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Creator: Robert C. Weaver
Interviewer: Daniel Patrick Moynihan
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Weaver, Robert C.; Administrator, Housing and Home Finance Agency (1961 - 1966). Weaver discusses the Civil Rights movement during the Kennedy Administration, his and John F. Kennedy's [JFK] thoughts on civil rights, and the legislation that this sparked, among other issues.

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Oral History Interview

Of

Robert C. Weaver

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Robert C. Weaver – JFK #3

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ONE INTERVIEW - REEL #1
WITH DR. ROBERT C. WEAVER
by Daniel Patrick Moynihan
July 8, 1964

MOYNIHAN

This is Moynihan interviewing Dr. Weaver in his home on July 8, 1964.

This is our third interview.

WEAVER

All right.

MOYNIHAN

Bob, we have talked about your work as a head of a great agency in the Department -- in the government over these years. And yet, all the while that you were running this agency, you were also necessarily a representative of the Negro community in America. Not an elected representative or appointed, but you were there -- you were involved.

And, during this period the Civil Rights issue probably for the first time in the history of the Nation became the single most important domestic issue. It surrounded many things. It surrounded you -- the Open-Occupancy Executive Order, but surrounded mostly, particu-

larly at the beginnings of, not the beginnings of Negro militancy, but the point in which Negro militancy became a fundamental political fact of life in America which culminated in the President's Civil Rights message to the Congress in June 1963. It followed the year later by an enactment of that law. And I was wondering what in the most general and the most specific ways would be your recollections and reflections upon those years.

WEAVER

Well, I think there were three ways that you could look at it. And, I think this is the way that the President looked at it. First, I think there was the question of a basic commitment. Secondly, there was a question of the techniques. And, third the question of time.

As far as the basic commitment is concerned, I think that there was never any faltering. I think that from the start the Administration felt, the President felt, that this was an area in which action had to be taken. I think, however, events did two things for him.

I think they both personally involved him in this to a degree that he

had not been involved before, and that it brought him a great deal more understanding than he had had before. And with that understanding, I think also there was a delaying in timing in light of the magnitude of the problem. Perhaps I can demonstrate that as I go along.

As far as the commitment was concerned, I think that both as a politician and as a statesman, and I think President Kennedy was concerned with being both, he realized and felt that this was an area in which there had to be forward movement, in which the issue had to be faced during his Administration. I think the timing was delayed as events occurred -- as most of us like to put off the unpleasant things in life until a little later with a hoped for more propitious set of circumstances.

In the course of that, however, I think that this not only became a matter of political necessity and a necessity for the survival of the nation, but I think there was a certain amount of personal involvement. I perhaps can explain this by quoting what happened one day.

As you know, the President could be given to great anger. And the event I relate occurred just after he had had his encounter with Governor Barnett of Mississippi. He said to me in a meeting where I was at the White House -- Mr. Weaver, I would like to speak to you afterwards. And when we got into the privacy of his office, he turned to me with great anger, and said "do you know what that 'son of a bitch' Barnett did today?" And this was, I think, evidence of a personal involvement of seeing how people, in handling this very emotional problem, could act in a manner which I think he had never really realized before was possible -- a manner that any of us who had been on the receiving end of Southern brutality in racial matters had known for a long time.

Now, getting back to my first point, I think the initial thing the Kennedy Administration attempted to do was to demonstrate its commitment to equality of opportunity. And this was, of course, in the field of employment. So that my own appointment, the appointment of Carl Rowan, the appointment of a series of District Judges, George Weaver, others at the policy making levels among Negroes in Government was

symbolic of this concern as well as an evidence of the political power and importance of the Negro in America. As to how you could separate these two, I wouldn't be able to say because I think there were quite a few forces working on the Administration and on the President. But, in any event, the net result was that it did symbolize at the time, and I think subsequently, this commitment.

Also, one of the first things that was done, of course, was to revitalize and reorganize the President's Committee on Equal Opportunity in Employment. And, this was effected through making the Vice-President -- then Vice President Johnson the chairman, as the former Vice-President Nixon, had been the chairman; bringing in a very competent staff, involving the Department of Labor as it had never been involved before, and all of the other Departments of the Federal Government.

The first evidence of any activity in this area occurred, as it should have, in the Federal Government itself. And, here I think the Committee and John Macy, who was Chairman of the Civil Service Commission, took the leadership. Also I think that without exception, the

cabinet members and the heads of the independent agencies accepted this as a policy -- some like Labor and the Veterans Administration under Jack Gleason, cooperated to an outstanding degree. Others cooperated to a degree that it had never been true before. And in such Departments as Defense and Commerce, for example, the proportion and number of non-whites, particularly in the higher -- when I say higher, I mean jobs paying over five or six thousand dollars a year salary ranges -- increased appreciably. And also at the highest range non-white employment increased significantly during the early years of the Kennedy Administration.

