

Herbert Tucker, Oral History Interview – JFK#1, 03/09/67
Administrative Information

Creator: Herbert Tucker

Interviewer: John Stewart

Date of Interview: March 9, 1967

Place of Interview: Boston, Massachusetts

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Biographical Note

Tucker was assistant attorney general of Massachusetts from 1959 to 1968; chairman of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) Boston chapter; and a worker in John F. Kennedy's (JFK) Senate campaigns 1952 in and 1958, and presidential campaign in 1960. In this interview, Tucker discusses his work promoting JFK's senate and presidential candidacy with African American voters, JFK's relationship with civil rights leaders and record on civil rights, and Tucker's trip to Gabon on behalf of the Kennedy administration, among other issues.

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Of

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Papers relating to Herbert E. Tucker's activities during the Presidential Campaign of 1960 and an Oral History interview conducted for the Kennedy Library in 1967.
Less than 1 cubic foot.

Herbert Tucker – JFK#1

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Oral History Interview

with

ER
HERBERT TUCKER

March 9, 1967
Boston, Massachusetts

by John Stewart

For the John F. Kennedy Library

STEWART: Mr. Tucker, when did you first meet John Kennedy?

TUCKER: I first met John Kennedy when I was the chairman of the executive committee of the Boston branch of the NAACP [National Association for the Advancement of Colored People] back in 1948. At the same time I was also working my way up in my college fraternity, and at that time I was the regional director of the fraternity in a sense, and from both of those organizations we formed a relationship--

actually I had taken a personal liking to the man as an individual at that time and knew that from my connection with these two organizations I could give him a platform, first of all because up to that time he had had little or no contact with the Negro constituency.

His district which he represented as a Congressman probably had less than ~~one~~ ^{one} percent Negro vote, and he had nobody to whom he could turn. And I think he also took this as an opportunity, not only to establish what I thought was a very fine relationship, but to give him a platform to speak on intergroup relations as he wanted to do.

STEWART: You knew him then in 1948. I assume he, of course, was thinking at that time of a statewide campaign either for governor or senator.

TUCKER: Well, I would assume so, knowing the individual as I thought I did, and he planned far ahead. If you remember, he ran for Congress twice, I believe it was, and then for United States

Senator in 1952. So it was ³withing that period ^{looking} that he probably was ~~working~~ toward a state-wide office.

STEWART: How would you assess his interest at that time in the whole problem of civil rights and inter-group relations?

TUCKER: I felt that he had a moral conviction withing himself. I didn't think that he was making, if I may use the vernacular, political hay out of the situation. I think that he felt morally that the minority had been denied opportunity, and he wanted to learn something more about the denial of this opportunity, become acquainted with individuals so that he could assess for himself using his favorite term "so he could make^e a judgment".

STEWART: What contacts did you have, if any, with him in the 1952 campaign?

TUCKER: Well, I was in 1952, he asked me and one Elwood McKennedy, who is now a judge ^{now} in the city of Boston, to draft a paper for him

for use in the 1952 campaign dealing with minority problems. That was my first political contact. Prior to that time it was just through these organizations. In fact, as an aside, he still, I don't know whether it's he or his estate owes me two dollars. [laughs] He took a membership in the NAACP and as was his custom, he never carried much money with him, and he didn't have two dollars. So, "Herb, would you pay the two dollars for me, and I'll give it to you some time." And I have yet to see the two dollars.

STEWART: In that 1952 campaign were there any significant differences from a Negro point of view between [Henry Cabot] Lodge and Kennedy?

TUCKER: Well, you've got to, I think, again look at it again from a political point of view; That was most of the people in Boston actually were, even though they were of the Negro minority, they had always leaned toward the Republican Party. It was a sentimental gesture in so far as Henry

Cabot Lodge was concerned, and here was a new comer about whom few people knew anything ^{and} and it was a matter of, actually I think, distrust at first. In fact, I found ^{that} this so-called distrust grew to enormous proportions in later years as I worked with him. We can go into that later, if you wish.

STEWART: That's interesting, this distrust at this early date ^{in '52}. What was that based on? Generally his impression as the son of a rich man and so forth?

TUCKER: Mainly because he had had no contact, had made no effort to have any contact with Negroes ^{and} and seemed to be impervious to the problems. I'm not sure that it was because he had a just certain amount of wealth. He had no contact. I mean, he came in here practically to run for office as a student. He had been all over, living all over the world, going to school with his father and so forth. And so his contact was nil. ^{Adn} so I think the distrust was based

upon taking the known, as I might put it, against the unknown. And there were just a few of us who had enough faith in him as an individual and could see through this sort of thing, that once he became familiar with the problem, ^{that we} were sure that something could be done about it.

STEWART: Did he campaign to any great extent in the predominantly Negro wards of Boston?

TUCKER: He didn't have to. That's what I'm saying. His constituency had no . . .

