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L. Wallace Black (January 4, 1972)

C. Richard Arena

Oral History Interview

with

MR. L. WALLACE BLACK

January 4, 1972
Whittier, California

By Dr. C. Richard Arena

For the Richard Nixon Oral History Project

ARENA: This is interview #1 with Mr. L. Wallace Black. L. initial stands for Lawrence, Wallace Black of Whittier, California, Arena interviewing January 4, 1972. May we begin, and do you mind if I call you Wally?

BLACK: Not at all.

ARENA: And you call me Dick. Wally, where and when were you born?

BLACK: I was born in Portland, Oregon on October 3, 1906.

ARENA: And when did you get into this area if I may ask?

BLACK: I came to Whittier in December of 1933 and formed a partnership in the practice of law with Judge Merton Wray.

ARENA: And would you mind giving a summary of your educational background?

BLACK: I have an A.B. [Bachelor of Arts] degree from Washburn in Topeka, Kansas, with a major in history and political science and a minor in economics and a minor in science, general science. I have a Master of Arts degree, a two year degree, from Claremont Graduate School in Business and Economics which I attained rather late in life. I received that degree in 1961, I believe. In 1931 I graduated from Stanford Law School and received a J.D. degree, or Doctor of Jurisprudence from that school in 1931, and I was later admitted to the Bar.

ARENA: For the layman, Wally, do you mind explaining this. You have the LL.D. [Doctor of Laws] degree, I believe, and the J.D. What is the difference from the standpoint of the degree.

BLACK: Well, the law degree is a fouled up degree.

ARENA: And by fouled up you mean F O U L E D?

BLACK: Fouled, yes, a Navy expression. Originally, of course, no law degrees were granted in the old days. Lawyers studied law on their own or by someone else and sometimes weren't even required to take an examination. They just got a certification from three members of the Bar that they were competent to practice law and a person of good character. And this tradition has more or less held in the law. One can still be admitted to the Bar in California without any formal legal education if one can pass the Bar examination and complete certain studies under the direction of another attorney or lawyer.

Now, at the time I entered law school it was a general practice among all law schools, or most law schools, that if one attended school for three years and then entered law school and completed the three year course in law, one received the LL.B. degree. If they completed their B.A. [Bachelor of Arts] degree before entering law school and attended three years of law and graduated, they received the degree of Doctor of Jurisprudence or a J.D. At the time I graduated from the Stanford Law School most of the better law schools had changed this policy and required a Bachelor's degree in order to enter the law school, an attempt to upgrade the law to a purely graduate course of study. Most of these schools then granted the LL.B. degree, in lieu of the J.D. Some schools, however, granted the J.D. Stanford was one of the schools that granted the LL.B. So, at the time I graduated I had an LL.B. degree. But later these law schools, for the most part, now grant the J.D. degree and don't grant an LL.B. if they require four years and a baccalaureate for entrance. So, some years ago when Stanford did this, my degree was redesignated as J.D., but it is dated in June of 1931 and contains a duplication of the signatures on my LL.B. degree. The LL.D. degree is an honorary degree.

ARENA: Wally, you might be aware of a Justin Miller and you might be aware of Dean Benjamin S. Horack. Both of these are connected with the upgrading of Duke University Law School and if I'm not mistaken, Justin Miller, himself, was from Stanford and Dean Horack did quite a bit of writing and research on the question of upgrading legal education throughout the United States. I was just wondering, do these names ring a bell with you by any chance?

BLACK: Justin Miller does. As a matter of fact, one of the interesting things is that when the Duke Law School was established, the Dean of the Stanford Law School took a leave of absence in order to establish the law school at Duke.

ARENA: Do you recall the year--about when, if you don't remember exactly.

BLACK: That was in 1930 and 1931.

ARENA: Thank you.

BLACK: So when I was there, there was an Acting Dean, you see, Arthur Cathart, C A T H A R T. I'm trying to recall the name of the Dean of Stanford who was at Duke at that time.

ARENA: It wasn't this Justin Miller?

BLACK: No, it was not.

ARENA: Because he stayed on at Duke, if I'm not mistaken.

BLACK: Yes, I think he did. I don't believe he was ever Dean of the Stanford Law School.

