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Gift of Personal Statement

By Hale Boggs

to the

Lyndon Baines Johnson Library

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Signed *Hale Boggs*

Date March 15, 1971

Accepted *Harry Middleton*
Archivist of the United States

Date *Dec 11, 1972*

were both highly controversial. But I think that Kennedy would have eventually succeeded.

B: You think they would have passed in '64 had Kennedy still been President?

Bo: I think so.

B: Were you planning, there by the fall of '63, any change in tactics or strategy or emphasis to get those bills?

Bo: In the fall of '63 when Kennedy left here to go to Texas, the main bills that we were concerned about was passing the balance of the appropriations measures that still hadn't passed, and our plan was to pass them and then adjourn. That's really all we did after that.

B: Was there also any hint at the time there in the fall of '63 that Robert Kennedy would resign as Attorney General?

Bo: I didn't hear it, but there was some hint about it.

B: How necessary was the Texas trip?

Bo: I don't know whether it was necessary at all.

B: I was wondering if you were close enough to Mr. Johnson or any of the other Texans to understand whatever it was that was going on in Texas.

Bo: Well, I think the President was anxious to get his campaign underway, and there were several things that brought him to Texas. To begin with, there was a dinner in Houston honoring Albert Thomas. And Albert had worked very closely with him, and of course he knew Albert in the House, and Thomas even then was sick--he lingered a long time with cancer--and I think the President wanted to go, really wanted to go to Albert Thomas' testimonial dinner. Then the rest of it just fell into place to go on to Austin and Ft. Worth and Dallas,

B: William Manchester in his book on the assassination says that you discussed with President Kennedy the possible violence in Texas before the trip.

Bo: The impact of that statement in Manchester's book is not in the right context. What I said to the President was that politics in Texas are so disturbed--at that time they were really in a terrible factional fight--that it looked to me like you are apt to get into trouble. I didn't mean that somebody was going to try to shoot him.

B: You mean politically.

Bo: I meant politically.

B: Political trouble.

Bo: Exactly. And I remember he kind of laughed about that and said, "Well, that makes it more interesting."

B: But you didn't mean to imply physical violence?

Bo: No, of course not. Never crossed my mind.

B: In the Manchester book, that statement about you is paired with Kennedy's New Orleans visit in '62 where there was some unrest in the crowd.

Bo: Yes. I had quite a talk with President Kennedy about that in 1962.

B: Do you mean before he went to New Orleans?

Bo: Before he went to New Orleans. What happened was that we had gone to a ball game the opening day in April 1962, I remember this quite well, and about the second or third inning it started raining, so it rained hard enough that we had to get under cover. We went into the dugout where the players stay, and the President came over to me and said, "I'm not sure about going to New Orleans." I said, "Why?" You see, he was going in May, May 4, I think. And he said, "Well, I've got reports that it's so tense down there that something could happen." I said, "Well, Mr. President, when the time comes that you can't go to an American city, you, as the President of the United States, then something's got to be wrong." And I said, "That's just conversation. You'll get a very

warm, friendly reception when you go to New Orleans," and he did; he got a wonderful reception. At that time, there was--what he was talking about was threats of violence.

B: Had you been active beforehand in trying to calm some of the people in New Orleans?

Bo: Yes.

B: Some of the people of the Perez type?

Bo: Of course Mr. Perez went his own way, but Mr. Kennedy had a very large following in New Orleans, and he carried New Orleans pretty strongly when he ran for the Presidency.

B: Sir, we are about at a stopping point here.

INTERVIEWEE: HALE BOGGS (Tape #2)

INTERVIEWER: T. H. Baker

March 27, 1969

B: Sir, we covered last time up to the time of the assassination. Immediately afterwards, that night, you were one of the group of legislative leaders who met then-President Johnson out at the airport, weren't you?

Bo: Yes, I was.

B: Did you all assemble and go out there together?

Bo: I went out to the airport with Senator McCormack to meet President Johnson and also, of course, to see Mrs. Kennedy and the other people who came back with President Kennedy's body. The Speaker and I rode out together--and I greeted President Johnson and Mrs. Johnson when they got off the aircraft. Then we returned to the speaker's office. Later a joint leadership meeting was held downtown, if I remember correctly, at about seven o'clock or seven-thirty, in the Vice President's office in the old State Department Building.

B: Was the conversation at that meeting just general or did you go into any specific plans for what would happen next?

Bo: President Johnson, like all the rest of us, was obviously shocked at the assassination of President Kennedy. His main concern was that the country carry on despite the terrific shock of the assassination of the head of state. He talked about the fact that the last thing on earth that he could want was to be in the position that he was in as a result of an assassination, and he asked the leaders of both political parties to assist in making the transition as firm as possible and to keep the country on an even keel. At that time there was still some question about whether

or not there was a conspiracy and so forth.

B: Did this come up at the meeting then?

Bo: I don't recall; I don't really think it did. The meeting was very somber, of course. It didn't last long. We were all crowded into the room with the President.

B: These were the leaders of both parties?

Bo: Both parties, and I think each person there pledged his cooperation.

B: How soon was it before you began having--Well, if the word is proper, more or less normal leadership meetings, that is, dealing with the process of legislation and the handling of Congress?

Bo: Almost immediately.

B: During the next week?

Bo: Yes. You may recall, if my memory serves me right, after President Kennedy's funeral, I believe that was on Monday, President Johnson addressed a joint session about Wednesday, and we had an enormous amount of work to do because we had not finished the work of the Congress; and we had to finish it and start another Congress in January. So we were here until Christmas eve.

B: Yes, sir. I remember you were here until Christmas eve. That got to be a pretty wild night.