STEWART: I mean as a Senator, I'm sorry.

TUCKER: Oh, as a Senator. In 1952 he did campaign extensively in the Negro areas because I accompanied him many times as he went there. I don't know how familiar you are with Boston, but it's grown somewhat now, but in 1952 the Negro population of Boston was relatively small. Even now the voting population is only ² ~~two~~ percent of the ~~retire~~ ~~city~~ state. So I would say in '52 ⁷ since the population grew ^{area} in that ~~part~~ ^{person} it was very small. So it was

a very small factor. And that's another important factor to attribute, too, because the Negro, as such, as a block could have no affect one way or the other, even as to controlling whom would be or carrying the balance. It was really a negligible factor in any campaign. So I say, ^{that} by actively campaigning there was another feeling of sincerity on my part in so far as he was concerned of really feeling this problem and wanting to do something about it with no previous knowledge.

STEWART: What contact did you have with him between 1952 and 1958?

TUCKER: Well, I was a member and I had to introduce him a couple of times at two or three affairs. One of which I remember he was coming from Worcester, and it was in the winter time, and they had a storm and he was delayed for forty-five minutes, and I had to spend forty-five minutes thinking of introductory remarks and finally somebody tapped me on the shoulder and

said, "He's here, he's here." But aside from those occasions I was instrumental in getting the Foundation, the Kennedy Foundation, through him to make a sizeable contribution to the the Freedom House, Inc. which was a civic center here in Boston, and take a very deep interest in it. I was a member of his finance committee in both campaigns. And was called upon many times to render various services. I can't think now. . . . [interruption] [telephone call, resumes] I forget what I was talking about.

STEWART: You were talking about the extent of your contacts with him in the interim of the campaigns.

TUCKER: Oh, and then on many times he would call me to see if I could ascertain the feeling in the community about various problems with which he might have been faced. I know on one occasion particularly we had quite a squabble here in the state Democratic committee; the [John W.] McCormack forces versus the Kennedy forces.

And there was one vote splitting them and he didn't know this individual who was a member of the state committee, and he thought that I might have some influence with her, and he called me to see if I could persuade her to vote the Kennedy way. And as it turned out she did because of me more than because of him, because she was also one of the distrusting things, but the vote turned out fourteen to thirteen and he was successful. So I think he was grateful for that also. But there were innumerable times that he would call and ask me to come over to 122 and sit down and talk with him generally about the problems, particularly the problems that involved the Negro minority.

STEWART: Did you see any discernible change in his attitude or ^{his} awareness of problems of the significance of ~~the~~ Negro people generally politically during this period?

TUCKER: No. No, that didn't begin to show in any

discernible fashion^o or any marked discernible fashion until probably '56, '57, somewhere in there. He was very cautious about it. Yet as you probably can recall that in those times of '51 and '52^s much more so than it is now^s most liberals were very cautious as to how far they were going to take a stand on some of these problems^s and he followed into that pattern. He was always concerned about the results of any action that he took. I can^r recall in 1959 when he called me to Washington and he sat in that rocking chair of his^s and he wondered then. If you remember^s [Lyndon B.] Johnson had just been successful in getting the⁷⁻⁷ ~~now~~ just, but the year or so before⁷⁻⁷ the 1957 Civil Rights Bill through^s and he wanted to know how I felt on its impact on the Negro population of the country. He must have been thinking about something. I'm sure he was, of course, but he was thinking of the results

of this, how it was going to affect, and what steps he ought to take.

STEWART: Were you consulted at all on the stand he would take on the 1957 Civil Rights Bill?

TUCKER: Well, that's when we, I suppose you would say, I was critical, that's when I was very critical because at that time I was president of the Boston branch and ⁱⁿ my capacity as president we had to criticize him for the stand that he did take in 1957. I'm not sure of the Title now, I think it was Title IV ~~at~~ that; I'm not sure either Title III or Title IV; I'm not sure which . . .

STEWART: I think III was something else.

TUCKER: for the stand that he took on that, and as a result of that he sent [Theodore] Ted Sorenson up here to talk with me, and I arranged a meeting so Ted -- of course, there's a difference.

Emery I still felt the way I did about him as an individual, but being head of the organization any criticism had to come as president of the

organization. So I arranged a forum for Ted Sorenson to come here and try to explain his position. And as I recall without going into too much detail ^{that} most of the people were satisfied with the way he explained it. ^{But} I should say cautiously satisfied [?] because [?] as I found out later [?] we were still having problems trying to convince the entire population of the country as we went around the country that this man meant what he said and ~~intended~~ intended to do something about it. ^{this}

STEWART:

Do you recall the substance, [?] or ^{the} main thrust of the explanation? Was it basically ^{at} because of the advice ~~he~~ he had gotten from the people at Harvard Law School and other people? Was it based on these Constitutional grounds?