ARENA: I see. Of course, the reason I'm interested as I pointed out off the tape a moment ago, I have just returned from Duke University where I spoke with considerable legal personages of former fellow students of President Nixon and the people in the alumni office and the question of the founding of the law school came up a number of times. Would you mind summarizing--without going into detail, and we will use the rest of the tape to go into detail--your overall firsthand contact with President Nixon from the very beginning when you met him to the present time? And by firsthand, that would include experiences like seeing him practice in court, possibly being a member of the audience where he was in some of his Whittier community plays, possibly at law association meetings. Anything that comes to mind in a general way. And then as I say, we'll bear down on this whole area, depending on the time remaining.

BLACK: Well, to the best of my recollection, although I am not certain, I met Dick the first time in the elevator of the Bank of America building and was introduced to him as a new lawyer who had just graduated from Duke and was practicing law with [Jefferson G.] Wingert and [Thomas W.] Bewley, who also had an office in that building. Now I knew Dick best through the 20-30 Club. I was active in the Whittier Community Players but I was never in a play with Dick, but later I can tell you an interesting story on my part about how Dick met Pat [Patricia Ryan Nixon].

ARENA: Now, just to be sure because this has happened, we get interested in other details and some of these key stories that come to mind, might not come to mind later. This has happened to me. I want to be sure we don't lose this. So at this point would you mind going into this story dealing with the meeting between the Nixons.

BLACK: Well, as I just said, I was rather active from time to time in the Whittier Community Players and Mrs. Louise Baldwin, the director, called me and asked me to take the part of a lawyer in a play they were producing. Now this was in the middle 30's sometime and the depression was on and for some reason, I guess, I had some legal business which was a little unusual for the times and I couldn't take the time to take the part. It was around noon. So when I hung up the phone I got in the elevator in the Bank of America to go out to lunch and Dick was in the elevator and I told Dick that Mrs. Baldwin was looking for someone to play the part of a lawyer in a play and I thought he should take the part. Dick was very reluctant to take the part. And I told him, "Well, if you get up before the citizens of this community and play like a lawyer, maybe you can get some business." Well, he was still hesitant to take the part. When I got back to the office I called Mrs. Baldwin and I told her I thought if she would put the pressure on Dick, she could talk him into taking the part. So he took the part, and this was the play in which Pat Ryan was playing a part. So the first night of rehearsal he met Pat and took her home. And the story is, which I cannot vouch for, that he proposed to her the first night. I have never known whether this story is true. But at any rate, as a result of this contact and association with Pat Ryan, they eventually got married.

ARENA: Were you aware, Wally, at all that he had an interest in acting and had appeared in high school and college plays before?

BLACK: I knew he had been in some plays at Whittier College. I knew that he had been a debater and I knew that he had been an orator--that he had won an oratorical contest in high school. So I knew he was interested in dramatics.

ARENA: And so that is why you asked him in particular, because you would not have asked that of any lawyer in town. You had the inkling that he had some background in acting.

BLACK: Yes.

ARENA: I just wanted to be sure about that. Wally, do you happen to remember the name of that particular play? Was this the play called "The Dark Tower"?

BLACK: I can't remember the name of the play but it was a very unique play. I can remember the plot.

ARENA: Did you happen to see it yourself?

BLACK: Oh, yes.

ARENA: Would you describe your recollection as clearly and as fully, and take as much time as you want of Richard Nixon, the actor, in this play?

BLACK: Well, he did a very fine job. I think he played the part of the prosecuting attorney. And the plot of the play was a murder case. And the decedent had either fallen or been pushed from a window. And the question was whether it was an accident. So, it was the kind of a play that had a great many characters, unusual characters in it. They had some gangsters and all kinds of people and it was a very good play for character actors. But the thing that was unique about it was that they chose a jury from the audience each night. And at the conclusion of the evidence, the jury went out and returned the verdict. And one night they might get a verdict of acquittal. The next night they might get a verdict of conviction.

ARENA: I think you know what I'm going to ask you now. You say he served as the prosecutor. Do you recall what the verdict was that night?

BLACK: No, I don't. The best of my recollection is they convicted him--the defendant. But I couldn't be certain of that.

ARENA: You think they convicted him but you are not certain.

BLACK: I'm not certain.

ARENA: I see. That is very interesting and one would have to check almost, since several people would be guessing as you are. The more people interviewed on that the better. However, those who were in the play that evening might have a sharper recollection.

BLACK: Yes. They might. Dick might remember. You will have to ask him.

ARENA: I would like to. Do you recall if you got any of the audience reaction to the President's role in the play? For example, you have just given your opinion. You thought he did--how did you put it?

BLACK: I think he did an excellent job of playing that part and I think the audience did.

