the entire delegation, because the fact of the matter was that in most of those instances the Negro delegates were indicating that their first choice would be Kennedy but they wouldn't get the opportunity to express it, because of their commitment to the position of the delegation, until the second or third or subsequent ballots. Although I attended some of the meetings with the delegation representatives from the Kennedy front, as I said, my specific role was dealing with the Negro delegates. When it was a problem dealing with an entire delegation, then I just went along.

STEWART: Were many of them changed during this convention? I guess what I'm asking is Do you think your efforts were that fruitful during the convention or was it a matter of holding on to what you already

had before the convention?

REEVES: No. I think that we did get some important changes during the convention. One of the things I think we succeeded in doing was in some of the delegations of getting splits that were not anticipated on the basis of the original commitment of those delegations. In other words, the Kennedy people were becoming more willing to take their positions and to stand with it. That was one observation that I think was true. Prior to the vote, of course, based on the calculations and the organizational work that was being done, the morning of the vote we were fairly certain that we had it. Then it became a question--because then our salesmanship with a lot of the delegation was, "Look, you might as well come on over because it's going to happen anyhow." That also turned some.

STEWART: You made one of the seconding speeches, didn't you?

REEVES: Yes. I didn't know about that until, I guess, the day before when [Theodore C.] Ted Sorensen called me and asked me would I make one of the seconding speeches and asked me if I would prepare a-- was it one minute?--whatever it was. I went back and my wife and I prepared what I would say and brought it to Ted. Afterwards we were told that apparently we'd done a very good job because he only changed one word.

STEWART: That's unusual.

REEVES: For Sorensen, yes. That's why I say we were told by some of the other people at that time that apparently we had. . . . He suggested the note that he wanted me to carry. She was at the convention with me and was an English major and speech major, and so with her assistance we got this blurb together. That was, of course, obviously a big moment in my life. He made some remark about it which. . . . The guy had just a terrific sense of humor. That went off, of course. . . . I think just at the time that I made my seconding speech one of the movie stars came in and walked across the floor, and attention was distracted.

STEWART: You were upstaged.

REEVES: Yes. I was upstaged. But, as I said, I still felt that was one of the greater moments in my life and I'll never forget it.

STEWART: What was your reaction to the selection of [Lyndon B.] Johnson as the . . .

REEVES: Well now, that was probably the most interesting experience that I had at the convention. All that day, while the various groups were meeting with the senator, I was in the hotel, and, of course, we were naturally concerned because we Humphreyites were still hopeful that Hubert was going to get the nod. I guess it was in the early afternoon that [R. Sargent] Sarge Shriver sent for me to come up to Kennedy's suite and said the senator wanted to see me. So I went into his bedroom and there he was in

his shorts just having had taken a shower. He had had a nap and taken a shower and was getting ready to dress. He said, "Frank, I wanted you to know before the announcement is made that Senator Johnson is going to be the vice presidential candidate, is my selection for the vice presidential candidate." I suppose the expression on my face was such that he said, "I know that this is going to make things difficult for you, but all I can say is that you and I will have to work a little harder." I always remembered or treasured that moment, the fact that he felt that it was necessary to explain to me before the announcement was made and also to say that he realized that this would create problems for us.

Of course, it did create problems for me because almost immediately when the announcement was made and we were on the floor--of course, I was near my own delegation but with some of the others with whom I had talked previously, Michigan people and others, to support Kennedy. I'll never forget that two of the members of my own delegation practically were prepared to read me out of the party and to lynch me right there on the convention floor because they felt that this was a betrayal of them and of the whole cause. I had met Johnson before, but I certainly was in no position, at that point, to give them any assurance of how Johnson's selection could be consistent with what I had told them was the Kennedy position.

Afterwards, it was arranged for [James H.] Jim Rowe, who at that time was designated as liaison between the Johnson and the Kennedy campaign staffs-- Jim had known previously. So Jim and I talked, and Jim arranged for me to talk to Johnson. I assured Johnson that he could certainly depend on me for help or assistance I could give. The senator had made his choice and, although I had problems and misgivings, I was nevertheless committed to campaign for the senator's position, and, for that reason, I said I would be willing to do anything that I could to help him. He thanked me and I think he asked me a couple of questions in regard to what he could do, how he could try to improve his image with the Negro voters.

The morning after the nomination, traditionally at the Democratic conventions, Congressman [William L.] Dawson had had a meeting of the Negro delegates at which the presidential and vice presidential candidates had come to speak to them. The meeting had been arranged again, but Congressman Dawson had insisted on deferring to me to chair the meeting in light of my relationship with Kennedy. Well, the meeting was set up and arranged prior to the time they were to appear. Of course, there was open rebellion on the part of some of the delegates in light of Johnson's selection. So I had to leave the meeting then to go and bring Kennedy and Johnson to the meeting. I had real misgivings about the kind of reception that they were going to get. I went first to the senator's suite and got him and then came down the back stairs to the Johnson suite, picked him up. When I got to his room, he was all ready and Mrs. Johnson was ready. I suggested to him that I thought that the temper of the delegates was such I thought it might be advisable that he not bring Mrs. Johnson. He agreed. So we went on down and into the meeting. It went very well. Both the senator and he got a very fine reception. There were one

or two delegates who expressed certain misgivings about Johnson, but here again I think the senator's sincerity in his own attitude and reaction was such that it overcame the real opposition. Everybody, of course, then was anxious to have their pictures taken and we went through that.

STEWART: Were they really fearful of being able to sell Johnson back in their own areas?

REEVES: I think this was true. And as they said, notwithstanding his position on the Civil Rights Act and others, they felt that he was a southerner and that his position and reaction was typically southern. Although there were notably some of the people from New York, Adam Powell, Ray Jones and others--who had supported Johnson, there was still sort of a distrust of him.