TUCKER:

It was and now that you bring it to my attention, ~~He~~ he did seek the advice of certain members of the faculty out there whose names slip me now, and I know the members ^{that} he would have talked with, and I'm not sure at that time whether he talked with

Mark Howe³ or Arthur Sutherland, or Dean [Erwin]^{N_o} Griswold, whom he ~~used~~ used³ to many times to talk with, but I do recall saying hwo they felt about the Constitutional questions involved and that his opinion was *guided* by their opinion.

STEWART: Then you personally were quite satisfied with his explanations and his . . .

TUCKER: Well, because I had such ^{personal} admiration for the individual³ I suppose ^{unlike} the other people who hadn't had the opportunity to see him and under the circumstances that I had seen him³ I suppose.

STEWART: ^A Was Belford ^wLaxson actively advising him at this time?

TUCKER: No.

STEWART: He wasn't?

TUCKER: No, I don't think Belford came into the picture until early 1958 or ~~was~~ late '57 when he ran for Senator the second time and we all³ knew that at that time he was actually running for the presidency of the United ⁺States. Well,

I think that's when Belford ^{just} actually came into the picture. In fact, he bowed out as far as I know. His wife took over most of ^{the} his duties that he would have been. . . . It was Marjorie ^{Lansing} and I who worked very closely ^{together for} that whole year of 1958, and then again during the presidential campaign. Saw very little ^{of} any of Belford.

STEWART: Well, then ³ during the 1958 senatorial campaign than I assume you were an active member of the campaign.

TUCKER: Yes. I had the title of ³ the Associate Director of the Civil Rights ³ section of the campaign.

STEWART: Were you successful in getting through to people why he had voted as he did on the '57 Civil Rights ^B Bill?

TUCKER: Well, if I were to say ^{that} based upon the results of the election in the urban areas ^{where} the Negro vote counted ^S for something, I would say that we got our message across. I was sort of a trouble shooter in that campaign in that I had, of course, specific duties, but my main

job was to move about in any area that I ^{felt} ^{thought} there was a problem. ^{That} The decision was my own ^s and I was based in Washington four days a week and here three days, and I'd just take off whenever I thought there was a problem to talk with a group. In fact, as I recall how I got involved in this thing ^g, the state Democratic committee of Michigan was having its convention in Grand Rapids ^s and I got a call from Ted Sorenson ^e, say this afternoon, asking me how quickly I could get out to Grand Rapids. Naturally, I was curious as to why I had gotten this call out of the clear blue sky, and as it turned out I was to be exhibit number one-- "this is a Negro who has faith in Kennedy and should ² be able to sway the rest of you." ^o

STEWART: When was this now?

TUCKER: This was in, let's see, 1960 ^o this would be the year of the campaign. ^s In April of the ^{year of the} campaign, prior to the Convention. That would be 1960 ^s wouldn't it? So it would have been

was in April of 1960. This is going beyond, of course,
if I'm carrying you too fast, you bring me
back.

STEWART: No, that's all right.

TUCKER: But as I say I found out that actually I was
to be exhibit one --- here is a Negro who has
known Mr. Kennedy for a number of years
and can tell you just what type of individual
he was. And I can see now, as I look back, why
that was so important, because as I looked
around probably unlike many of the Democratic
state committees in the entire nation about
thirty per cent of the delegates were Negroes
and that was a very important convention. Go
out there and have something to say about the
individual and make sure ^{that} he was represented
particularly, I think [Stuart] Symington was
running at that time and, of course, Johnson,
and there were some there who were interested
in Johnson.

STEWART: How successful generally ~~at th~~ were you at that convention?

TUCKER: Following that convention after I made my report and stated that I had thought I had made some inroads but ~~that~~ they weren't definitive enough, a group of these people were invited to Washington, if you remember, you may or may not. A group they sent *the Caroline* out there for a group of these people whom were designated to come and talk further with him.

STEWART: Did they have a breakfast meeting ~~with~~ at his house?

TUCKER: I'm not sure where. I think it was at his house. I didn't go to that meeting myself. I didn't know about it until after it had happened. I just came back and made my report and then I heard some time later that these people had come.

STEWART: Going back if we could then to 1958 during that campaign was it generally recognized that

had
Kennedy had to get a sizeable support from the
Negro community in order to convince people
throughout the country that he did have the
support at home?

TUCKER: Yes. And in order to do that, to make sure
that he got at least his message across to
the Negro population or to a great segment
of it, we formed an organization called the
Massachusetts Citizens Committee on Minority
Rights, and sponsored a testimonial dinner
for him, expressly for the purpose again of
giving him a forum, and hoping the audience
would be ninety per cent Negro and directed
all out efforts in that vein. And we had
about six or seven hundred representatives
Negroes at this meeting. Now it could have
been that it was personal pride in a Massa-
chusetts son, or it could have been that we
were finally convinced them that this was
the type of man, because there was little problem
in Massachusetts after that meeting.