ARENA: And the audience thought that as well. I see.

BLACK: As a matter of fact, he probably was one of the stars. I wouldn't exactly say he stole the play but he almost did.

ARENA: Do you recall if that was THE leading part or one of the leading parts?

BLACK: No, I wouldn't say it was THE leading part. There was also a defense attorney, but it was one of the leading parts.

ARENA: Was there any other, in a way, ad-libbing or unrehearsed part of the play in addition to the jury that made this unrehearsed decision? In other words, was there an opportunity for the lawyer, the person playing the lawyer, President Nixon in particular, to do any ad-libbing on his own, if he didn't think that the writer did, we'll say, in the prosecution, could he take liberties there so far as you know?

BLACK: No, I don't think so. I think they stayed by the script.

ARENA: Do you know if this was kind of a last minute role for him in the sense that he did not get as much practice as the others and stepped in late or had to put in, we'll say, some extra time in learning his role?

BLACK: No, it was before they started rehearsals.

ARENA: Do you recall that the audience was a full one? Did Whittier support its Community Players in that particular play and in these plays in general?

BLACK: Reasonably well. We sold the tickets for fifty cents apiece in those days and we usually ran the play two nights, sometimes three nights.

ARENA: Do you mind if I ask you where you developed your first interest in acting, and is this something that lawyers have a tendency to follow as a hobby--acting?

BLACK: I couldn't say whether lawyers like to follow it as a hobby or not. I had always been interested in dramatics and I enjoyed going to plays when I was in college.

ARENA: Had you acted in plays?

BLACK: I had never acted in my life in a play until I came to Whittier and someone asked me to take--Mrs. Baldwin I think--a small part as a drunk in a play and that was my first experience in acting.

ARENA: Do you mind if I ask you, in addition to rehearsing and meeting for the rehearsal, were you doing anything in the way of further socializing? In other words, did you get together with President Nixon on a regular basis, those who were participating in this group? Was it an on-going social meeting in addition to meeting specifically to take roles in plays?

BLACK: Not in that sense. A particular cast had a lot of social contact, and after the rehearsals we would usually have a little party. Someone would bring a cake or a pie and we'd make coffee and we'd sit around and have a little dessert and coffee and talk.

ARENA: This was after each rehearsal?

BLACK: After each rehearsal we usually did that. So there was a great deal of socializing and friendliness that developed among any given cast. And, of course, after the play was over we always had a party at someone's home. We would go to someone's home and have a party. But so far as the group in general was concerned, we didn't have any meetings or any parties. It was the cast that would do that.

ARENA: Wally, I know that you know about the history of this area, that Whittier was founded by a Quaker community, did you find that that fact, that it was a Quaker community, made any difference regarding the support of this sort of activity--plays?

BLACK: No, it didn't, but it did have an effect on the kind of plays we presented. And some parts of the play had to be cut out.

ARENA: Can you think of a specific example?

BLACK: I can think of a number. I remember we produced the play "Ah Wilderness" which is a very old and well established play. And it was the story of a young man growing up. And there was one scene in which this young man was induced by another young man to go to a house of ill repute. And in my opinion this was a very moving and touching scene and the character came out clean and wholesome as a result of this incident. But this particular scene was completely omitted from the play when we produced it because we thought it might offend some people in the audience. There were other instances in which there was drinking--where drinks were served. Usually these scenes were omitted although, as I said, we did sometimes portray a person in an intoxicated condition. He usually played a role as a comedy part and we never showed him drinking. We would show him as the result of the drinking. I remember I took a part in "The Male Animal." You

may recall there is a scene there that's very amusing where the lead becomes intoxicated with a young man, but there was no drinking in the scene. As a matter of fact I had that part, which happened to be the lead in that play. But there was no drinking portrayed, although the intoxication was portrayed.

ARENA: Thank you very much for recalling those experiences. Do you recall that President Nixon appeared regularly or can you think this was one of only a few plays in which he participated, when you knew him at this time?

BLACK: So far as I can recall this is the only time he appeared with the Whittier Community Players.

ARENA: Would one of the factors be that the time involved was so consuming, that it is difficult for the lawyer to put in that extra time? Would that have been a factor?

BLACK: No, I don't think it would have been a factor at that time because neither Mr. Nixon or I had very much law business. I don't know whether he was in any other plays or not, but I don't recall that he was.

ARENA: Now let me go back to that summary that we were on and this involved the Community Players and you have already mentioned the 20-30 Club. Were there other activities, maybe a service club or that sort of thing, in addition to the 20-30 Club where you might have had direct contact with him?