We worked hard during the campaign. I think Johnson himself did a lot to overcome that initial objection. He was very honest, very sincere. We were successful even in getting places like Detroit and others to want him to come there to speak during the campaign, which was something that we had anticipated, at least early in the campaign of those areas but, as things developed, it got to the point where some of the Negro areas and Negro groups were anxious to have him come in. It turned out much better than we expected.

STEWART: Had you had any encouragement or any indications before the convention that Humphrey had a chance as far as the vice presidential ... .

REEVES: Well, I think that among the Kennedy people there were some who favored Hubert for the vice presidential nomination. I think that during the convention, I always thought that there was some hope for Hubert up to the time that Johnson was selected. I suppose that others with probably more political savvy than I may have been aware that it couldn't happen. Again, I was hardly in a position to be objective about it. I was sold on Hubert. Because I still had contact with the other people with whom I'd worked in the Humphrey campaign and among the Kennedy people there were those--I mean other than myself--who favored Hubert as the vice presidential nominee. I'd say that up until the end I suppose I still hoped.

STEWART: Could you describe what you did in the period right after the convention as far as getting things organized. I assume this is when some of the problems started to arise as to how the thing would be set up.

REEVES: During the convention, I guess the last day or so, it was indicated that Sarge Shriver would sort of be the liaison between the civil rights effort and the main campaign operation. So we had a meeting at which we worked out what was to be the general program and the placement of the various people in the program. It was at that time that it was agreed that I would travel with the candidate and sort of serve as the liaison between

his personal campaign staff and the other civil rights effort; and that Mrs. Lawson would set up a civil rights division in the campaign staff which would be headed by Mrs. Lawson; that Louis Martin would work with that operation and Charles Brown from Michigan (there were two or three other people to work in the national headquarters) and that our, of course, principal effort would be to do those things that would be designed to--one, we were concerned with getting out the Negro vote, as well as, of course, encouraging support for the senator.

Congressman Dawson was nominally the head of the operation. That was another interesting thing that occurred during the convention. There were those who felt, in view of the fact that I was the senator's principal aide in this area, that the position which Congressman Dawson had traditionally held, of being vice chairman of the national committee, should go to me. Well, I took the position that, since I was a member of the Democratic National Committee anyhow (which, in fact, Congressman Dawson wasn't; this was just a nominal position) and since it was certainly desirable that there be no indication of any break among any of the people who traditionally had been associated with the Negro effort in the Democratic party, that he should retain his position. I spoke to the senator and others about this and, after the executive committee had met and made the decision on the officers, I was very happy that they gave me the role of informing Congressman Dawson that he was to be reelected as vice chairman.

So that he was, of course, nominally the head of the national campaign effort insofar as the national committee structure of the campaign was concerned. My role was more a personal one in relation to the senator and his liaison to his personal campaign staff, of which I was a part, and the national committee campaign operation, in which the civil rights division was set up. So that I traveled with him, and then on some occasions I went out ahead of the party for the purpose of making contacts, overseeing that Negroes were included in the welcoming groups and the other arrangements that had to be made.

This gave rise to a very interesting experience. I'm sure that with everybody who was connected with the senator's campaign has indicated a role or a part in the famous Martin Luther King incident. What happened--what actually happened, as I know it--was that the senator was going to be in Florida, in Miami, and prior to--I think we had left New York to go to--in any event, prior to the time we went to Miami, arrangements had been made for me to stop off in Atlanta to talk with King because we were still trying to arrive at some conclusion as to exactly what role King would play in the campaign at that stage. As a consequence, when the presidential party left Miami to go back to New York, I left and went to Atlanta. In the interim, King had been arrested as a result of his participation in a demonstration in Atlanta. I didn't know this until I arrived in Atlanta. It was raining cats and dogs and I don't think I'd been in Atlanta more than once or twice before. When I called his office to check on the specific arrangement for my appointment with him, I learned for the first time that he was in jail. Well, I then called Wyatt T. Walker, who was at that time his personal assistant, and went out to his home. I rented a car at the

airport and drove out to his home and talked with him. It was agreed that I would go to the jail to see him.

So I went to the jail. It was very interesting because I had identified myself as an attorney from Washington, then I began to get the red carpet treatment. I don't know whether they assumed I was with the Justice Department or just what, but I had expected, certainly, not to get the cooperation that I did. At the time I got there he was being interviewed by some newspapermen, so I waited. After the interview then I was ushered in to see him and we talked. Among other things, of course, I asked him in light of this new development--being in jail--what, if anything, could we do, what did he want us to do to try to help him. He said, well, at that point, he was much concerned about his wife, so that anything that we might do to reassure her that he was all right he would certainly appreciate but that so far as he was concerned, there was no particular action that we could take.

I then went back to the airport and went on into New York and met with the senator and Bobby and Harris Wofford and some others and we discussed it. The first reaction, the first suggestion I made was that the senator himself would send a telegram to Coretta, Mrs. King, indicating his concern and interest and asking her if there was anything that he might do. I had to leave then to go to California in advance of his visit there. I got to California and I got a call from Harris Wofford saying the senator, instead of sending a telegram, had called Mrs. King, and then Bobby had interceded with the Georgia authorities to effect his release.

When this information hit California, it was just tremendous, as you remember, had a tremendous impact, and many people said it did more than anything else to influence Negro support for Kennedy in the election. As you can see, it was all sort of a chance thing. It really wasn't planned, as some have suggested, as a deliberate means of trying to evoke support for the senator, but arose out of the circumstances which I've indicated. He was--at least certainly I believe--sincerely motivated, not in terms of what it would mean to him votewise, but out of a sincere and honest concern for the Kings and what he might be able to do to help.