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STEWART: Was ~~like the~~ Mr. [Roy] Wilkins generally receptive by now?

TUCKER: No.

STEWART: Not at all?

TUCKER: No. You're talking about Roy Wilkins of the NAACP?

STEWART: Yes.

TUCKER: No. ² And if he was, he didn't make it publicly known; I'll put it that way. Maybe it was because of his being head of the NAACP and not wanting to be involved in politics, but I know Roy well enough ³ for him to take me off in the car and tell me how he felt, if he had any feelings, without involving the organization. But ^{for} ~~from~~ the many opportunities ^{that} he had ⁷, and knowing what I ² ~~was~~ ^{had been} engaged in, he never did make any such ^h suggestion ^{as to} support. And I was quite surprised to know that he was one of the first ones to go down there when he was finally elected.

STEWART: ~~STEWART~~ Moving on then, as the presidential campaign picked up in late 1959, early 1960 were you generally satisfied with the type of advice that Kennedy was ^{getting} ~~getting~~ on the approach to ~~the~~ Civil rights problem?

TUCKER: Yes, yes. He had -- you mean by best advice you're thinking of individuals, the make-up^{up} of the committee? I think that ^A Harris ^{Wof} Walford probably gave him the most vital piece of good advice during the campaign when he had him call Martin Luther King.

STEWART: Well, I was referring to the three campaign periods. During the primaries for example and a few months before that.

TUCKER: Well, if I were to put it that way I think ^{of} and I don't say this immodestly, but I think it was pretty narrow prior to that time. I think, again I say, that I was exhibit number one, and whatever advice I tried to give him, I think that's how he moved. I don't know anybody else who was advising ^{him}

at that time except maybe the Lawsons. And I think that they volunteered their services more or less than ^{having been} kind of sought out by him originally. Oh, and I should mention another name, Frank Reeves. I don't know whether you've talked with him. ^N Frak at the time was a national committeeman from the District of Columbia. But as far as I know there were just the three of us who were trying to steer him in this ^S course, the proper course.

STEWART: Do you recall any significant examples of things ^Z that you were advising him to do that he or members of his staff were opposing? Here again during the pre-Convention period?

TUCKER: ^{yes} Yes, ^{just} ~~just~~ one. During the Convention in Los Angeles we had been trying to actively participate on the national level in so far as ^{the} minority rights of minorities were concerned.

And I can recall very vividly my second meeting with ^[Robert F.] Bobby Kennedy. We were looking at the, -- what do you call it, ^Z the closed television

in the hotel?

STEWART: Yes.

TUCKER: And President Johnson was down in the press room. [tape off, resumed] [Interruptions]

STEWART: You were mentioning an incident at the Convention.

TUCKER: Yes. We picked up and were looking at a television and there was President Johnson down in the press room expounding on civil rights, and expressing the general notion that everybody ought ^{to} be given equal opportunity, and if he were given the chance what he was going to do, and so forth, and so on. Up to this point John Kennedy had ^{said} done nothing about civil rights in his attempting to get the votes at the Convention. So Frank Reeves, Harris Wofford and I drafted a document as fast as we could, and ran up to the fourteenth floor to see if we could see John Kennedy and tell him that we think it was about time that if this man from Texas

can say anything, I think it's about time that you ought to say something. And we drafted what we thought was a pretty good document, and of course, we had to go through Bobby. ^[ROBERT F. Kennedy] And I'll never forget his words. He looked at it, and he says, "I'm busy as hell. What do you think we're running a campaign for? Negroes alone?" And that was it. Now later on that was given to him and he, of course, put it in his own words and did make a statement before the nomination. Maybe we just got the younger Kennedy at a bad time. But I do remember that. Now whether, again, he meant that he was too busy at that particular moment, or there were other factors, they were still trying to get votes, we recognized that, or whether that was his feeling, or what. Certainly it wasn't shown later, particularly with Bobby. I mean, he was much more outspoken on this than John ever was. But that was, you say, "Did anybody disagree?" that

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was the first time and only time that anybody turned down any suggestion made by the section.

STEWART: Do you recall any significant voicing of opinion by civil rights people that Kennedy had courted favor with the Southern people to get votes at the Convention, or to get second ballot votes at the Convention?

TUCKER: Yes, this was at the NAACP convention in St. Paul, either St. Paul or Minneapolis, I can't remember St. Paul when it was suggested that I go out there and even though I was a delegate to the Convention to try to take some steps in persuading the individuals that this man was sincere in what he wanted to do for the minorities. And got a lot of disregard for, or disagreement with what I was trying to put across. So much so that we put in a hurried call for [R. Sargent] Sarge Shriver, who came out and was one of the most pleasant individuals you'd want to talk to, and with his very pleasant manner and working and

talking with these people sometimes ten and twelve hours a day. He slept in my room, so I know how hard he worked trying to persuade these people that I think ~~it~~ had some effect.