BLACK: Well, most of my contact with him was as a practicing attorney in Whittier and as a personal friend. And in this respect I would say most of this arose out of our relationships in the 20-30 Club, which was at that time a young man's service club. And as a result of that contact I know we had Pat and Dick to dinner in our home at least once.

ARENA: And you were married at this time yourself?

BLACK: Oh, yes, I was married when I came to Whittier. I don't recall being at their home for dinner.

ARENA: Would you happen to recall if at this time he had this annex or branch law office in La Habra, California?

BLACK: Yes, I recall that. It was an old empty store building. And he had a desk in the back of this large room and a kind of a screen up in front of the desk. And at that time he practiced for a while in La Habra and joined the Kiwanis Club of La Habra. And he was a member of the La Habra Kiwanis Club so far as I know until he left Whittier to go back East to work in the Office of Price Administration.

ARENA: As far as you know--I do know you are a member of the Kiwanis now--may I ask you how far your own membership goes back?

BLACK: I came into Kiwanis after I reached the age of thirty, out of the Whittier 20-30 Club in 1939.

ARENA: Oh, in '39. So you could have both been members at the same time.

BLACK: Yes, we were members of Kiwanis at the same time.

ARENA: But you not necessarily in La Habra.

BLACK: No, I was in the Whittier club, and Mr. Nixon was a member of the La Habra club.

ARENA: Do you recall if he ever had any office there?

BLACK: In La Habra?

ARENA: Yes, an officer in the Kiwanis Club?

BLACK: No, no, but he served as president of the Whittier 20-30 Club. He served a term as president of that club.

ARENA: Also, while we're on the question of La Habra, if I'm not mistaken, did he live on top of a garage in an apartment there, do you happen to recall?

BLACK: As far as I recall, he never lived in La Habra at that time at least. He lived in Whittier. That's the best of my recollection.

ARENA: But since you never were actually in his home, you couldn't describe his home.

BLACK: Well, I remember at one time they lived in a little house. I think it was in the back of another house, and one of the Garrett boys lived next door. I can't remember which one. They were twins. And they raised mink and this was rather disconcerting to the Nixons because mink smelled--sort of like rats or something. I don't know just exactly how they smelled. I know the minks disturbed them some. They didn't particularly enjoy that particular home.

ARENA: This would have been during the time he was practicing law, before the OPA [Office of Price Administration] too?

BLACK: Oh, yes.

ARENA: This wouldn't be a period when he came back from military service and moved into Whittier?

BLACK: No. When he came back from military service, he moved into Hughes [Hughston Meadows] subdivision that was part of the old Green Hills Country Club, those modular homes.

ARENA: Does Beverly Boulevard ring a bell? I know he lived among a group of small homes on Beverly Boulevard at one point.

BLACK: Not on Beverly Boulevard. I have an old Christmas card address book. If I have it I could give you the address where he lived during a good part of that time.

ARENA: Well, the reason I would be interested especially is to meet with these neighbors, especially if the Garrett boys --one of them is living.

BLACK: Yes.

ARENA: And have some more details about the raising of these mink.

BLACK: I think the one that's living is the one that raised the mink.

ARENA: That would be fine and what would the full name be, by the way?

BLACK: I can't remember which one was which or the names of either, but I know where he lives. [Weymuth Garrett]

ARENA: That would be fine if you could give it to us.

BLACK: He lives in my neighborhood. He lives on the street above me in College Hills.

ARENA: Fine. Do you recall that the President belonged to any other organizations, say, one of the political parties, for example? Was he a registered, maybe active member of one of the political parties during this early law practice period before 1942 when he went into OPA?

BLACK: Yes, I think he was a member of the Young Republican Club here, it seemed to me. I was a member of it, I know, and I served as vice president and my wife served as president one year, and I think I remember him attending those meetings.

ARENA: Just to clarify the situation, if I'm not mistaken, Judge Merton Wray is a fairly well known local Democrat. Would that be a correct statement?

BLACK: Yes.

ARENA: And his father was also. Would that be a correct statement?

BLACK: His father was not registered.

ARENA: I see.

BLACK: His father registered as "refused to state" so he couldn't vote in any of the primaries. I'd classify his father as a Socialist and I'd classify Merton pretty much as a Socialist although he is a member of the Democratic Party. But he leans toward Socialism. And his father was an avowed Socialist.