The other, I thought, rather significant thing that happened during the campaign which had some political--oh, let me go back. There was one incident that occurred during the convention that I'll always remember. I don't know whether you saw the recent article in Ebony by Carl Rowan?

STEWART: No.

REEVES: In the April issue of Ebony Carl Rowan did an article, and in that article is a picture of the senator and me in what apparently was an ice cream parlor. What happened--during the convention he had an appointment to talk to the California delegation. It was in a television studio out in the north side someplace in Los Angeles. Well, there was some mix-up in the time. In any event, we arrived early, and Nixon was still with them, so that we had to wait our time. While we were waiting, we went across

the street to a little hamburger joint. It was, of course, the senator and three or four other of his campaign aides, and, of course, the press and camera crews went with us. So we had, I think, a hot dog and a soda or something, and they were taking pictures and all. But the time came to go, and he reached in his pocket, and he said, "Oh, my goodness, Frank, you'll have to pay for this."

STEWART: That always was typical, I think, of him.

REEVES: I'll always remember this experience with him when I had to pay the check. The other significant and, I thought, important turning point in the campaign didn't so much involve him as it did Bobby. There came a time when he was going somewhere in the South, was going to make a major--I think it was Georgia, someplace. This had become a critical issue, as to what was going to be his position on the civil rights issue at that time. Louis Martin and Mrs. Lawson and I and the others who were interested had been going back and forth and back and forth and finally we had this showdown meeting with Bobby. The question came down and Bobby finally put it to us this bluntly and said, "All right," he said, "the question is whether you are prepared at this time to assure me that if he takes the position you advocate, the votes which the position will gain for him in the North and in the West, in areas where Negroes represent a significant portion of the population, will offset the votes that he'll lose." I was, I guess, the spokesman for this group at that time and I remember taking a deep breath and saying, "Yes." The decision was made. I think it must have been the University of Georgia. I remember he made this speech in which he made it perfectly clear that he was taking the same position there on civil rights that he was taking elsewhere. I thought that this was also an important and significant turning point in the campaign.

STEWART: Were you really that confident that it would be offset?

REEVES: I said I took a deep breath. [Laughter] As it turned out, apparently, we were right. But these things are so--when you consider a little thing can make such a big difference as is suggested with the Martin Luther King incident, I suppose any prediction that you make in a campaign on such an issue is merely an educated guess at best. You can't be sure that other things of apparent minor significance may turn out to be more important. During the campaign, I think that things generally on these issues as they arose went well for us. I think that his own personality was probably the most important thing that we had going for us because in almost every instance that I know of he succeeded in persuading and convincing people, without doing so directly, of his own honesty, his own sincerity, his own humaneness and this latter quality is one that, I think, was one of the most important qualities that he had, that personal contact with people--that he had this quality and it came out. It was impressive to people who had occasion to deal with him.

STEWART: Were you at all involved further during the campaign with the negotiations with Congressman Dawson? There were some problems,

as I understand, as to exactly what role he would--even after he was . . .

REEVES: Yes. I was involved, but I think the person who played the most significant role in that was probably Louis Martin, who during the campaign developed to be more and more the strong man in the national campaign staff operation. I know he had more to do with it than I did, because most of my time was spent on the road and very little here in national campaign headquarters and very little contact with Congressman Dawson directly.

STEWART: Were any of these--frankly, I don't know to what extent there were personal differences among the civil rights advisors, but in retrospect do you think any of them were serious enough to have had any significant impact on the course of the operation?

REEVES: Not really, because here again, of course, it's natural that there would be and that there were petty jealousies and jockeying for position. One of the things that I think helped to keep much of that down was his and Bobby's and Sarge Shriver's firmness in making it perfectly clear as to who was in what position, so that even though we sometimes had resentments and problems, I never felt. . . . I mean, although I suppose always the person who supposedly is nominal leader is the one that they're shooting at, but I always felt confident that I had his and Bobby's full support. As a result, it certainly didn't affect my doing my job or what I conceived as my job.

I think that the problems that we had. . . . Of course, we had problems about money, because in many of the areas the Negro campaign effort was thwarted and compromised by not having sufficient funds. We were faced with the problem then of trying to get funds for that effort from sources other than the regular local or state campaign funds and even from the national committee, so that the citizens' operation was important.

I've thought that another thing that was very helpful to us in the campaign was, for instance, I was included as a member of our so-called "flying circus," if you remember, that went around outside of the campaign. This represented a kind of attention or concern about the Negro vote that probably hadn't been emphasized to this extent in the previous campaigns. I think this was a plus for our side. There was always a willingness on his part, and, as a matter of fact, he was sincerely interested in meeting, among others, the Negro political leaders in every place we went, so that I didn't have a real difficulty in making arrangements for those meetings. I had his full cooperation for those meetings. I had his full cooperation. Because Bobby was operating here in Washington and I was operating on the plane with [Kenneth P.] Kenny O'Donnell and that crew, my own contact was not as much with Bobby as with him and with Kenny, Louis Martin, I guess, had more contact with Bobby because he was here in the national campaign headquarters. But I don't think that we had any real threat to the unity or the effectiveness of our effort by the differences that did arise and did occasionally crop out because

whenever they did, as I said, I felt confident and in retrospect feel that every time an issue got to him, he settled it the right way. There was no difficulty.

STEWART: This "flying circus," was this the. . . . I'm sorry, I thought I knew what you meant. Was that the crew of entertainers and athletes that . . .

REEVES: No.

STEWART: This was the Frank Thompson and Bobby . . .

REEVES: That's right. That was Bobby, Margaret Price, Byron White, [John H.] Bailey, [Lawrence F.] Larry O'Brien. This was the group that we set up. I think we had four regional meetings across the country and met with the campaign political leaders in these areas. No, the other was another operation.