This was I think the first overt and the first planned action in this field. I'm not too sure that this was not something that did evolve and grow rather than something that had been planned. I believe that it was felt that the best way to deal with racial problems was first through executive action and in employment. This avoided the very controversial matter of the Civil Rights legislation which obviously would, as it did, stall other legislative activities. And, secondly, it placed the Administration and the President, I think, in a better bargaining position if he could go before the Congress with his legislative proposals

after he had done quite a bit on the administrative side and Executive side where he could act himself without going to the Congress. Any Executive is rather vulnerable if he goes to the legislators urging them to act when he has failed to act within something approaching the limits of his powers.

And, I say again, I don't know how much this had been thought out. I think it became obvious as time went on. It was probably a combination of political reality and a rationalization of this reality into an effective program, but in any event, I think it was a sound approach.

The real 'fly in the ointment' as far as the Executive action was concerned, related of course to the Equal Opportunity in Housing Executive Order. This was one which I tried to get through in the fall of '61. It was touch and go. It was rumored around that maybe we ought to go for a Department first, and then go for the Executive Order. My own feeling, which was publicly expressed in the press, was that I felt the Executive Order was more important than the Department. And I felt that if I had to make a choice, the Executive Order ought to have priority.

This was not the approach that was followed, and there were many forces involved.

As to those who were involved in the final decision, I am not sure in the entirety. I know that people like Ken O'Donnell, and Larry O'Brien on the one hand were involved. Certainly, Bobby Kennedy was an extremely key person in this particular action. And increasingly Lee White became the White House liaison for housing and community development as well as for civil rights matters; thus he, too, was a key factor. Of course, in all of these decisions Ted Sorensen was involved. And I'm sure that --

MOYNIHAN

How did people stack up or line up?

WEAVER

Well, as you would expect, Lee White and myself were probably pushing the hardest for immediate action. I would say that Ted was of two minds, intellectually and morally: yes; politically: not too sure.

I would say that Larry's feeling and probably Ken's too, but more Larry's because I talked to Larry more than Ken and Larry's was purely a political reaction. This point of view recognized that the open occupy executive order had to be issued but urged that the timing was terribly important and said let's not muddy the water right now until we get some of these other things that we've got to get out. And I think also that Bobby Kennedy had some degree of ambivalence, but because of his extreme loyalty to his brother and to the Administration was probably one of those who said -- well, maybe we had better put it over regretfully from 1961 until later.

In the fall of 1962, it was a foregone conclusion that it couldn't be put over any longer and the order was issued. I might say that in this instance, as in many instances, the Administration, I think, got itself in the box by not taking immediate action. Because during the campaign of '60, the issue was clearly set forth with the Democratic candidate's asserting that where Federal action was involved in the provision of housing, the resulting construction should be covered by

a non-discrimination order.

Involved in this was direct action like Public Housing and Urban Renewal. But the two big ones were the FHA insured and the VA guaranteed mortgage programs. And by 1960 the fiction that had been created over the years to the effect that FHA insurance was not government action because it doesn't cost the government anything had been demolished by writers in the field like Charlie Abrams and myself. We pointed out that, in fact, there was great government involvement because the credit of the United States government stood behind this insurance system. And, if there were a major depression and a large volume of foreclosures, certainly the Treasury would have had to bail out the system. So that it was simply a myth to say that there was no Federal involvement in FHA.

However, the Civil Rights Commission came out in 1962 with a report which carried the theory a little bit further, in fact much further. And that was to the effect that because the Federal Savings and Loan Insurance Corporation and the Federal Deposit and Investment Corporation,

which were mainly the backbone of the Savings and Loan, and basic to the growth of certain of the Mutual Savings Banks, and of course other banks, were also backed by the credit of the nation, those credit institutions whose savings were insured by these two corporations were also government assisted. And thus by the time the '62 Order came up there was great pressure on the Administration to extend this to the Savings and Loan Associations, at the least.

Of course, persons like myself felt very strongly that this should be done. Had the Order been issued in 1961, it would not have been extended to Savings and Loan Associations, and nobody would have squawked because nobody had developed the theory that deposit insurance coverage also involved pertinent government participation. But in 1962 the issuance of an Executive Order on Equal Opportunity in Housing was criticized because it failed to go far enough and excluded Savings and Loan Associations.

So here was the case where delay caused difficulty for the Administration at the same time that it afforded long-run benefits for

minority groups because I think there's no question that the Order has to be extended. When it will be is something, of course, the President will have to decide.