STEWART: But this definitely was a subject on many people's minds?

TUCKER: Yes, ²yes, yes. All through. I had the same similar situation when I was ^Sinstructed ^Tto go to Cleveland with Congressman [William L.] Dawson. ^{He was} ~~He was~~ going as the representative of the Democratic Party, the spokesman, and I was going as the spokesman for John Kennedy. And the general question was, at that time, ¹¹ this man hasn't done, nor has he said anything that would give you the impression that he favors equal opportunity, and how can you convince us that this is what he's going to do. ⁷¹¹ The only way I can explain it is because I've known the man ^{ey} (at that time) for some nine or ten years, and I know how he feels inwardly. ~~that~~ ^f He calculates all of his moves.

if this has to be interpreted as a political move, ^{Then} that's the way it has to be interpreted, but as an individual I can tell you how he will react when he is faced with these problems." And what I said to them turned out to be the fact.

STEWART: Did you have any role in any of the primaries?

TUCKER: No, I didn't. *No, I didn't, I had no role.*

STEWART: After the . . .

TUCKER: At that time I was just moving around from organization to organization. My job for, one of my jobs, for instance, the Masons -- in case you're not familiar with it -- are not supposed to engage in political activity in any way within the temple of the Masons, the Masonic Hall. ⁱⁿ And I can recall being holed up in a room in ^a St. Louis for four days while ^{from} waiting for the Supreme Council to try to act on a resolution which I had phrased as innocuously as possible, but working through ^{from} the outside to the inside trying to get this resolution.

room

And I was afraid to leave the hotel/to see what action they were going to take on it. Another time I had to go to the Baptist convention in Philadelphia. I don't know whether you recall that or not. There was a big squabble as to whether or not the Jackson forces or ^{on} there was another faction, they had a big fight at the convention hall. So much so that we were trying to get a resolution through there that the Baptist convention would endorse his presidency, and ^s of course, that was the religious issue again, and we had quite a lot of difficulty ^s particularly with their ~~own~~ disagreements getting to the violent stage.

And there again I was in the middle, but that was what I did mainly rather than going directly to the ~~poles~~ ^{poles}. I just traveled around from one convention to another for that eight or nine month period, and I must have gone to maybe fifteen of these darn things to see if I could get a resolution through ^s

personal in some instances, naming him by ^{NA} me,
and impersonal in other instances, trying to
get the principle of not turning this man
back because he's a Catholic ^{ey} (depending on
where I went, or not turning this man back
because he hasn't made the forthright statement
that you think that he ought to make, and that
sort of thing^g. All sorts of conventions.

STEWART: Did the civil rights and the religious
questions get quite intertangled at times?

TUCKER: Yes. Because in all Negro organizations, all
of them, I don't care whether it's the convention
of hairdressers, or whether its a convention of
^c SNIC [Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee] ^S
they're interested in equal opportunity. And
each of the organizations will give ^{as much} ~~enough~~
time to it, maybe on a different level or in
a different manner, but in back of every single
Negro organization in this country there is ^{the} a
question of civil rights, and we have to deal
with them.

STEWART: And how did the religious problem generally come in to the situation? Or did it to any great extent?

TUCKER: The only one that I went to was this Baptist national convention, and as I said they had an internal struggle there, and so much so that the president of it was booted off the stage, and he had to conduct his meeting in an anteroom off convention hall like this with so many people ^{and} that policemen there. However, even in that split organization we were able to get the resolution to him which ^{was} they acted upon favorably, and then he became one of the very strong supporters of President Kennedy later, and by virtue of his support they were able to get much support from the Baptists of ^B Negro Baptist organization which is the ^{R S} largest religious organization we have in the country.

STEWART: With in the civil rights division of ^r section it's been reported that there was a considerable amount of internal friction, ^A specifically among

Harris Wofford, Frank Reeves, Marjorie Lawson
and I assume Shriver and other people. Were
you aware and involved in any of these ///

TUCKER:

Well, if there was any friction I certainly
don't think it was because of any particular
policy. I think ^{that} it could have been. . . .
If there was now, I didn't recognize it, but
having been in politics for a long time I
know that there are many people who engage
in this so-called infighting because they
want to be the closest one to the candidate
~~or~~ whether they be successful or not is another
question, but they want to be the one closest.
In that sense there may have been. [I know
that Margie being a woman sometimes played her
feminine tricks on us, ~~exaggerating~~ and that sort
of thing,] but I don't think that it was over
any basic problem of policy. I think it was
more a matter of who was the leader, and why
couldn't I be the leader rather than you, and
that sort of thing, because I'm to be the one

that's ~~the nearest~~^{going to} be the closest. I had a distinct difference, or different position than most of them because I didn't want anything from him. All these people were looking for jobs. And of course, the more they did I suppose the more important they could be presumed to be, and probably be offered these types of jobs. And as I say, I went down there, decided I'd go to Los Angeles, so I didn't see all of this going on in the office. And in addition to that, I had made it very plain that I was just in it because of my personal admiration for this man, and I didn't want any job, and they knew that. Somewhat independent in a sense.