STEWART: Were you involved in that? at all?

REEVES: Well, with Frank Montero and Lou Martin involved, yes, in getting it set up. Fortunately, I didn't--I say fortunately--I mean, I didn't actually travel with that group. That was another . . .

STEWART: Whose idea was that or how did that come up? Do you know?

REEVES: I think that probably Louis Martin and Frank Montero in New York were probably the prime movers in getting that operation together. As I said, that was something that was being done out of the national headquarters, and I didn't have an active role in that, so that I can't speak with any authority about it.

STEWART: You, I assume, were seeing the president daily. You were traveling. . . . Just as a sort of a little side light, throughout the whole campaign, what things did you say especially irritated him as far as his day-to-day activities were concerned? I've always heard so much about President Kennedy's supposed temper and his sharpness with people on occasions. Did you see much of this?

REEVES: I saw some of it. I don't now recall that it was something that particularly impressed me. He would become irritated when he ran into the snafus which I, having participated in sort of a similar role in previous campaigns, I guess, was more accustomed to than he and some of the others who were working with him. I was trying to recall some specific instances of this point, but my memory doesn't serve me. But as I said, I do recall that there were because, on the other hand, I was impressed again and during the campaign with his good humor, which served us all well because everybody was tired and I guess our nerves were frayed. And yet when he was around, when we reached these places where we would stay overnight and that type of thing, he usually gave all of us sort of a lift by his own good humor or some incident that would arise that he'd turn into a joke and give us all

a laugh. As I said, I can't recall now that I was particularly impressed by these evidences or indications of bad temper that you mentioned. As I say, I can't say there weren't and probably there were.

STEWART: Did you have much contact with reporters and members of the press?

REEVES: Yes.

STEWART: Do you recall any problems or any significant incidents as far as these were concerned?

REEVES: Well, for one thing, the reporters were constantly taken off guard. One of the biggest problems that we had with Kennedy was keeping him on schedule and getting him to adhere to the schedule that had been planned. This meant that many times the reporters were caught short when changes would be made and their plans were upset. This caused some problems. Other than that, [Pierre] Salinger and [Andrew] Hatcher were traveling with us, one or the other of them or both of them most of the time, so I didn't have any responsibility in this area. Here again I just don't recall the particular problems except, as I said, the fact that, not only they, but all of us sometimes were caught off guard by changes or by his staying longer at one place than he was supposed to stay and therefore creating a problem of keeping up with meetings on the balance of schedule.

STEWART: We are running to the end of this. . . .

STEWART: Just let me ask you a few general questions. There was nothing else significant as far as the press was concerned? Were there any guidelines or anything that Salinger laid down as far as talking to members of the press?

REEVES: No. Not that I remember, at least not. . . . Well, no, not that I remember. One thing that was interesting and of some concern and that was that for a time we were concerned with the lack of coverage by the Negro press. So that an arrangement was then made for a pool of representatives of the Negro press to travel with the regular press party. And I can remember one incident where--I think it was, my recollection was someplace in Texas--where we ran into a problem in terms of accommodations, and at the senator's direction the whole schedule was changed so that rather than the overnight stop that we'd contemplated, we went, the party--I think I had left the party at that time to go somewhere else, but I was called in on the things--the party didn't stay overnight. They got back on the plane and went back to New York rather than have this problem.

Then we had another incident which I thought was very significant in St. Louis. I went out with--I can't remember the guy from upstate New York, a Vince? Anyhow, we went out to do the advance on the presidential visit to St. Louis. And I was there first, and the usual procedure was to talk to the local people, you know, about arrangements and, you know, contact them

with Bobby and the plane if it was not somewhere in the field. And so it got down to the night before, the evening before they were to arrive, and Nixon had just been there. And we found out that at the hotel where the presidential party was to stay there had--someone in the Negro community brought it to my attention that there had been an incident within a few days prior to that involving . . . [Interruption]

What happened was that, as I said, I think, as I remember it was Jackie Robinson who had had some problem with this hotel about his staying there. And Nixon was to follow us in St. Louis, and apparently he was going to stay at the same hotels, so that the local Negroes were putting the pressure on in terms of how we were going to handle this. So we finally--we called the hotel management and they said well, that there are two hotels together owned by the same people. They said their arrangements were that they wouldn't accommodate the Negro members of the president's party, but they would be accommodated in the hotel next door.

Well, we knew that this would create problems. So I think it was the evening before we were to move when Vince asked me what I wanted to do about this, and I said, "Vince, we just can't, we can't do this." So we called Bobby, and I remember Bobby's explosion over the telephone and, okay, he would call us back in a few minutes. And so he called back and told us, "Well, okay, tell so and so that under the circumstances we'll just withdraw the whole party from the hotel and find other accommodations for it." Well, you can imagine, I imagine the party must have been a hundred or more, including the press. So we started calling other hotels to see about making arrangements in the interim.

The owner of the hotel, who was out of the city, apparently got wind of this, that we called that we were going to have to cancel. So he called, and Vince put him on the phone to talk to me, and he said it had been a mistake and that there'd been a change in their policy and everybody would be accommodated, you know, in the same hotel and all, so we said, "Well, now look, we're not, we can't accept this on the basis that you're making this exception just for the Kennedy party. We're going to have to have coupled with this a public statement as to the change in policy." Well, he agreed. And we thought that this was a significant breakthrough that we were able to accomplish because, again, the president, the senator and Bobby stood behind us on this. So I thought that was a significant incident.

I guess, at least, I don't think now of any other particular things that happened, but, as I said, there was a consistent policy that the presidential party would not stay anywhere where there would be any discrimination against any of the people in the party. And everybody was included in everything that concerned us. This is the way in which the candidate was elected.