I would guess that President Johnson in the '64 campaign will face criticism for the rather restrictive coverage of the Executive Order, and is going to be harrassed to take a position to say whether or not he intends to extend it.* Now, this is going to present some political problems for him because if he says he isn't or keeps quiet, he's going to alienate certain of the liberal and the minority group forces in the nation. If he says he is, then the so-called backlash of white opposition to the Civil Rights movement is going to help something else to fan the fires. Because of course, housing is probably the hottest,

*Because of the threat, that Goldwater presented to Negroes and other minorities, this didn't occur. But as of now (December 19, 1964), President Johnson faces growing pressure to extend the order.
(R.C.W. in editing the transcript.)

the most contended and the most charged issue in this whole field. So that here the timing sort of boomeranged, I think, in the long run.

And obviously had President Kennedy lived, he would have faced the same dilemma.

As I said before, the first thing was Executive action -- and this was an approach that was followed not only in programs I have mentioned, but in other programs. In every instance the consequence was extending greater equality of opportunity. One of the things that had occurred throughout the last three years which has been most gratifying has been that not only has the Administration secured wider and more equal opportunity for non-whites in Federal employment, but for the first time there has been a consistent and aggressive program of action in this area. And here John Macy should get the kudos.

The idea of actually, positively, and actively recruiting Negroes for Federal service in the South has been undertaken. And I might say that I was shocked to find that in some of the FHA offices which come under the Housing and Home Finance Agency we had no clerical workers

and certainly no professional workers in many of our Southern state offices. Since that time, we have moved in there. With the difficulties of recruiting that exist, we have changed this somewhat and this is true of other agencies, notably of the Veterans Administration. I think the Department of Labor, too, should be mentioned although I'm not too sure what their field record is.

I was not directly involved in the development of this equal opportunity employment policy because almost by tacit understanding, the President felt that since I was going to be involved in running a rather important area of governmental activity my concentration should be there and I should be used only casually in the race relations problems outside of my agency. Thus, sometimes I was called, but usually in connection with my own operations. So that what I'm about to say now is more conjecture than knowledge, but I feel -- I think it's rather evident -- that the hope was the Civil Rights legislation would be delayed as late as possible in the first Kennedy Administration, meanwhile trying to get as much other legislation through prior to raising that issue.

MOYNIHAN

Now, you mean -- what specific Civil Rights legislation was initially envisioned?

WEAVER

Well, more or less the type of bill that was introduced. Because I think that anyone and everyone who was involved in this was realistic enough to know that in the 1960's a Civil Rights bill had to contain most of the things that were in the present bill. FEPC, I think, was a thing that was not agreed upon. This is about the only major area that was not involved.

MOYNIHAN

Public accommodations, voting.

WEAVER

Public accommodations, voting and the public facilities which were assisted with Federal funds etc.

The evolvement, as you know, of legislation is really a major two-pronged activity. First, there is the conceptual thing as to what areas

are going to be covered. And then as you get into the drafting; the very drafting process itself comes back and affects the conceptual, and vice-versa. Because sometimes you find an idea which you would like to put in a little bit of legislation is extremely difficult to mesh into the type of legislative writing that makes it possible to administer. Sometimes you have to modify your concept in order to get the administrative techniques that will work and certainly a consideration with administrative techniques get you into further and different and wider concepts than you may originally have had.

So as to whether or not we would have had the Commission that Mr. Collins is about to head or not, I would say the answer to that would be 'yes', if we had gotten the legislation in earlier.

As to whether or not we would have had FEPC, I would say it was questionable. But the other major items -- substantive items -- I think were a part of the thinking of those who were working on the Civil Rights program. And I say this with some degree of assurance because frequently in talking to Burke Marshall, and Katzenbach and even to Bobby Kennedy,

it was obvious that these things were in their minds and in their thinking. This became --

MOYNIHAN

When did these conversations begin?

WEAVER

Almost from the start when we began talking about the Executive Order for Housing. Because here the question was, in what sort of milieu would this exist. And what sort of other complimentary things would be involved was discussed.

We got into it very, very deeply when the Executive Order was issued because the question of how far we were to extend the order became a major issue. For example, in our community facilities program we have certain activities in health. We do nursing homes in FHA and we do dormitories for nurses and for medical students in CFA. The question was what was the coverage. Well, it was decided that the coverage under the Executive Order would only be in so far as housing was involved.

In other words, in a dormitory built under our programs for nurses, there could be no discrimination against nurses; but if there were say segregated wards in the hospital, this would not be the concern of the Housing Executive Order because there would be Civil Rights legislation coming along to cover that aspect.

MOYNIHAN

I see, yes.

WEAVER

As soon as we began to talk about the Housing Executive Order, we had to think about it in terms of what other related action might be proposed. And even now we are having some problems of interpretation because there is a degree of overlapping. Thus it was inevitable that I should become involved in the Civil Rights legislation.

Of course, what I am about to say now is no secret. And that is that the President's timing -- no matter what it may have been initially -- was brought to a head last summer. It was perfectly obvious when the Civil Rights demonstrations and the Civil Rights issue were taken

to the streets, as it was said, that there had to be a Civil Rights legislation if there was any hope of getting it off the streets.

