



4-3-1972

## **Nathaniel N. George (April 3, 1972)**

C. Richard Arena

Oral History Interview

with

MR. NATHANIEL N. GEORGE

April 3, 1972  
Los Angeles, California

By Dr. C. Richard Arena

For the Richard Nixon Oral History Project

ARENA: This is interview #1 with Mr. Nathaniel George, nicknamed Nat, and also called Nate. His middle name, which is his mother's maiden name, is Norris. Mr. George is of Los Angeles. This interview is in Whittier, California, on April 3, 1972, Arena interviewing. May we begin, Mr. George, by my asking you where and when you were born?

GEORGE: I was born August 27, 1906, in Washington, D. C.

ARENA: And would you mind giving a brief run-down of your education, and when you moved to California, so we get the background before you went to Whittier College, where you were in the graduating class of 1931, which was the President's freshman year.

GEORGE: I was born and reared in Washington, D. C. I went to elementary school at Wilson Elementary School, later going to Dunbar High School, graduating in 1926. I came out to California in 1926, that September. I stayed in the University of Southern California three months, when I was dissatisfied with the school. It was too large for a small youngster just from Washington, D. C. I stayed out of school the rest of the year and worked. The next fall I scouted around at UCLA [University of California at Los Angeles], Occidental [Collegel], Pomona [Collegel], and finally decided upon Whittier College, and there I made up my mind that would be the place I would go to school. Because of the friendly attitude and the openness of the campus, this is where I knew I wanted to go to school.

ARENA: You may be aware that when I put that same question to Mr. [William T.] Brock he said that one of the reasons for his coming to Whittier was you. In other words, you had recommended the school. There was that personal tie. Was that the case with any other person? Was there a particular individual whom you knew at that time, who had been a student here, or was this strictly on your own?

GEORGE: It was strictly on my own, because that day I had attended all these other colleges that I mentioned before, and when I got to Whittier that was the place I made up my mind to go to school, because of the quaintness of it and the college atmosphere that entered into my thinking at that time.

ARENA: Just for the record, as you know, Whittier College was started by the Friends and was very much a Friends college at that time. Were you a Friend, and did that have anything to do with it, from the standpoint of the religious connection?

GEORGE: No. The religious part of it was not in the picture, because I didn't know whether it was strictly only for Friends. I knew that I was accepted and this is where I went to school. I did, however, attend many of the Friends meetings at the First Friends Church in Whittier, which is the largest Friends Church west of the Mississippi.

ARENA: That claim is still made by the Friends, if I'm not mistaken, and was it made at that time?

GEORGE: It was made at that time.

ARENA: That's very interesting.

GEORGE: Dr. [Williard Orville] Trueblood was the minister, and I went to school with his daughter in Whittier College.

ARENA: Do you mind if I ask you if you were aware, before you came to Whittier College, of the history on the role of the Quakers in the abolition movement and other aspects of black history, and did that play a role in any way in your making up your mind?

GEORGE: That did not play a role in my making up my mind to go to college, but because I went to an all-Negro high school and because I was under the counseling of all Negro teachers, I naturally knew that the Quakers had a great deal to do with the liberation of the slaves. I think that the Quakers started one of the first underground railroads.

ARENA: Did you possibly know, when you did attend Whittier College, the President during that freshman year?

GEORGE: No.

ARENA: Did you find out later, maybe coming back for some alumni meetings, during the rest of the three years that he attended as a student? In other words--maybe I didn't make myself clear.

GEORGE: No, I thought you were speaking about the president of the college.

ARENA: No, I did mean President Nixon.

GEORGE: Could you ask that question over again?

ARENA: Let me do that. When you were a senior and President Nixon was a freshman, did you know him, as a freshman?

GEORGE: Yes.

ARENA: That's number one question. Number two, while we are on this question of the Friends and Quaker heritage of the college, were you aware that he, himself, was a Friend in his religious affiliation?

GEORGE: No, not at that time.

ARENA: Right. Now, this was all by way of general background, your coming to Whittier. Do you mind if I ask you if there are other members of your family, either brothers or sisters or parents, or uncle, any members of your family who had attended college before your time?

GEORGE: Yes.

ARENA: As you think back?

GEORGE: Three cousins finished college. One is teaching in New York City and two are in social work in New York City.

ARENA: Again, by way of making this biographical sketch, before we get to your direct contact with President Nixon, you were saying off the tape a minute ago--and I'd like to put it on the tape--your interest in college from the standpoint of a minor, you said you were interested in history, how about your major?

- GEORGE: My major was in physical education, because I came out to the University of Southern California because of its nationally-known track team. At the time [Clarence] Bud Hauser was my idol. He was the captain . . .
- ARENA: And he was at USC [University of Southern California].
- GEORGE: He was the captain of the USC track team at that time.
- ARENA: Were you aware, when you were making up your mind about coming to Whittier College, that Coach Newman, frequently known as Chief Wallace Newman, had been at USC also?
- GEORGE: No. I did not know that until Coach Newman came to Whittier. Coach George Philbrook from Notre Dame, a teammate of Knute Rockne's, was the coach at Whittier at that time.
- ARENA: When did he leave during your period?
- GEORGE: He left in my sophomore year. That was '28.
- ARENA: By way of your--again, bringing up something that was off the tape that would be of interest--your interest in history, and your mentioning one of your history professors, who also was one of President Nixon's professors whom I'm sure you recall, Dr. Paul S. Smith.
- GEORGE: I was telling you before this interview that I thought that Dr. Smith was one of the greatest history professors that I have heard talk. I say that because history was my minor interest in college, so I was very particular about the type of history teacher that I had.
- ARENA: And just to be sure, although you were a senior and it was not likely that you would have had the same history class with President Nixon then, but did you, possibly?
- GEORGE: No, I did not.
- ARENA: As you know, several of the students were working their way through the college, including President Nixon. Did you, also, work your way through Whittier College?
- GEORGE: Well, yes.
- ARENA: Either part or full time?
- GEORGE: I had to work all the way through college. The first year I worked through the generosity of Mr. [William] Rich, the manager of the Southern California Gas Company.