STEWART: Do you recall getting involved in any local political situation that caused any major problem, as far as, for example, certain members of certain factions being on the platform with the candidate

or not being on the platform, this type of thing?

REEVES: Oh, we had some of that. I guess the fight between the pre-convention Kennedyites and postconvention Kennedyites, as to, you know, whether the post people would be left out or whether they were going to be included. We had some situations where it had never happened before, but we insisted and they gave way to our insistence about including Negroes in the delegations, in the welcoming delegations, the platform guests, that type of thing. As I said, in every instance that I know of, Bobby and the others who were heading the campaign dissolved the order and, as I said, on this issue of including pre- and post-Kennedyites they to. . . . A lot of that arose because there were those who were prepared to support Kennedy but who were not prepared to support him as a part of the regular Democratic organization. Well, this is where Byron White's operation was important, the citizens groups. And so far as I can remember, we were able to work it out satisfactorily, which is relevant.

STEWART: Did the fact of Johnson on the ticket present any real problems in your discussions with local people?

REEVES: No, because, interestingly enough, Johnson's own statements and activities during the campaign did a great deal to overcome opposition that had previously existed to him, existed to him up to and including the time of the convention. And as the campaign went on, as I said before, it reached the point where in Detroit, Cleveland, New York, other northern areas where we had been, where it was sort of predetermined Johnson would stay out of, they were asking for him. Of course, it wasn't always possible because of his other commitments to make arrangements for him to go in. But it was certainly different from the '52 campaign when I was, you know, operating in similar role with [Adlai E.] Stevenson. And we agreed early in the campaign, as a result of our experience, that we just didn't mention [John J.] Sparkman. The opposition to Johnson was certainly not like that we had in regard to Sparkman, even though at that time there were, you know, many more indications that Sparkman was a liberal than there were that Johnson was a liberal. But I know in New York, for instance, the strategy was just not to even mention Sparkman was on the ticket. Well, I don't think we had this problem with Johnson.

STEWART: What possible action by Nixon worried you or scared you? What did you think were the most vulnerable aspects of the Kennedy position, if any?

REEVES: Well, I remember that there was an indication at one point during the campaign that Nixon, some of his advisors, were attempting to persuade [Dwight D.] Eisenhower to fill a vacancy, to appoint [William H.] Hostie to a vacancy on the Supreme Court. Of course, all of us were for that. We were concerned as to what effect, what favorable effect that might have on the Nixon candidacy. The other thing was that unhappily, or happily for us, was that Nixon--not Nixon. Who was the vice presidential candidate?

STEWART: [Henry Cabot] Lodge.

REEVES: That Lodge play about a Negro in the cabinet. This, I think, helped us because Kennedy's position, I think, was more honest on that issue, and that one appeared to be so patently an effort to influence. And then when there developed the argument about it within the Republican ranks, I think that was helpful to us. I think that the Nixon people missed many an opportunity that could have caused us problems. By and large, I don't recall that they did cause us any problems because every time they had an opportunity, they muffed it. So I think we were the beneficiary of their mistakes in relation to the Negro area as much as we benefited from our own activity.

STEWART: Can you think of any examples of mistakes that they made or opportunities that they missed?

REEVES: Well, let's see. On the Martin Luther King thing, I'm told or understood that there were several of the Republican advisors who tried to persuade Nixon and [William P.] Rogers and those to intercede on King's behalf. When the decision was finally put to Rogers and Nixon, they decided against it. I think that because they were in a position of being the incumbents, they probably could have made some move or gesture which, in a sense, would have been more significant or meaningful than what we did.

It was also interesting that despite the fact that Martin Luther King and his father were both from Atlanta and the lift that we got from the Martin Luther King incident throughout the country, that the Republicans carried Atlanta. I went in there a couple of times, and I think that this was due largely to the fact that they had a much more effective organization than we did. The Negro Democrats in Atlanta were sort of split and didn't have effective organization. We couldn't get money, really, for them to operate effectively. And, on the other hand, the Republicans had done a very good job in that respect, and the Republicans got the majority of the Negro vote in Atlanta, despite the King incident.

STEWART: Who was Nixon's chief civil rights advisor? I don't recall.

REEVES: Well, I guess, Grant Reynolds, I think was operating . . . Who in the heck traveled? I can't remember who traveled with Nixon. I guess Morrow [E. Frederic] Fred Morrow, I think, as I remember, traveled with Nixon some of the time. Then, of course, they had a real pro on their national committee staff down in Washington at that time, a guy that was really good. I mean in experience. And then there's Goodman from North Carolina, faculty of North Carolina State fellow, who was very effective.

But as it developed and, of course, as is normally true in the situation, we had so much more to offer that I think that what happened is that faced with the comparable decision that we had to make and did make in relation to

the southern vote, I think the Republicans had about reached the conclusion that their best hope was, in the light of our positions to write off the Negro vote and to make the more direct appeal to the southern folk, which was the way it turned out. And so that I don't think we had, in this area, I don't think we had as great a problem as would have been true in regard to other matters insofar as the Nixon versus Kennedy campaign was concerned.

STEWART: What role did you have in setting up the meeting, the Council of Human Rights Meeting, here at Howard University?

REEVES: Well, I was involved in both the decision and the planning of the meeting. There was some concern that it couldn't be, that it should be nonpartisan, and we knew that the sentiment was strongly in our favor and so, of course, we had no difficulty in going along with this idea that it would be nonpartisan. The chairman of the meeting as it turned out was my law school classmate, Jim Robinson. I don't recall what was the reason why President [James, Jr.] Nabrit himself couldn't. . . . And at the meeting the sentiment just became pro-Kennedy. We had some logistics problems because on that same night we had another meeting scheduled--I think it was the night of one of the debates or it was the same night as one of the, of probably the first debate.