I think probably the turning point, as far as President Kennedy was concerned in this, was when he made the remarks that he did make at the time of the march on Washington. And, I think, after that there was no way in the world that he could have done anything else but go ahead. And I think he knew that. In fact, I know he knew it when he made the remarks --

MOYNIHAN

You mean he had already said something on his June message?

WEAVER

Yes.

MOYNIHAN

Did he ever talk to you about the events in Birmingham or how determining do you think they were? Arthur Schlesinger quotes him in

an article in Harper's as having told Martin Luther King or King Martin Luther --

WEAVER

No, Martin Luther King.

MOYNIHAN

And told Randolph and Whitney Young and some others that Bull Connor did more for Civil Rights legislation than any other man of the day. And what do you think of that?

WEAVER

Well, I'm sure that was true because going back to his reaction to Governor Barnett one can sense his outrage at the brutality in the situations. I think that this was something that absolutely infuriated him as a human being. I think it was the fact that any man could lie and could be so two-faced and could play with human lives the way that guy did down there in Mississippi. It was something that was absolutely outraging. And, I think there was a great indignation on

on his part and on Bobby Kennedy's part too. I believe, however, that the Mississippi situation was the first one to infuriate President Kennedy. And then when the Birmingham thing came along with the dogs and the Bull Connors and so forth he was convinced that he had to act.

By this time, I think he had decided that there was no such thing as trying to reconcile the situation by reason or mediation, to get the moderate opinion there or to do it through state action, and that you could not depend upon the liberal South to change the situation either. I think he found the liberal South was practically impotent -- wasn't too liberal anyway. And that if anything was to be done, the Federal Government could not relieve itself of its responsibility.

I think too that another factor which will probably fit into this, if you recall, was that these very moments of these very tense domestic issues on the racial front was the time when our image abroad was so terribly important, and the President was so immersed in a very successful, I think, effort to improve our image throughout the world. He was dedicated to deal more effectively on some of the very, very difficult

international problems that faced him. And, I think he was too much of a historian and too much of a political human being not to recognize how this was just cutting the ground from under these efforts in the international front that had taken so much of his time. So I am sure that there was a moral indignation first and then the cool intellectual diagnosis that this was something that we couldn't live with and we had to face up to -- that we couldn't put it off any longer.

MOYNIHAN

Arthur Goldberg has suggested to me that a great portion of the President's great domestic liberalism derives from simply his understanding of what you had to do in order to be successful abroad. He started with the foreign policy problem and worked back.

WEAVER

Well, this was exactly the part -- the second part of my observation. I think that the moral thing hit him first. This was an emotional thing. It was an anger thing. And I think a certain degree of sort of indignation that human beings could behave this way was involved. But

then the cool intellect -- he operated as you know not from his anger, but from his intellect. His cool intellect was in the terms of the foreign milieu in which this was happening. The world situation which was occurring simply made it impossible for us to continue this way.

And the two were a very fortuitous circumstance because the one I think supported the other. No matter how much the anger without the intellectual commitment, I doubt if he would have acted as he did. And I think that there would have been tendency again to be angry, but to sort of sublimate the anger to the idea that maybe we could put it off a little longer.

But after the summer of '62, there was no putting it off any longer.

MOYNIHAN

Spring of '63

WEAVER

Yes.

MOYNIHAN

Which would you mean?

WEAVER

Well, I think it was the summer of -- no, that's all right. The spring of '63, yes.

MOYNIHAN

That spring and the Mississippi events of the previous year.

WEAVER

The -- Mississippi, Birmingham, the March on Washington, the demonstrations in the streets, the sit-ins and so forth -- all of these were the things that I think galvanized the action. And, I think this is very important too because people keep saying that Negroes should not demonstrate. They should not press too fast; but Negroes in this country know that unless they press fast -- unless they press hard -- unless they continue to press, they don't get anything even from people who are favorably inclined to us. They get nothing from others.

MOYNIHAN

What do you think about that -- the whole range of the Negro revolt? Did it surprise you?

WEAVER

Yes. I think it surprised me because I'm of a different generation. And also I have to remind myself that it is very easy for a Negro, such as I am who has comparative economic security who faces many of these problems that face the masses of Negroes only in an academic light for the most part, to decide that maybe people are pushing too hard, and maybe they are moving too fast and maybe they will upset the apple cart. Because what is really being said, and I don't say it, is they'll upset my apple cart. But they're not going to upset their apple cart because they don't have any apples in the cart and I think if you put some apples in their cart, this is a way to avoid demonstrations rather than to tell the disadvantaged and discriminated against to go slow and to wait and to be nice and kind, and maybe in another hundred years they'll get some of the rights that everybody else takes for granted.

