

INTERVIEW I

DATE: July 23, 1969

INTERVIEWEE: KENNETH O'DONNELL

INTERVIEWER: PAIGE E. MULHOLLAN

PLACE: Mr. O'Donnell's office, Park Square Building,
Boston, Massachusetts

Tape 1 of 2

M: Let's get your identification on the beginning of the tape here, sir. You're Kenneth O'Donnell, and your official position with the Johnson Administration was as special assistant to the president from the time he took office, a job you continued in from the Kennedy Administration, on until the early part of 1965. Is that correct?

O: In addition to that, Doctor, I was also executive director of the [Democratic] National Committee. I held two positions at the same time.

M: You had been in Washington beginning in the late 1950s with the Rackets Committee investigating staff, with, later, Senator Robert Kennedy. Did you get to know Mr. Johnson at all during that time?

O: No. I had seen him, but I'd never met [him]. The first time I saw Senator Johnson then was when the hearings were being conducted on the space program in 1957, where they used the same room we used. We were ejected from the room because of the hearings that the Majority Leader then wished to hold. But I never met him until the convention of 1960.

M: Called the police station?

O: Yes. I made a full investigation of it afterwards. I had the FBI do it. And I'll just tell you that was the fishiest performance I ever saw in my life. It just has never happened, that they wouldn't call the fellow who held my position.

M: But there's no incriminating connection that you know of between--?

O: I think you could have proved it. I talked to the Washington police, too, I've got some friends over there. And every one of them was convinced it was a frame, every one of them!

M: It's very important, because it seems to me that Lyndon Johnson really never replaced Walter Jenkins.

O: Oh no. I then get a call to get down to the White House by Bill Moyers. So Bill Moyers and myself, I was at Dick Maguire's house, who is a great pal of Walter's, and we went down to the White House. There was Abe Fortas and there was Deke DeLoach, who is the number-two man in the FBI now, who was a Texan and had been Lyndon Johnson's liaison. We were debating what to do about it. Lyndon was then up in New York. He didn't know what the heck--nobody knew what to do about it. So Fortas and Clifford had gone to see the newspapers, which was a stupid thing to do, to see if they could kill it. That's what blew up the whole thing probably. But Walter was then very, very sick in the hospital.

Lady Bird stood up like a champion. She said, "I'm going to make a statement for Walter Jenkins, I don't care what the President says."