STEWART: Yes, probably was. . . . It was in October, it was early October.

REEVES: Yes, I think it was the night of the first debate. Well, there was some, some of the, you know, Kennedy campaign people felt that we couldn't do it. Well, here again, this is another time that I was able to get the President and he agreed with me to go forward. And as matters turned out, it was a tremendous success, and it was a tremendous lift that was even this little by-play between Kennedy and Clarence Mitchell Jr., who is now state senator of Maryland, in which the senator came off and, "What happened?" As we were about to leave Mitchell followed us, you know, asking him some very unfriendly questions. And fortunately students in the general group were so fired up and so pro-Kennedy that, you know, they almost, well, they physically, you know, moved him out, you know, but it turned out to be a great thing. And I think everybody was glad that we did it. And, of course, a valuable contribution to the success of it was Mrs. Kennedy, herself. She met us right outside this building as we came from across town, from the American University area where we had gone to the debate. And she met us and joined us over there at the chapel across the street for the meeting. It was one of the most successful things that was done despite the fact that it was supposedly nonpartisan. It turned out to be a huge pro-Kennedy demonstration which because of where it was and all proved to be very significant.

STEWART: What about the meeting in New York, the . . .

REEVES: Civil rights . . .

STEWART: The constitutional rights and American freedom conference [National Conference on Constitutional Rights and American Freedom].

REEVES: Right. Well, that too turned out to be very successful because, you know, it was the first time that the Negro, let's say the civil rights people, felt that they were being offered an opportunity to participate in the drafting of a program that would become a part of his program if elected. And we got wonderful participation, great interest, and I think this, too, helped persuade a lot of people of his sincerity.

STEWART: Were you fearful at this New York conference and at others that possibly the candidate would be pushed further into things than he could possibly deliver? I'm thinking, of course, specifically in terms of legislation.

REEVES: Well, my own position was that--I suppose it was a selfish one--but mainly that it was desirable he be pushed as far as we could because I knew that there were those who certainly took a much more hard-headed position and maybe more realistic position who were in some instances dragging their feet. But here again, what usually developed was when the issue got to him personally, nine times out of ten of them he resolved them in the direction I was anxious to see them go. And so that with whatever. . . . I didn't have any fears that he was going to be pushed too far. I was just hopeful that we could keep him moving in the direction that he was going. And this on the basis of his own decisions.

STEWART: But did the whole subject of whether he could deliver on all this, was this discussed at all or to any great extent?

REEVES: Well, I think it was discussed. I mean I know it was discussed. But here again the question was whether we could well, whether it was better for him to take a position on these issues and then if he was unable to deliver, it could be clearly shown that it wasn't because of him but rather because of the unwillingness or the reluctance of Congress to go along. And I think in this respect we were hopeful that we would get the kind of support and assistance that we felt Johnson could give with Congress in putting through many of these things. There were some of us who felt that part of our problem was a willingness or an unwillingness on the part of others to take a position on these things, and that we felt, therefore, that his approach to many of these things like the constitutional rights meeting in New York was to refer the product of the meeting to a group of advisors to draft, you know, proposals and positions. So that his willingness to go that far without necessarily committing himself in advance to any particular position gave us sort of a safety valve because the people to whom he, well, he asked to prepare these drafts were--and this was the area in which Wofford operated more directly than I did, but at least my impression was that the hope or feeling was that by giving the civil rights people an opportunity to be heard and to say what they wanted without his necessarily making a commitment in advance was something more than anybody else had done because usually the procedure had been to decide what it was that was best and then tell the people. We felt that this was a fortunate, favorable switch to do it the other way, to give them the opportunity to say what they wanted, and to get it

off their chest without necessarily making a commitment but at least saying that these views will be given consideration. And I think it worked out successfully.

STEWART: Were you at all involved--I don't know, you mentioned at the start that you were active in the ADA. Were you at all involved with the problems they had over an endorsement from that organization?

REEVES: No. No, because by that time I was so involved in this other thing that my activities in ADA were very limited.

STEWART: In terms of the roles of individuals, how would you assess, for example, Mr. Powell's role in the whole campaign? Or did you have any contacts with him?

REEVES: Oh, yes. As a matter of fact, I went with him on part of that barnstorming tour that he took across the country in Kennedy and Johnson's behalf. And I think it was effective. Adam, you know, has a certain charisma and a certain ability to evoke emotional support. [Interruption] And I, let's see, I think I was with Adam in Cleveland. I was with him in San Francisco--Los Angeles, I mean. And, as I said, he was a crowd gatherer, pleased the crowds, and of course, it was in California--that was it--that we picked up two things: the Nixon covenant which Adam made a great deal of and the Martin Luther King thing. Adam used that in California. And, of course, he was able to get as much out of these issues or more than anybody else probably could have, and he used both very effectively. And I think that he did play a role because, you know, the difficulty with the Negro vote is that it's often. . . . Well, you just don't know before the actual election as to what's going to happen because the lines of communication aren't as, you know, well established as they are with the voter at large. So that even though you may appear to have support, as I said, you really can't tell until the vote's actually counted. And there also is a sizeable proportion of the Negro vote--certainly at that time, I hope to a lesser degree now--that is influenced on an emotional basis. And in that area, certainly Powell would be and was helpful.

STEWART: Was there any reluctance on the part of anyone about his involvement?

REEVES: Oh, there were some who were concerned as to whether he might do us some harm, but here again I think that this was overcome, but we had some problems about the arrangements in connection with the Powell tour. And there were some places that felt they couldn't have him, but as it turned out, we worked out a schedule which was satisfactory to everybody. I'm certain that he did as good in the places where he actually went, and these, of course, were the major Negro population centers across the country.