What I try to do is to put myself in the position of the white American who might be faced with the same problems and asked how far

would he be moved by exhortation to wait. And I doubt if he would be moved very much.

MOYNIHAN

But, all right but when this enormous event happened --

WEAVER

No, before I leave that don't let me imply that I don't realize that there's always a danger of too much pressure and too much activity and out of this comes violence. And, but -- I only say that it takes the historian to record whether or not the pace was too rapid to achieve the maximum reforms. The contemporary person I don't think knows.

MOYNIHAN

You made the remark that the Civil Rights movement was out on the streets and it wouldn't go back until there had been legislation. Now would it be your impression the country was closer to serious set of disturbances a year ago than say today or --

WEAVER

Oh, definitely!

MOYNIHAN

Was there a real danger point in this? Or was it simply you had reached this point in getting a couple of white politicians in Washington to do what they had promised to do anyway?

WEAVER

No, I think several things. In the first place, I think that the demonstrations and the sit-in movements and all of these things have a very therapeutic value because they give people who are disillusioned and disadvantaged a feeling of doing something and accomplishing something and not just sitting there waiting for the inevitable to happen.

Also, they tend to provide a solidarity within the group so that you get people fighting for things rather than fighting among themselves which soon can erupt into fighting against somebody else too. And I think the Black Muslim movement is a beautiful example of the dangers here. I don't mean to imply that within the Civil Rights movement all the possibilities of violence and danger are over, but I do think that

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there is a more favorable milieu in which a more constructive situation can develop. And, I'm going to let the historians decide whether or not it did.

MOYNIHAN

This is Daniel P. Moynihan interviewing Dr. Weaver in his home in Washington on July 8, 1964. This is our third interview, our second reel.

Dr. Weaver, we were talking about the Civil Rights movement. And you were much involved with it for many many long years and much involved with some of the men who were leading it from outside of the government as well as inside the government.

What is your judgment of some of the developments among the men, and among the institutions because these were the years when white boys, or Mr. Charlie such as I really began to hear of CORE and SNICK -- the Northern students' movement and such like?

WEAVER

Well, I think several things. In the first place, some of the leaders who have now emerged have emerged since I was active in the field. So I know them more professionally than personally. Men like Philip

Randolph, Roy Wilkins, Whitney Young, I've known over the years. And I'm sure that maybe my prejudices will show here because those that you know best and who have been mostly closely associated with movements with which you identify yourself, usually emerge as the most gifted among any group because of the fact you don't know the others. You're not identified with them. But I think before we talk about the personalities, we ought to talk about the movement.

Several things happened. And, I think one that happened is something that happens in all organizations that I've ever seen anywhere. And that is the fact that as organizations get older and well established, it's more and more difficult for the younger people to emerge in a leadership role, because the leadership role is more or less established by somewhat self perpetuating directorships. The NAACP is the organization with which I am most familiar. In it the existing directors have a lot to do with electing future board members, although the situation has been modified somewhat. It still is not a wide open type of organization. The nominating process in many organizations is usually the

way that they perpetuate themselves and keep themselves going. And it's seldom a wide open thing not even in a political party.

But -- here in the last fifteen years, and certainly in the two years ending in 1960 when I was Chairman of the Board of the NAACP and the three or four years preceeding that when I was Vice-Chairman of the Board, there was a very definite movement among the younger people in the organization for more representation on the Board. And for more representation within the offices of the organization. As I said, this is an inevitable thing in any organization that develops over a period of years.

It's interesting to note that Farmer (James Farmer head of CORE) was formerly an NAACP worker. And this is true of many of the other new leaders in new organizations. This is in part what's gone on. The young people are deciding that, as we did when I was young, as a matter of fact my first activity with NAACP was thirty years ago here in Washington when a group of us fresh out of college decided that we were going to do something about the local branch of the NAACP which

was then, we thought, in very reactionary leadership. And we took it over. But we took it over from the inside rather than outside; maybe we weren't as creative as the youngsters are today. And, I think it was revitalized as a result of this activity. I don't think that the analogy is complete that because I don't think that the national body was quite as needing of reform as was the District Branch. But remember by the time when I was looking at the national body, I was one of the top officials whereas some 30 years ago I had not been.

The second thing I think that is involved in all this is the fact that young people always feel, and they should feel, that their elders aren't doing a good enough job; that they are probably a little bit conservative and that maybe they, the younger generation, ought to come and inject some new blood. And this always goes on.

With this being a universal situation, and with the Civil Rights movement developing because of many things, you have, for example, to talk about the emergence of the African states which had tremendous

psychological impact on Negroes in this country. Because up until this time, the average Negro was quite ashamed of his African background. The African was pictured in history and geography as a savage with no culture. And, of course, slavery was completely a dehumanizing process. Thus few wished to be associated with Africa. At the same time slavery in this nation was a process which very carefully cut off any of the African roots among slaves (by carefully separating slaves with common tribal backgrounds and languages) contrasted say to Brazil where African roots have been maintained.