STEWART: Were you at all involved in the registration campaign, the very successful registration campaign that was conducted from Washington?

TUCKER: No.

STEWART: Not at all?

TUCKER: No.

STEWART: Because I think^k there was some relationship with the civil rights . . .

TUCKER: Well, there may have been . . .

STEWART: . . . at least a lot of the same people worked on it.

TUCKER: Well, there may have been a civil rights section that had about eight or nine people in it. [Marjorie was at least the titular head, she was the director. And I think this was when this came up because Harris, although he was a part of the civil rights ~~he didn't~~ had ~~have, the civil rights~~ section, he ~~didn't~~ no ~~have~~ a title. And I think it was to pacify Marjorie that they made her director, although they looked around and said we'll make you associate director.] And Frank Reeves was one of the few ^{who} ~~that~~ traveled with Kennedy. I don't think ~~he~~ ^(and) had any connection with the civil rights section at all. Frank, after the campaign really got going was in a sense the same as I was. He was exhibit one. I have to laugh

about this, but I missed the opportunity to
second his nomination, because, as Jack said,
"You're not instant enough" ^{of course} and what he was
telling me that too many people might not
know that you're Negro appearing on the
television ^{and} I won't get credit for it. So they
suggested that Frank Reeves do it, rather than
I. I would have liked nothing better; I was
quite disappointed. But Frank, getting back
to what I was saying, actually wasn't connected
with the civil rights section at all. He was
the Negro ^{who} would accompany him ^{and} would be
seen when he made his various tours ^{into} ^{and} ^{said}
he came to Boston once in connection with
this registration, but that wasn't set, as I
recall it, even though I went to that meeting
on racial lines. That was just a general
registration and they set up committees all
over the country, particularly in the state
with which I'm familiar.

STEWART: But the emphasis was on the northern and

eastern industrial states and particularly
in the cities. . . .

TUCKER: Yes that's right
(naturally)

STEWART: So a lot of the effort was in Boston(?)

TUCKER: ^{therefore} Would have to be because of the make-up of
the population of the city.

STEWART: Were you generally satisfied with the operations
of these civil rights sections? Overall how
would you assess their contribution to the
campaign effort?

TUCKER: I think it ~~was~~ ^{made} quite a contribution. Again,
I have to go back and look at these vote in
the, and that's the only way that you can
judge it is to go back and look at the vote
in the larger cities: Chicago, Detroit,
Philadelphia, and you'll find that the majority
of the people, and the majority ^{of} whom might
be, not the majority, but a ~~large~~ large segment
of them are Negroes, and you'll find that
the Negroes probably voted for him three to
one. And all of those are urban areas. So

based on that, I think, certainly ^{that} we were
successful. And you can't leave out William
Willie ^{Louis} Martin either. He did an excellent
job in getting the story of Kennedy about.
Just did a wonderful job.

STEWART: Were you at all fearful during the campaign
that Kennedy was going beyond what could
possibly be delivered? I'm thinking specifically
they had a constitutional rights convention,
I believe it was called, in New York, ^{in which} certain
resolutions were adopted that went ^{even} beyond
even the Democratic platform of that year.

Were you at all fearful that people would . . .

TUCKER: I'm not familiar with what you're saying.
I was never fearful of the people because,
that the people would feel that he was going
beyond reality in this, if that's what you're
suggesting, ^{because} after I got to talking
with these people in the intimate groups
I came out feeling very satisfied with the
way they received what I had to say at that

time. So I didn't ~~---~~ It's the strangest thing in the world, that even though the man from a proverbial point of view, squeaked through with a hundred thousand votes, I have never felt any pessimism in my entire association with him. I never dreamed that it would be as close as it was. I think most of the people in the campaign walked off feeling the same way. So they were getting their message across, there's no doubt about it, and we were getting our message across.

STEWART: What was your reaction to the news that soon after the inauguration that there wouldn't be any civil rights legislation, at least in 1961? Did you feel a let down, as many people did?

TUCKER: No, because I was sure that based on executive level that, ^{or} executive decision, rather, that he would do what he could in that capacity rather than be concerned about the Congress which could debate this thing over, and over, *and over*

and delay it, whereby ~~with~~ the width of a pen
after he ^{had out} felt the feeling of the country on
various points, he could determine what the
Congress would take months to do. So I ~~felt~~ ^{thought}
because this was because of the faith that I
had in the way I'm sure that he would have
conducted himself, and it turned out that way.
He was a cautious man, ^{e-} there's ^y no doubt about
that, ^{ey-} in decisions of that nature, but as I
say, you can't argue with success. He made
the determinations, and they turned out to be
rainbows.