ARENA: Do you mind if I ask you how you, an avowed Republican, came into contact with an avowed Socialist and remained on good terms, obviously, with both of them as well as the other Republicans, such as the young President Nixon? You said you were his friend.

BLACK: Whose friend?

ARENA: You were the friend of young Nixon.

BLACK: Yes, and I'm still a good friend of Merton Wray and practiced law with him after his father died.

ARENA: Would you mind commenting on just those simple facts. How did you do it?

BLACK: Well, there was no problem. It's rather interesting how I became associated with Judge Wray.

ARENA: It would be.

BLACK: My father was a Baptist minister, and also a Socialist.

BEGIN SIDE II TAPE I

ARENA: We were discussing how you became interested in joining the law office with Mr. Wray. You mentioned your father being a Baptist minister.

BLACK: Yes, and as such, he served the Kansas Baptist Convention as director of Christian Education for the state and worked with young people all over the state. And he induced many of these young people to go to the Baptist college in Kansas, which is Ottawa University in Ottawa, Kansas.

ARENA: Would you mind giving me your father's full name, Mr. Black?

BLACK: A. Lawrence Black and the A stood for Adam, and the only people who called him Adam were his very close relatives, his first cousins, because he didn't like that name. So, he was known as A. Lawrence Black and in Kansas he was known as Daddy Black. And these young kids that he worked with were known as Daddy Black's kids. And one of these at that time was a young woman who joined what the Baptists call The Life Service League. These are young people who dedicate themselves to some kind of lifetime Christian work, and this particular young lady had served as a missionary in China and taught at the Baptist University in Shanghai [China] and had returned to the United States after the Japanese bombed that area and the school was closed, and married also a graduate of Ottawa University and they lived in Whittier. At that time I was located in Long Beach [California] and had a temporary job with a lawyer by the name of Oscar J. Siler, S I L E R, who was a member of the Board of Governors of the State Bar. And on Christmas eve Mr. Siler called me in and told me he either had to get rid of me, whom he was paying fifteen dollars a week, or get rid of his secretary, and that he could get along without me but he couldn't get along without his secretary. So, during the early part of that time we drove up to Whittier to see this young lady who was Florence Nesbitt then. And this was before Mr. Siler had let me go. I could tell that I was going to be let go because there wasn't enough business to keep me occupied. And she told us about Judge Wray.

ARENA: Would you give me the full name of Merton Wray's father, please?

BLACK: Arthur G. Wray. I don't know what the G. stood for. I know what Merton's G. stands for, but I don't know what Arthur's stands for. So she told us about Judge Wray, Arthur Wray, and she told us that he had had a very serious heart attack and that he was well on the road to recovery, that he would probably reopen a law office and that he might need someone to be with him, because he couldn't practice full time. So they took us out to Judge Wray's home in East Whittier--they lived on a five acre orange grove as I recall.

ARENA: Any idea how close that might have been to the Nixon grocery store?

BLACK: Not very far. You went right down Colima Road about six or eight blocks and turn to your right on Broadway, and it was about the third or fourth house. It was a matter of less than a mile--half a mile maybe. So as a result of that, Judge Wray took me into partnership. He said, "We'll split everything fifty-fifty. I can't afford to pay you anything." So we became partners and that's how I came to Whittier.

ARENA: Was he aware at the time that you were an avowed Republican, a member of the Republican Party?

BLACK: I don't recall that ever came up in the conversation. He took a liking to me for some reason and said, "You're just the kind of a young man I want in my law office."

ARENA: And after it did become known, did it ever create any problems, the fact that you were an avowed Republican, although he did not have an avowed party, it was known that he was a Socialist?

BLACK: NO--no problem at all.

ARENA: That's very interesting.

BLACK: He was very broad minded. As a matter of fact, the two greatest Christians I have ever known that really lived the Christian life was my father and Arthur G. Wray. He was tolerant and kind and very intellectual.

ARENA: Do you happen to know if this Arthur G. Wray ever shopped in the Nixon market and ever got into any discussions with young Richard Nixon's father? Did that ever come up in any way--who was known for his great intensity in political discussions, as you might know yourself. I don't know if you knew Mr. Frank [Francis Anthony] Nixon personally, also.

BLACK: No, I did not know him. I knew Mrs. [Hannah Milhous] Nixon personally, but not his father.

ARENA: Did that ring a bell that Frank Nixon, the President's father, loved to argue politics?