The Negro was rather ashamed of his background in a country where everybody else glorified his national background -- sometimes without too much basis. But in any event, this identification was a nice romantic movement and a very important psychological movement for people. It provided a psychological prop which the Negro didn't have. Well, the emergence of the African nations all of a sudden put Africa in the big league and provided a background of which Negroes could be proud.

Whereas before, Africa had not even been in the bush leagues, and maybe it was in the bush leagues if you use the word "bush" in this.

MOYNIHAN

May I suggest to you -- at the unification of the -- reestablishment of Poland after the First World War made it possible for Poles to know who they were.

WEAVER

Yes. This is terribly important. It is the sort of thing that Baldwin talks about when he says nobody knows my name; it is an identification with something. It does a great deal to make you feel that you are a very functional and a very important part of society. And, also makes you, I think, all the more restive with the fact that you are being treated as less than other elements in society. Once you have an identity of which you are proud you become identified as a part of society -- not a special group which has a special and peculiar background. I think this was terribly important.

Of course, the Cold War was also important because the Negro in this country, and certainly his leaders, realized that the nation was vulnerable as long as it had second class citizenship. And particularly when it was going all over the world talking about spreading its brand of democracy. And this was its weakest spot, and I think Negroes were smart enough to realize that they had a tremendous ally in the Cold War. As a matter of fact this probably leads to a certain degree of ambivalence or wishing that the Cold War would not go away -- not wanting it to disappear entirely, but not getting too warm but yet capitalizing on its existence without any feeling of guilt because they had nothing to do with creating it. It's a very nice position in which to be, I assure you. One of the rare times when we have enjoyed such a position.

There is a third factor which is just now coming to the fore as we talk about poverty. And that was that after World War II and the Korean War, the shift in the demand for labor away from the unskilled, the untrained to the trained, away from the blue collar to the white

collar, into the service industries into the technical industries, etc. This caused a tremendous amount of unemployment among Negroes in urban centers. They had already experienced economic depression in the rural areas, but there was a certain stability about the rural areas -- and with this stability, there was a certain degree of hopelessness. But with the concentration of large numbers of minorities in areas of urban orientation, with political activity came the possibility of getting more articulate and more independent leadership, and also the possibility of getting more irresponsible leadership. As Louie Martin says "shooting from the lip" I think is an excellent example of what I'm talking about.

These absolute basic privations which were facing a large proportion of non-whites became a great source of great dissatisfaction. I think I can illustrate this best by taking a city in which I had been doing some consulting work in connection with housing during the late 1950's, and that's Cleveland. After the strike the steel mills came

back, but about half of the unskilled labor was never reemployed, and never will be reemployed. Here you had a chronic unemployment situation on your hands. People were not trained for modern industry. Many of them were too old to be trained. And, for none were there any training facilities.

You add that to the fact that in some instances there is third generation of families on relief and this is not good. It's certainly better than having them starve. But certainly a nation as fluid as ours, and as advanced as ours should not be satisfied with such conditions. It really should be ashamed of this sort of a thing. It is all right to have heavy relief loads in a time of depression, but when you continue that over periods of prosperity and boom and into other periods of stabilization; then I think there's something basicly wrong. Of course, this is why I think the recognition of poverty is so symbolic and so important. Because all we've done so far in my opinion was to recognize it. We certainly haven't gotten any program yet to do away with it.

When you add these things you should add another ingredient which I think is a very significant one. And that is the security that had been engendered in the growing middle class among non-whites. When these diverse trends are considered, it becomes apparent that the Negro's economic position is a peculiar one. It is not one that you can use averages to describe. It is one in which you have at the top increasing prosperity, increasing opportunities -- Negro engineers, Negro professional people and so forth that are now in sharp demand. They have more opportunities than they ever had before. We had over a million and one hundred thousand non-white families in 1960, (90% of whom were Negroes) making over five thousand dollars a year. We had then some six thousand maybe eight or ten thousand Negro families making twenty five thousand dollars and over a year which is the beginnings of an economic middle class. We've long had a social middle class, but it didn't have much of an economic base. Now we have got a real economically based middle class.

But as the "haves" are getting more the "have-nots" are getting less. And, this is a great danger -- I think one of the greatest dangers in the whole racial problem in this country. This is why I go back to what I said earlier, when I talked about the therapeutic advantage of recent demonstrations.

These are things that involve all economic and social classes among non-whites. They work together against a common ill -- the disaffection of a people who are having troubles towards those who are not having trouble. In any minority group, it is much easier to turn on another minority group person than on the majority group under the situations of frustration. They are together working against a common problem when they demonstrate against discrimination. And this tends to keep the dichotomy in the Negroes' economic status from turning inward.