STEWART: I've heard it charged or said that a number of people in the Kennedy organization were somewhat naive about the way in which Negro people generally reacted to various political situations and. . . .

REEVES: I'm sure that's true. I'm sure there were a lot of people . . .

STEWART: Can you think of any examples of this, would you . . .

REEVES: As I've said, I think there are a lot of people in the Kennedy organization, like Kennedy himself, you know, just had not had contact and just didn't know. Not that they were opposed, but who just couldn't understand or didn't understand the way this, you know, the Negro mind--if you characterize that--worked and operated, and felt that, well, the presence or participation of Negroes as members of his campaign staff as such, there was some who, you know, who didn't see the necessity for this, who didn't realize that there was a certain symbolism that had a meaning to the Negro who normally felt that he was left out and that to see a Negro present and apparently active in some role other than a menial role in the campaign operation.

So that to that extent, I think that, for instance, Hatcher's and my presence was--I mean there were some people in the campaign who, you know, questioned its value. There were others, I think, who were prepared to accept it and who, you know, who went along. As for specific illustrations, that would be difficult. But I can't say that it was, you know, there was unanimous agreement on all of the things. I mean there were some, for instance, who had real misgivings about the position which we took about the subject, what we felt, that Kennedy did have a residual movement of good will and support from the southerners that possibly he could lose or did lose as a result of the positions which he took, who felt that too much time and attention was being devoted to a vote which they felt had to go for Kennedy anyhow. It had no place else to go. I don't think that even this was a matter of a lack of sympathy or lack of support for the Negro and civil rights cause, but rather to many of them it was just a matter of political expediency.

STEWART: Moving on then--it's getting late--after the inauguration or after the election what did you do?

REEVES: After the election, between the election and inauguration, I came back to Washington, and then I went up to Hyannis Port, I think, on two occasions for meetings with the people there. I was informed that I was one of a group of eleven, I think it was, who were cleared by the FBI [Federal Bureau of Investigation] for positions in the administration. And then I had a call from Larry O'Brien, went down to the Mayflower Hotel where he was staying to see him on, I guess, one Sunday morning in which he informed me that it had been decided to nominate me for judge of the United States District Court here in Washington, which would have been the first Negro appointed to the district court, judgeship, in the continental United States. And, of course, I was very proud and happy about this, but then there developed a situation in the Washington delegation where, although we had originally committed ourselves to a Negro commissioner, there was some question as to whether that was going to happen and, consequently, I . . . [Interruption]

So I then went back to Larry and took the position that I would prefer to be a candidate for D.C. commissioner because I felt that I owed this to the people in the District who were projecting me by making me the national committeeman and all who had represented my base of support. And, as a consequence, immediately after his nomination, the word leaked that I was to be nominated for district commissioner, and this was on the day before the vote on the rules change in the Congress. So when . . .

STEWART: It was to be chairman, wasn't it?

REEVES: That's right. So that when this hit the fan, apparently there was a great uproar, and Ralph Dungan called me back to postpone my appointment to the D. C. commission; it could mean the necessary votes for the rules change. And it was then agreed that instead of being nominated for the commissionership that I be appointed as special assistant to the president, which, of course, for me was a preference anyhow. I preferred to be in the White House. So this is as it turned out, and Harris Wofford and I went in as special assistant assigned. . . . Well, my role was dual. It was both in terms of race relations, civil rights matters, as well as in connection with the District of Columbia. And this was, of course, where I stayed until the time came for the ill-fated nomination for the commissionership in July.

STEWART: Of '61.

REEVES: Sixty-one.

STEWART: Is there anything significant about your work during those six months that you were. . . .

REEVES: Well, yes. I mean, one of the things that the whole operation there was sort of on the basis that you did as much or you went as far as you wanted to, until you got into difficulty. And, of course, on this basis, I was running as fast as I could to try to get some things done. I think that I was largely responsible for the order that went out desegregating all government facilities and employee organizations. What happened is Fred. . . . Fred? California.

STEWART: [Frederick G.] Dutton?

REEVES: Fred Dutton and I. . . . An order had been issued in connection with another matter, but the basis for it was, you know, the use of government facilities could only be, had to be on--I think this was an order on politics, political basis, nonpartisan basis, so we were able to take that and use that as a basis for getting through the order on non-segregation in employee organizations.

The other thing in which I played a part was the Coast Guard. The president on inauguration day had made a comment about his concern about the fact that there didn't appear to be equal representation. I worked with Fred Dutton on that.

The other was, as I said, primarily during that period I was involved in effecting Negro appointments to positions in the government, in opening up, for instance, Internal Revenue Service, and in the initial implementation of the nondiscrimination order in government employment. That was probably in those two areas where I played, spent most of my time. I was concerned with the decision that the president would not press at that time for additional civil rights legislation because this was sort of a promise or at least a hope that Negroes had. I couldn't and wouldn't participate in trying to explain or justify it, which created some friction between me and some of the other people in the White House who felt that I had that obligation. I felt that if I did that, that whatever effectiveness I might have in dealing with the Negro groups would be in danger.

I think the most important role that I played during that period was providing an ear within the White House and on the White House staff for the Negro organizations and others who wanted to feel at least that their problems and complaints were receiving consideration. And so that here again, I spent a great deal of my time listening to or talking to or going to meet people where, you know, questions had arisen or were arising, both with respect to appointments and the implementation of the antidiscrimination program. Here again, by and large, I got excellent cooperation and assistance from the other people on the White House staff. I saw very little of the president during this time. He didn't call; we didn't have staff meetings as such. If there was something you had as an individual, you'd get word to him through someone. A whole lot of people had a finger in this civil rights area during that time: [Richard N. ] Dick Goodwin.