BLACK: No, I had never heard that. I don't know whether or not they traded at the Nixon store at the time they lived in East Whittier. But very shortly after we opened the law office, Mr. and Mrs. Wray sold the place in East Whittier and bought a home here in Whittier, here on North Bright [Avenue], I think it was. And they lived there at that time, and I know at that time they traded at Orcutt's grocery, ORCUTT.

ARENA: Do you have any idea as to about how many Socialists there were in Whittier or was Mr. Wray a unique case and we'll say the most well known Socialist?

BLACK: No, I wouldn't say so. I think we could say possibly--if I could recall their names--we could probably mention some professors at Whittier College that were among the leading Socialists in this community and were more active. But I say that Mr. Arthur G. Wray was, I think, a Socialist. He was not particularly active in the Socialist Party at all, as far as I know.

ARENA: Did he ever run for office himself? Was he that active in politics by any chance? This is the father--Arthur G.

BLACK: Arthur G. Wray when he lived and practiced law in Nebraska as a young man ran for Governor of the State of Nebraska on an independent ticket and was almost elected. He was defeated by a very narrow margin. I don't know who he ran against. He ran on an independent ticket.

ARENA: As you know, I have had the pleasure of having an interview with Judge [Merton] Wray himself and, of course, he has brought up his father, but this is most helpful in that it gives another source for this information. So it adds to the historical value because if that would be the only record, the son speaking of his father, I think the historian would feel that it would be more helpful to have as many speaking on this obviously colorful figure, Arthur G. Wray, than just the one voice.

Is there any other contact that you had with the President that has not been mentioned up to 1942? We mentioned the question of his play acting, his membership in the Kiwanis and the 20-30 Club, the fact that you were joint lawyers. Is there anything else? You mentioned having him at your place socially and let me be sure about this. Was it President Nixon and Mrs. Nixon, Mrs. Pat Nixon?

BLACK: Yes.

ARENA: That certainly is worth looking into in detail. Did you belong to any civic organizations together. I'm thinking of maybe boards of education, library committees, any semi-public organizations or groups?

BLACK: Not that I can recall. I was also a member of the Junior Chamber of Commerce.

ARENA: Do you recall if he might have been?

BLACK: I can't specifically recall whether Mr. Nixon was a member of that organization at the time I was a member.

ARENA: All right. Now let's go ahead after 1942 and without going into politics as such, but your firsthand contact with the President. Would you summarize your contact with him, and when I say without going into politics as such, I mean mention for example if you did have contact with him and in what capacity so that for future reference, those who will be going into politics as such when this project opens up, they will have a basis for reference where you are concerned, if you know what I mean.

BLACK: I had very little personal contact with Mr. Nixon since he first was elected to Congress and left Whittier, although Mr. Nixon asked me to be his campaign manager in that

first campaign and at that time I was working as a civilian with the Navy Department in terminating war contracts.

ARENA: You might recall he was doing the same thing.

BLACK: He had done the same thing and as a matter of fact, he got me this job. He told me about it and I went over town and got the job.

ARENA: About when was this, 1945 or '46?

BLACK: Yes.

ARENA: About how long did the position last?

BLACK: About eight or nine months. I got twenty-five dollars a day.

ARENA: And would this be right in this area or was this back in Baltimore [Maryland]?

BLACK: This was in Los Angeles.

ARENA: Because I think he was doing that in Baltimore.

BLACK: He did it in Baltimore, yes.

ARENA: But did not do it in Los Angeles at all?

BLACK: No. He left that job and came back to enter the race for Congress after he had been chosen by the Committee of 100.

ARENA: If I may summarize this correctly then, whereas it began by his asking you to do a job for him, it ended up just the way it turned out, that you got a job for him.

BLACK: Yes. I already had the job. In many ways Dick is an impulsive sort of a person and I don't know how long he had considered asking me this, but he suddenly asked me this on the street in Whittier.

ARENA: Asking you this--being his campaign manager.

BLACK: Yes. He asked me if I would like to manage his campaign just out of the clear blue sky. We met each other on the street and said hello and he turned around and said, "Wait a minute. I'd like for you to manage my campaign." We discussed it a little. He offered to pay me something. I don't remember. I told him I couldn't take his money.

ARENA: As a matter of fact, had you managed anyone's campaign before and were you in active politics in any way before?

BLACK: Well, I was active in the Young Republicans organization and in the Republican Assembly.

ARENA: Excuse me. Had you ever held an office?

BLACK: An elective office?

ARENA: Well, either elected or as a leader, say, a political leader.