STEWART: One other question about the campaign. Were you at all involved in any efforts to get open endorsements from Martin Luther King or other civil rights leaders?

TUCKER: Not personally. When I say not personally I know that the section that we were involved in was attempting to do that, not so much ^{y-} -- well, I guess ^y we were trying to do it openly because we had asked for or ~~x~~ arranged appointments

for Roy Wilkins to have a private talk with him. We arranged for Whitney Young to have a private talk with him. Martin Luther King, even ^[James] Jim Farmer, who at that time was with CORE [Congress of Racial Equality] ³ ⁵

And each of them had a private conference with him. So in that sense, yes we were trying to get endorsements, even to the extent of just getting their sympathy even if they couldn't through their organizations ^{publicly} officially endorse him.

STEWART: Was this effort generally successful?

TUCKER: Again, you have to look back and see what has happened.

STEWART: No, I mean in terms of these particular ~~endorsements~~ individuals you mentioned.

TUCKER: Yes, I'd say successful. Again, I'm saying what has happened, how strongly they took ^{to} to his side when he became president, actually, all the way down the line.

STEWART: You say you had absolutely no intention of joining the Kennedy Administration. Did you ever weaken in this determination not to go to Washington with the Administration?

TH Or were you ever tempted to go?

TUCKER: Yes, I was on two or three occasions. In fact, he sent me over to ^{GABON} in Africa for the express purpose of seeing how I liked the country with the hope ^{of} and at that time the country named ^{it} I was supposed to become ambassador to Tanganyika, which has since become Tanzania, although I didn't see that country when I was over there. It was generally understood that this was ³ not only an honor to be representing the President, but it was a sort of a test case to see if he could involve me ⁱⁿ the Administration. And I had offers ^{with} going into the Justice Department, I suppose as one of the Assistant Attorney Generals or something like that. But I felt that I didn't want to do it. Wasn't persuaded even after he ^{did} they have

been trying to get me to come to Washington,
but I won't go.

STEWART: Could you, you mentioned your trip to *Gabon*

What was it for the independence activity? *activities?*

TUCKER: That's right.

STEWART: Did you meet with the President either before
or after that trip, or with *anyone* in
the White House?

TUCKER: That was funny. My daughter had just gotten
m married, and I ^{*we were*} was sitting out on the patio
relaxing. Father was worrying about paying
the bills and so forth. And someone yelled
out the back door, "The President ^{*is*} on the
phone." Of course, we all took it as a joke *S*
and nobody paid any attention to it, and even
with a lot of persuasion, we just sat there
and laughed at the situation. However, when
I did finally decide to get up to go, we lost
the connection, and ^{*so*} I picked up the phone
and called Ralph Dungan. And he said, "yes, ^{*S*} the
President had to go; he couldn't wait."

for you

You see this was on a Monday. . . .

← BEGIN SIDE TWO, TAPE ONE

TUCKER: . . . this way as far as I'm concerned. And he said, "Can you go to Gabon?" } and that's how that happened.

STEWART: Who else was in? There were three people that went, weren't there?

TUCKER: Yes. A man with whom I've maintained a very warm ^{friend} friendship ever since then. I got a letter from him today ^{Charles W. . .} Charlie Englehard from New Jersey and his wife. The three of us went.

STEWART: I see. Were you as impressed . . .

TUCKER: He and I were ^{the} official representatives. Jane just went to accompany him ^{really}.

STEWART: Were you as impressed as most people were with the affinity that many African leaders had with President Kennedy? Or was ^{it} evident at that time? This was in August of 1961, I believe.

TUCKER: Yes. I didn't discuss the President at that time at any great length with the President there. I was more concerned with the man in

the street. And using Mr. ^s Englehart as an
interpreter, I spent most of my time there around
the ^H warf and in the city and vilages talking to
the people about, not so much about the personality
but about the country of America. I know that
we did spend some time ^{at} with President [Lion] M'Bay
on several occasions, but that type of discussion
never came up, but as far as personalities were
concerned we did talk about the relative worth
of the country and what it could do for Gabon
which at that time had just been separated from
France for a year. And I think ^{that} we were successful
in persuading Sarge to get the Peace Corps started
over there. They seemed to be receptive to that
sort of thing, so I would suppose they were not
so much -- They weren't in a frame of mind to
criticize ^{that} because they knew they were going
to have to get some help from us. So I would
say that even if they had some criticism of
either the country or the personalities in it
they reserved them because they wanted help.

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And they finally got it.

STEWART: You say you did talk to the President on your return about the trip?

TUCKER: I sent him a written report and he replied, but I didn't talk ^{with} to him personally. No. I talked with Ralph Dungan, and ^{oh I forget, Dave, not} Dave ^{Kenneth P. P.} Kenny O'Donnell, people like that.

STEWART: Tell me from a public relations viewpoint, do you think ^{feel} that the Administration erred in saying that no legislation was needed, ^{when} and in fact, the reason was ^{that} none could get passed? This was during the first two and a half years of the Administration.