But -- by the same token, the thing that interests me, and I checked out some of the sit-ins and found some interesting class identification. It happened that the place where the first sit-in occurred

was at A and T College in Greensboro, North Carolina. It was there I had my first job. And I refused to go to the segregated theatre. I was criticized by the students and the faculty because I wouldn't accept this evidence of segregation. And to have the student sit-in movement originate at that institution was something that just got my curiosity whetted.

I went around checking and I found something that was very interesting. And that is that most of the kids who were leading the sit-in movements were those who came from families with a degree of economic security. And, it was the fact that they had this security that made them willing to take the chance of doing these things. So that out of the security of the parents came the radical behavior of the kids. There may be a little bit of social theory here that would deserve some further research. But in any event, I was struck by this.

I think that what I'm trying to say here is that you had a mass movement -- a sort of an unacceptable behavior from middle class respec-

table standard of being arrested which was something that the nicest people in any group do not do, and of taking direct action rather than meeting with nice folks on both sides and sitting down and talking these things out and getting nothing.

This was the behavior which was not something that would ordinarily have come from the Negro college student who was much more conservative than his white counterpart -- and much more controlled by the college administration.

Now of course here we are dealing with great and large intangibles. And I'm sure a great deal of this was not only a racial revolt, but I think it was also a revolt against the archaic administrative practices in some of these schools; it was, in part, a matter of throwing over authority. Some of it was the authority of parents who would never have done this. Most of it I think was the authority of the administration which still wanted to treat these students as though they were small children, and they didn't want this.

Out of all of this, came this emergence of this new activity. Now with this, of course, always there are leaders and people who are willing to be tapped for leadership or push themselves into leadership who were very happy to take over -- to get ahead of any movement.

I think that one of the things that has happened is that we have developed a large number of leaders who have little or no followership. And I might say that the institutions primarily responsible for this, to a large measure, are the press and other media of communication in this country. A paper like the New York Times, which usually is a very, very thoughtful paper, has built up Malcolm X (and so have the radio and TV) as a great leader with probably the least number of followers of any comparable figure in the country. Most of the people that I know had never heard of Malcolm X until the white press discovered him and the radio and the TV exploited him. This is sort of a peculiar type of thing because the feature pages create these people and the editorial pages deplore them. I think that maybe this should be the subject of some sort of research too.

So that we have had all of these conflicting, some not conflicting, but all of these movements bubbling along. Out of that has come some new leaderships and new organizations. I think the top leadership of most of them is quite able. I think that the idea of different methods is good. I myself am quite proud of the way that Roy Wilkins is handling himself. I think that he's articulate. I think he is able with a certain degree of lack of emotion, but still of intellectual character, to state clearly what the position that he feels and I think many of the people in the NAACP accept.

But we've also had a situation where the younger, the splinter movements if you want to use a labor analogy, have forced some of the more stable groups to move much more to the left. And I am speaking now not ideologically to left, but to the left in the sense of the left being the direct action, more than they might otherwise have done. And, here again I leave it to historians to evaluate this. I guess the only way you evaluate a movement of protest is by the results that it achieves..

And, certainly I remember when the CIO unions were doing a little sitting-in and so forth. For most Americans, this was a terrible, outrageous thing. It was going to ruin the country and so forth, but now that it has happened, it is recognized as one of the techniques that made the industrial unionism possible in this country. The people who write about it today are looking at it quite differently from the contemporary observers for the most part. So lest I be trapped with that -- I'm simply trying to report rather than to evaluate at this time.

I think too that you get some very, very difficult situations for the leadership. And I look at a person like Whitney Young who is with the Urban League, an organization which has never been a Civil Rights organization, and who now finds himself I think sort of ambivalent as to whether he is a social worker or a Civil Righter. But -- I think these things will sort of develop and emerge into some rationale as time goes on. Of course, the grand old incorruptible man of all of this, and I was happy to see that President Johnson so recognized him in this

last award of medals for outstanding achievement, is Phil Randolph -- who for years articulated a sort of a senior advisor and spokesman position in the whole movement and who seems to go into eclipse for time and then comes out into the fore.

But I would say that all things considered -- the magnitude of the problem, the difficulty of the problems -- that most of these leaders of the national movements have proven to be exceptionally able men. There is no doubt that Martin Luther King, who is not an organization man in the sense of the others who builds a strong organization, certainly is a man who articulates the feeling of many people among minorities and moves an even large number of people among majority groups to a degree that probably only Frederick Douglass among Negroes ever approached before.

The fact that these men, (the big six in National Negro leadership) who are quite different in their personalities, and in their approaches except their -- as they have often said -- devotion to the same goals, can get together and did get together the March on Washington which was

an extremely difficult and dangerous undertaking and can carry it off as well as they did bespeaks, I think, of great ability and of great degree of subordination of their own personalities. This is very difficult for a leader to do because if he hasn't got a personality that is difficult to be subjugated then he isn't a leader almost by definition.