STEWART: Lee White.

REEVES: Lee White, Fred Dutton, Sarge Shriver. So that there wasn't any one person who dealt with that particular matter. And then leading up to the time when I was nominated again for the D.C. commissionership, which I say, I didn't want, I would have preferred to stay where I was in the White House. But the feeling, as expressed to me at that time, was that it had always been the president's desire and intention that there'd be someone on the Board of Commissioners of the District of Columbia in whom they had sufficient confidence that was, you know, dedicated to the president so that they would not have to be bothered with the District of Columbia as such and that the idea was that even then, although Walter Tobriner was president of the board, was that he would serve out the balance of the year as president and then I would be come president of the board.

And I suppose, you know, then the history of this other thing that, then the tax thing came up and the others that. . . . I don't know to what extent it was ever discussed with the president, but those around him sort of panicked, and despite the fact that later that day Hubert Humphrey informed us that he and [Hale] Boggs and Carl Albert and [George A.] Smathers had met and were satisfied that they could get my confirmation through on party lines, through a party line vote, the decision had already been made.

My last direct contact with the president was after that. I insisted that I wasn't going to leave until I talked to him. So it was arranged after three or four days, I guess. And I went up to see him in his suite at the White House. He expressed, you know, how sorry he was that this had happened and

that he certainly didn't intend or expect that it should be the end of my participation in his administration and that give it a few months for the furor to die down and that then he would by some act, you know, indicate his continued faith and confidence in me, and we would pick up where we left off. And he called Kenny O'Donnell from upstairs on the phone and told Kenny substantially the same thing, that in the interim he wanted Kenny to do whatever he could to help me and that it was to be understood that I would have and should have access to him whenever I wanted it to ask anything. And that I think was the last time, I'm sure it's the last time I talked to him and saw him personally until. . . . Was it--it was October, wasn't it? No. A year later.

STEWART. No, that would have still been in '61. Two years.

REEVES: Sixty-one. It wasn't until '63.

STEWART: Yes.

REEVES: Let me see, I . . .

BEGIN SIDE II TAPE II

REEVES: . . . had seen him once or twice after that but only on real formal occasions. Not to talk to him. And then when that happened, I was called to the White House, and we went down, you know, for the private viewing and all, by Bobby. I have a note I got from Bobby at that time.

Well, in the interim, I continued to do some things with the national committee and with Bobby and various people in the administration as a citizen, an outsider, and not in the administration. And I certainly felt a personal loss, both in terms of loss of a friend, a great man, but, I suppose, even more selfishly that other things may have happened with me had he not. . . .

And I remember the date that he was killed. My wife and I had an appointment for an interview in connection with the admission, application for admission, of our daughter to the Cathedral School where Luci Johnson was enrolled at the time, and just as we were about to get there, the news came over the radio in the car and, as I say, I couldn't restrain tears. We stopped the car, and we went in, and the woman with whom we were to have the interview sent word that she was so overcome and she knew that we would be because of our relationship that we postponed the interview to another time. And then a photographer from California sent me a picture that he had taken that I didn't know existed of the president, which--I have it; I guess I have it at home--that is, you know, it is just a wonderful thing to have, and I'm very grateful to have it.

We had some other moments that would be interesting. On one of the occasions I went up to Hyannis Port, and everybody was going in swimming, and I hadn't brought any bathing trunks. They sent me down to the locker room, and the only pair of bathing runks I found fit me belonged to his father. I remember he always got a laugh out of me in Joe's swimming trunks.

I remember the night of the nomination, I guess it was, when my wife had to sit in the box with Ethel Kennedy and the kids and her experience. She said when she got to the box and saw all those children, she was a little taken aback.

And then there was the occasion when she arranged for his attendance at a luncheon of her sorority here in Washington. That was the first time, again, that a president honored--well, she had him for the lunch and she had Vice President Johnson for the reception--and they said it was the first occasion that a president of the United States had honored a Negro fraternal sorority group by participating. And she has a note that he scribbled while they were sitting there, both apparently preparing their remarks on the back of his program, and he wrote this note from one author to another or something that was very interesting.

I don't know, I'm sure there are a lot of things I don't remember. But, as I said, of everything that I gained in the experience and contact with him, I suppose the most lasting and the strongest impression was his humaneness: real, honest concern with people. And this quality to me overshadowed all the others. And it's a quality which, in a sense at least, overtly distinguishes him from Bobby. Not that Bob--Bobby may have it, but at least the manifestation of it doesn't come through. And yet he could be tough. I had, you know, occasion to see him.

I also remember my wife and I were at a White House function on the night the Cuban missile crisis arose. And I remember I parked my car in the space that was allotted to me over in West Executive Avenue, and so he left I remember his leaving early. And when we came through the executive wing of the White House, there he was with Ted and others of his staff, still in his formal clothes, and I of course, didn't realize until the next morning what it was all about, but this was after eleven o'clock at night.

But, as I said, above everything else, the real impression that I have in this is that I sort of went back and I gather it must have been a part of the impression I got on that first meeting. It was his sincere and honest interest in people, which, I suppose, is the reason why you got the reciprocal reaction on the part of people all over the world toward him. Because he had it.

Well, the first occasion I went to Hyannis Port was to meet with him, and he met with Tom Mboya from Kenya. And I remember--well, previous to that he had made a talk here in Washington at a meeting in which he had expressed then his sincere interest in Africa, in emerging nations, and his desire to help them. And his discussion with Mboya was in furtherance of this. And here again, after the conversation Mboya was just tremendously impressed by his sincerity, his honest, and his concern for the people of Kenya and the people of Africa.

STEWART: Okay, well, if you . . .

END OF INTERVIEW