Bo: It sure did.

B: Were you involved in the idea of having a party that night for members of the House?

B: The President called me about it and asked me what I thought. I said, "Well, everybody's tired out. I think it would probably be a good idea." And I remember the night because it snowed, and it was a rugged night, but I think it did dispel some of the tension.

B: Was Mr. Johnson making something of a point of honor of the passage of that bill--I believe it was the Wheat Sales Bill, wasn't it?

Bo: Yes, he was. I don't know whether it was a point of honor, he felt that the bill was necessary for his Administration, to carry out his foreign commitments, and it was quite a battle, as you know. We had to round up members of the Rules Committee from all over the country, to get them back here to vote on a rule because the Republicans just wouldn't give. We got them back, they voted on it, and we voted on the measure about four o'clock in the morning on Christmas eve.

B: And there were some members, at least, who were mildly unhappy about what they called the pressure.

Bo: That's an understatement. Everybody by that time was worn out. Their breaking point had been--in some cases--had been passed.

B: One thing that happened before then. You were asked by Mr. Johnson to serve on the Warren Commission investigating the assassination. Could you describe how that came about?

Bo: Yes, the commission idea itself was mine, and it came about in this fashion.

The day that President Kennedy's body was here in the Capitol in the Rotunda, a newspaper friend of mine in whom I have great confidence--his name is Edmond LeBreton--called me aside and noted that various groups were proposing investigating the assassination, both in the House and in the Senate, and also the Texas authorities and of course the FBI was already investigating, and he said what we really need is a blue ribbon commission. Well, I immediately agreed with him, and I went to the Parliamentarian in the House, Mr. Deschler, and ascertained whether or not I needed any specific kind of resolution. We decided that maybe that was a good idea, so I introduced a resolution calling for the

appointment of a commission. It developed, however, that the President had the power to do it under his broad executive authority. So before we ever acted on the resolution, the President appointed the commission.

B: Did you discuss this idea with Mr. Johnson?

Bo: Yes, I did. And he called me almost immediately and asked me if I would serve on the commission, and I told him I would.

B: Was Mr. Johnson--did he ever seriously consider the idea of allowing the Texas authorities to conduct what amounted to the investigation?

Bo: I really don't know. When he appointed the commission, our mandate was to find the truth and do whatever was required to ascertain the truth, and we had the full cooperation of the Texas officials.

B: Did you advise Mr. Johnson on other possible members of the commission?

Bo: No, I did not.

B: The Warren Commission, of course, has been pretty thoroughly covered in books, newspaper articles, everything else. Did the members of the commission itself really work hard on the commission?

Bo: Yes, they did.

B: As opposed to the staff?

Bo: The staff worked hard, and the members worked hard too.

B: There has been some criticism of the methods involved. You, of course, are an attorney like many other members of the commission were. Did you feel that this was not exactly a judicial process, to follow the same type rules of evidence the courts follow?

Bo: I think that our inquiry was completely adequate, that it was very thorough, and if we couldn't get the truth, who could! We had all the resources of the federal government--all the agencies, the FBI, Secret Service, intelligence agencies, the CIA, the Department of Justice--the Attorney

General at that time was Robert Kennedy, the brother of the President who was assassinated, and certainly he wanted to find the truth. In addition to that, we had the Texas authorities in Dallas; they were all cooperative. I said at the time that the report was issued that anyone who wanted to believe otherwise could still believe that way, but it was my total conviction that we had found the truth--that Oswald had assassinated President Kennedy, that he had done so acting alone.

B: No second thoughts since?

Bo: No.

B: Has the fact that you represent a New Orleans district in the city in which District Attorney Garrison has been creating a good deal of furor about the assassination and the Warren Commission report created any awkwardness for you?

Bo: No, because all of us took the position when the report was filed--it was unanimously agreed to, but we had completed our work--that the report and the documents that accompany the report spoke for itself. And I've taken that position ever since then, and so have the other members of the commission. There have been many efforts to go back and unravel the work of the commission by people scattered all over the world, and that hasn't happened. I think the work will stand, and I think the longer and the more time passes, the more the work of the commission will stand out as a complete and very thorough job. Some of the people who were critics were critics long before we finished our work, and we invited them to appear before the commission.

B: Have you ever discussed--

Bo: The idea that anyone would want to cover up or conceal is something that any objective person would reject offhand.

B: Have you ever discussed this with Mr. Garrison?

Bo: Not really.

B: Does that mean that you couldn't discuss it with him?

Bo: No, it doesn't mean that, but I've had the policy of not discussing it with anyone. Many people have wanted to discuss it. I get letters all the time from people, and I feel that if different members of the commission should start off on a separate route without staff and all the other facilities we had available that we would destroy the work of the commission, and that's why I never discuss it.

B: That appears to be at least tacitly a general agreement by members so far as I know.

Bo: That's the way it has been. One member who was on the commission is now dead--Mr. Dulles, although all the rest of them are still alive.

B: To get back to the work of Congress there in '64 and on into '65, there had been even before the assassination a change in leadership on Mr. Rayburn's death. Did that make much difference in the operation of the House?

Bo: No, because Mr. Rayburn had been--his illness had been incapacitating him, and his team just moved in--John McCormack, Carl Albert, and myself. The last year that Mr. Rayburn was here, none of us realized how sick he was. Oftentimes when you are very close to a person, you just don't see it; it's insidious, and he would complain about things--he nearly always talked about a pain in his back, talking about having lumbago which was an expression I hadn't heard in years, kind of a country disease; but when I realized how very ill he was in July of that year, the year that he died, I went down to Tennessee with him to the county in which he was born where they named a bridge for him. And he