Then of course there are hundreds of other leaders who are jumping up every day. This again, if you look at the analogy of the labor unions, is par for the course. They won't last very long, but they will make a little to do while they are there, and make it darn difficult for the others in the process.

The danger, of course, in all of this in my opinion -- and this is why I'm so critical of the press and the other media of mass information -- is that when you build up leaders who don't have any followership, then you are permitting them to take action without any responsibility for it. They have got nobody to account to. And, what are they

looking for? They are looking for just what has been done. And this is premature recognition -- front page publicity. When they get that, they retain it by getting further and further out front -- out front often being making statements which don't make too much sense, or which haven't been thought through, or for which you have no responsibility for the consequences. In this I think there is a real grave danger.

In addition to that, of course, any period of social change is a period of tensions. And I don't think you have social progress without tensions. All tensions are dangerous because they may lead into violence. This is a thing that has always existed. It has existed in every movement, I don't know why people are so surprised that it happens today. It certainly happened in the labor history, as you know very well. It has happened in political history as people have tried to get their political rights and recognition. It even happened with Women's Suffrage -- with the female of the species, the tender things that they are said to be. So it is going to happen here too. But there is a

danger and it worries me; but I don't know what you could do about it. I don't think you can sit down and decide that it isn't going to happen, or that you're not going to do anything because there is this danger in it, because if this be true, then this is acceptance of the radical conservatives' objection to any change. Change presents dangers, but I think the greater danger is no change.

MOYNIHAN

Well, now the impeccable bourgeois credentials of Martin Luther King and Roy Wilkins and such are clear enough, but what about another group that came into prominence these days not necessarily new but they are nation widely known. What about the Bayard Rustins and the John Lewises? Just so that there were genuinely radical people. They were the radicals as whites. And they were more alienated group.....What about Rustin?

WEAVER

I don't know Rustin except by what I have read about him. I think,

however, looking at him as a social scientist, that he is a man who had been standing in the wings for a long, long time with apparently a dedication that some of his Quaker associations suggest. With a tremendous capacity for work and with a single-mindedness, and apparently a flare for organization that is very good, but I don't know him. The only thing I know is the work that he did in connection with the March on Washington. And, I think one reason that he has been able to survive and has been effective has been because he has had Phil Randolph's support which gave him a base of operation. I noticed in the last Sunday's paper in the Herald Tribune -- the magazine section -- there was an article on him. And his headquarters has been Randolph's office. And, of course, this has given him a tremendous amount of prestige that he wouldn't have had otherwise. I really don't know too much about him.

As far as John Lewis is concerned, I think that he is a chap who has apparently a great deal of native ability -- a great deal of leadership potential. I think, however, that there is the possibility that

he may make some serious mistakes.] It has been asserted that his organization has left-wing elements. I have no way of evaluating this, but if there is a basis in fact, I am reminded of what Phil Randolph put so well in 1940 when he said it is bad enough to be black without being red too. And I just think it doesn't make sense in this middle class society of ours, with all the other problems that we have, to get involved with the Communists. Because, obviously, as we found when Hitler and Stalin got together, the line will shift at any minute for the purposes of the interest of the line rather than the interest of any group that they -- at that particular time -- are concerned with. What appear to me to be failures to recognize these dangers are, I think, if they exist, evidences of immaturity on Lewis' part.

Martin Luther King's organization has been accused of harboring Fellow Travelers. I think there have been one or two instances where there have been left-wing people involved with King's activities. He has gotten rid of them I think. But his is, I think, an intellectual

position of the liberal in saying -- well, I am not going to condemn a man until I know he is absolutely guilty. And I don't want to have any character assassination and so forth. I think however that if King were concentrating upon building an organization, he might look at it a little differently. Now, I think that Lewis is just trying to get an organization together and in the process would take any group without looking at it. He seems not to have time to get into the luxury of deciding what dangerous elements may come along but he says let's get people and let's do something.

And an organization that wants to get going and says let's do something may also say let's do without deciding what the doings means in terms of tomorrow and the day after tomorrow. And I would prophesy one thing and that is that CORE, which has been composed of somewhat independent chapters and is now beginning to take on some sort of a national character, will change in some measure. Farmer is trying now to get an organization that has some limits within which its

constituents will operate. Because if a national organization, and again labor unions offer a little bit of analogy, has locals that kick over the bar and pay no attention to the national policies, that naturally means trouble. This is true in any organization.

As to what is going to happen with the Lewis group, I don't know; but I think CORE will become no less direct action oriented, but I think a heck of a lot more direct policy oriented as time goes on.

MOYNIHAN

Iron law pirates.

WEAVER

Well, I wouldn't say the iron law, but some law.

Robert Weaver

FEB 23, 1965

Robert Weaver

FEB. 25, 1965