BLACK: I've never held a public office but I served as president of the Young Republican Club and served a term as vice president of the Republican Assembly in Whittier and I was slated to be the president of that organization in the year that Dick would run again.

ARENA: Would you mind stating what the Republican Assembly in Whittier is?

BLACK: It's an organization of Republicans that organize to support the Republican Party and engage actively in politics.

ARENA: Does that still exist, Wally?

BLACK: Yes, it exists all over the state. It has become known at the present time as a somewhat conservative branch of the Republican Party. It seems to have that reputation now as being representative of the conservative wing. At the time I was active in it I wouldn't say they were especially conservative. They represented all elements of the party at that time.

ARENA: Could I ask you this before we get too far away from it. The fact that he had this job of terminating contracts is fairly well known, but I don't think too many people know just what is involved and you did virtually or exactly the same thing. Would you mind describing what the job entailed?

BLACK: Yes. At the conclusion of the war, most of the war production contracts were canceled and so we had to pay the contractors off what was due them, and we had a team of lawyers and a team of auditors, and I might say they were very competent auditors. We had some very good accountants.

ARENA: And these were not necessarily regular full time career government lawyers and auditors? These were people who maybe were assembled to take care of this particular function at that particular time.

BLACK: Yes. Most of them were officers of the Navy and some were like me, they were civilians. The ones that were officers were sent through a three months school back East some place.

ARENA: As President Nixon was an officer, he might have gone to that school.

BLACK: Yes, he may have attended that school but I didn't. So I had to just play it by ear. And what we did was negotiate with the aircraft industry. I was with Burair.

ARENA: Would you spell that please?

BLACK: It's the Bureau of Aeronautics of the Department of the Navy and these were aircraft production contracts. And what we did, our accountants audited the books and then we negotiated a payment with the contractor as lawyers. The lawyers negotiated the payment and it was based on the audit. We had to be able to analyze an audit. And on that basis we went into conferences with the representatives of the corporations. And I had charge of all the subcontractors of the Douglas Aircraft Company and some of the contracts with what is now Convair. I guess it was Convair then. Consolidated Aircraft had purchased Vultee and it became known as Convair. They did that before the war, I'm sure. So this is what it entailed as lawyers was to negotiate a settlement as to how much was due and owing the contractor based on the audit of the books. We paid them for the work in progress that hadn't been completed and we allowed a certain amount of profit on that. We paid them for their raw materials that hadn't been used, but we paid them no profit on that, you see. Just the cost of the raw material.

ARENA: Were these contracts terminated without difficulty or was there quite a bit of, say, disagreement on both sides? How would you describe that problem in general?

BLACK: Oh, in general there wasn't. It was amazing to me how fair most of these aircraft companies were in negotiating the contracts. Occasionally we had trouble with a subcontractor, who were smaller firms and needed more money I suppose. Some of them were long and arduous conferences and some of them were very easy to settle. I only had one instance in which a contractor refused to settle and that was B. F. Goodrich. And their main office is located in Ohio, I think, and I had many long distance conversations with the guy that was handling that contract and then he'd write me a long letter and distort the conversation, so I had to talk to him on a recording telephone and send him a transcript of the conversation in order to keep the record straight. And he would not settle. There was an issue

there that he would not compromise. There had been a strike and he wanted certain payments--I can't remember the details--and we paid him for certain losses he suffered by reason of his union striking but we didn't pay him for the losses he claimed to have suffered by reason of his clerical staff. They were not on strike. And on that basis he refused to settle, so when we couldn't reach a settlement, then what we did was to make Findings of Fact and Final Determination in making that offer. And at that point he had the option of appealing the case to a civilian review board in Washington or appealing it to a court of law.

ARENA: And that was standard procedure for any . . .

BLACK: Yes, under the due process clause of the Constitution, you see. He has to have access to a court of law at some stage of the proceedings. And so that is the way this act was set up by Congress. At that point he had his choice. If he went to the Review Board, the findings of the Review Board were final and binding on him and he could not appeal the Review Board's decision to a court of law. But he could take the case at that point to a Federal District Court.

ARENA: Do you recall any other direct contact with President Nixon after this initial political period of 1945 where he asked you to manage his campaign? Do you recall any subsequent contact with him?

BLACK: I have seen him personally twice since that time only.

ARENA: Would you state the circumstances?