TUCKER: No, I don't think so. I think that what he ^{had} had ^{in the} maybe idealistically ^{what he} had in the back of his mind that he could help solve the situation by executive order and intended to do so, and. . . Certainly there was a need, but it didn't have to be done by legislation, let's put it that way. It could be done by executive order, and he ^{thought} felt that that was the

most expeditious way, and I'm convinced that he believed that people should be given an opportunity regardless of the accident of birth. And I think he wanted to make an honest try of that first. As he started making his selections for appointments to various positions throughout the country, I think he made it obvious that what he intended to do was to pick qualified people and be colored blind in a sense, in the hope that this would alleviate the necessity for legislation ^{which} that could be bogged down for any number of reasons over a long period of time, and that if he gave these people an opportunity in some of these sensitive positions that there would be an awakening that these people were capable, and that it would be easier ^{si} then to try then to move along with some ~~aggressive~~ ^{pr} aggressive legislation. He never discussed this with me personally, but I think that's what he thought, because ^{as} I looked around and see where he put these people. United States District

Court Judges. We never had any Negro judges. Ambassadors to a country other than a black country. I'm talking about [Clifton R. Wharton, whose son my daughter married. I'm taking about Carl Rowan in the information agency. You probably could go down the line. Frank Reeves in the White House in a position other than such as [E. Frederic] Ed Morrow when he was down there he was there specifically as a Negro to handle Negro problems. But Finak was a White House assistant, even though it didn't last very long. But he wasn't relegated to the position of handling only Negro problems. So I think that he said, "If I can put these people into these sensitive positions, I think . . ." Well, didn't he appoint Luke Moore as United States Marshal or was it Deputy Marshal, in Washington? I'm not sure now whether Johnson elevated him, but I'm . . . The fellow that just took [James] Hoffa to jail.

STEWART: Oh yes, yes.

TUCKER: Luke Moore United States Marshal. I think that

he appointed him. And he put these people in these sensitive positions, and said, "Now look at them and see how they behave," and this will give me an opportunity now to make the legislation that I want to offer a little easier."

STEWART: Were you still active in the NAACP during this period?

TUCKER: I have been active in the NAACP as long as I can remember. And I'm still a member of the . . .

STEWART: Were you president . . .

TUCKER: No, I wasn't president then. I retired from that, ^{that's} it was quite a responsibility. I was president of the NAACP until 1960. Now I'm just a member, and they call me an elder statesman, now that I'm getting older.

STEWART: Well, one final question. Do you recall defending the President or the Administration's position on the need for legislation, defending it from . . .

TUCKER: Just as I have explained it to you now. In that same ^{just} ^{manner} line, yes.

STEWART: ^{Did} Do you have any other contacts/with the socially President?

TUCKER: Well, he's been to my house^{me}.

STEWART: I mean during the Presidential year.

TUCKER: Well, I was invited to the White House ^{or to White House} reception^s on one or two occasions, of course, there were hundreds of other people there. Mrs. Tucker danced with him. Not since he's been President, of course. But that's been the extent of it on the social level. I never considered myself a social friend of his. I couldn't possibly. But I think we have to ^{I can} consider him a friend. A political ally, if you want to put it that way, but I think he was a friend of mine. It was quite a wonderful feeling to be able ^{to} I don't know whether the number's still there or not, National 8-4141, I think it was, and ask for the President, and not be pushed around. I'd pick up the phone and call. It's quite a feeling. There are few people in this country that can do it.

enjoy it, I suppose.

STEWART: Did you talk to him on many occasions?

TUCKER: I would say several. It all depends on what you mean by "many." But on enough occasions ^o I certainly didn't make any frivolous ~~calls~~ calls. Anytime I called it was for a purpose. Or many times when he didn't have an opportunity or he wanted some information ^o or something from me, he may not have called himself, but I would get a call from Kenny or Dave Powers or Ralph or somebody who was down there. It was just like getting ~~a~~ call from him. You can't expect him to, when you become President you get away ^o from the people, you don't belong to anybody anymore ^o really.

STEWART: Okay. Is there anything you want to say

in conclusion or before we ^o stop? *shut this off?*

TUCKER: No. I don't know what else to say, John.

I can say that, ^o *there's to say* nothing else. Just that

I think it's a wonderful thing to me to think that I did have the opportunity to know him personally and be friendly and to work with

him and to help him on the way ^{even though} and it was rough going at first. It ended up beautifully, and certainly we're all pleased. I can remember the night of the election we were down at Hyannis waiting for those returns to come in.

STEWART: Oh, were you?

TUCKER: Yes. And that was quite an experience in itself. ^{just see} To feel the operation. And we flew on the Caroline that was the last few days of the campaign to see what the New Englanders felt about him. It was just an experience ^{that} I wouldn't want to trade with anything I've ever done.

STEWART: Okay.