BLACK: Yes. On the last night of the campaign when he was running for Vice President he came out to the state of Washington. He was scheduled to come to the state of Washington when this so-called scandal arose and he took to the air and made the famous Checkers speech. His speaking engagement in Washington was canceled because of that. Now, the Junior Senator from Washington was Harry P. Cain and he was named by Look magazine as one of the ten worst Senators in the Senate and of the ten he was named as the tenth or the worst Senator. So, he was in serious trouble and that is one reason they were sending Mr. Nixon to Washington to make a campaign speech. So it was the last night of the campaign when the speech was made in a large auditorium in Tacoma [Washington]. At that time I was still in the Navy and I was stationed in Seattle [Washington]. So we drove down to Tacoma to hear him speak. And after the address we tried to get up on the stage to see him, but there were so many people there that it was impossible to get on the stage, so I waved at him from the crowd. And I said, "Hey Dick." And he and Mrs. Nixon saw us and said hello to us and asked us what we were doing up in Tacoma. And I told him I was stationed

in Seattle, and we had a brief conversation over the crowd. And they asked us to come down to the hotel after the meeting, but there were so many people jamming down there that we just went on home. So that's one contact I had with him.

ARENA: And the other.

BLACK: And the other was when he was running for governor. He spoke to a meeting of the statewide Faculty Association of Junior Colleges that was held at Glendale Junior College. We had a convention there of several days and the last night we had a banquet and Mr. Nixon spoke at the banquet. Pat wasn't with him at that time. So after the meeting we saw him and talked to him briefly.

ARENA: Do you mind if I ask you if this is your first oral history interview, Wally?

BLACK: No, it is not. I gave one to some young student with a beard from Fullerton State College.

ARENA: And that is the first one?

BLACK: That's the only other one.

ARENA: Do you know if that process was ever completed, in the sense that you received a typed record of the talk and then you returned it and you signed any legal documents? Did those steps take place as well?

BLACK: The only thing I recall is I received a transcript which I have since lost.

ARENA: And do you recall signing any legal document?

BLACK: No, I think I approved the transcript and may have made a few ink corrections. I'm not certain.

ARENA: Do you mind if we get together and go into detail on some of these earlier topics that--as this interview is coming to a close now--we have only touched on? I would like to go more into detail where you and the President were members of the 20-30 Club. Also, the social meetings with the President during the period that you knew him when he was practicing law and also appearing in plays. And another occasion would be very helpful where you were practicing law and would encounter him professionally on those three occasions.

BLACK: I never tried a case against him.

ARENA: But did you ever see him in court or have any joint contact, we'll say, through Bar Association meetings or anything like that? Any joint professional contacts?

BLACK: Yes, I can tell you a rather unusual theory he had about how to try a jury case which he discussed with me but I've never seen him try a case. As a matter of fact, at the time I knew Mr. Nixon as a lawyer, neither one of us had very much practice. I saw a statement in a magazine article that he left a lucrative practice in Whittier to go to work for the OPA. Well, he didn't leave a lucrative practice. That was during the last years of the depression and he went with the OPA largely because he could draw a salary and have some income. I wouldn't say there were very many lawyers in Whittier that had a LUCRATIVE practice. Even the better and larger firms, of which Mr. Nixon was a member of one of the better firms here, Wingert and Bewley.

ARENA: I believe one book describes it was the oldest. Is that your understanding that the Wingert and Bewley law firm is one of the oldest or THE oldest? Would it be true?

BLACK: No, I am sure that is not true. There were lawyers here long before that. But it was a pretty well established firm. [Jefferson] Jeff Wingert had practiced law here for many years before [Thomas] Tom Bewley finished law school. He practiced on his own.

ARENA: I believe you were going into this jury situation.

BLACK: Oh, his theory of how to try a jury case. Never take any notes. His idea was that the jury didn't takes notes, so if a lawyer took notes, he would talk about things that were important to him as a lawyer but not important to the jury, and that if he argued the case to the jury on the basis of his notes, he would be talking about things the jury wouldn't remember or wouldn't understand. If he talked to the jury from memory, he would be talking about things the jury remembered because he remembered them. I don't know how successful this tactic was.

ARENA: What was your source of information for that knowledge? Did he give you that information himself?

BLACK: Yes, we were talking about something, the practice of law or how to try a case or something, just casual conversation, and he told me that is the way he would try a jury case. He said, "If I argue a case before a judge then that's different."

ARENA: Wally, I really can't thank you enough for giving me the benefit of this interview in which you have related so much firsthand information and I am looking forward to the second. Thank you very much.