He gave me a job there, taking care of the night chores at the gas company. I also had the help of the school, because we were given addresses of people in the neighborhood who were anxious to rent to college students, and I rented a little shack with a friend of mine that I met at the college by the name of George Jenable, and we paid six dollars a month for this cottage.

ARENA: How far was this from the campus? Did you have to walk far to get to your classes?

GEORGE: Two blocks from the school. On Painter Avenue, I think, was the name.

ARENA: If it isn't too personal, do you mind if I ask you if the neighbors gave you a rough time, being a black, or anything like that?

GEORGE: No, not in Whittier. This is what I noticed very favorably about Whittier at that time, because everyone was nice and everyone was congenial and everyone had a smile. But downtown Whittier, apart from the campus, there were many businesses that were operated by people who were not Quakers, who did, at times, have signs, made very noticeable, that "We have the right to cater to" this one or that one, or, "We have the right to refuse service to" this person or that person.

ARENA: While we're on that subject, we might as well take it up to the college itself. Did you ever have any problems of prejudice from the standpoint of Whittier College?

GEORGE: No. I had to wonder, sometimes, whether I was a Quaker or a Negro. There was no difference and there was no prejudice at all. I was invited to, and held many offices in, the college. I was treasurer of the freshman class. I was treasurer of the senior class. I was captain of the track team, and also president of the Cosmopolitan Club. So I was right in the thick of things as just one of the members of Whittier College.

ARENA: When was the very first time, Mr. George, that you did meet President Nixon, that you recollect?

GEORGE: I can't recollect that, because there was a lot of contact--and I say this in a way that it actually happened--that many times we were engaged in activity and not even knowing the names, but knowing the people. I was very much interested in the President, because he was a very articulate speaker, he was very forceful, and he was running for freshman office. I had listened to several talks, and he was just as persuasive then as he is now. This made me pay attention to him in that respect. He was out for the football

team, and many times the varsity would practice against the freshman team, and it was this same person who was always in the thick of things, trying his best to help the freshman team, and also give the varsity a workout.

ARENA: You said off the tape a moment ago, just to make it official, that you did meet other members of his family. Would you go over that again?

GEORGE: Well, Mrs. [Hannah Milhous] Nixon, from time to time, was around the college in the activities pertaining to Whittier. I believe, if I recall, that I had relationships with Mrs. Nixon long before I knew Richard Nixon was her son, because of her interest in activities in and around the school. When I actually knew her by the name of Mrs. Nixon, it wasn't until he was Vice President. And then I remembered the relationship by association and acquaintance with her.

ARENA: Could that be true in some other cases where other relatives of the President on the Milhous side--as you know, his mother was a Milhous, Hannah Milhous Nixon--such other relatives as Mrs. Marshburn, who is Rose Olive Milhous Marshburn; and the fact that his grandfather, the father of his mother, a Milhous, lived where you now have the Quad, at the tail end of Whittier Boulevard and Painter Avenue, if you've seen that recently. That part of the family goes back almost to when the city and the college were founded. Did you ever have any connection with those Milhouses?

GEORGE: The name of Milhous. . . . But the name of Marshburn comes to my mind because there was a youngster going to Whittier College during that time by the name of Marshburn. Now, whether that was a relative of the President, I'm not sure.

ARENA: The Marshburns themselves, the Oscar Marshburn family, have four children, and there are other Marshburns who are cousins, so it could be one of several, not necessarily on the President's aunt's side. Were you aware of other blacks living in Whittier who might have had some connection on the Milhous side? For example, I have been shown pictures by a very elderly gentleman who has quite a collection of old photographs. His name is Mr. Orville Espolt. And Mr. Espolt shows Mr. Franklin Milhous, the President's grandfather, at the Milhous farm at the end of Painter Avenue, who, around the time he came here from Indiana, which would have been the late 1890's, had a black working for him. It showed him atop a wagon with a pair of horses in front, and Mr. Espolt believes very definitely that he came from Indiana. What I'm wondering is, did you possibly come in contact with any blacks who may have had some direct connection with this part of the President's ancestors, just out of coincidence?

GEORGE: No, I haven't.

ARENA: We were speaking of your direct contact with the President's parents. What could you say about your personal relationship with Mrs. Hannah Milhous Nixon?

GEORGE: During the time of the President's father's [Francis Anthony Nixon] illness, I called him to make an appointment to come down to see him, one Sunday after church. I got there before the President (the Vice President at that time) came from church. And when I was admitted in the house by Mrs. Nixon, right away she said, "This is Nate!" And she put her arms around me, and I told her how glad I was to see her, and she said how glad she was I was down to see Richard, as she called him at that time. And then we talked for awhile and I introduced her to my wife, and then she, in turn, introduced me to one of her cousins--I think it was her cousin, or one of Richard's cousins--visiting them at that time. I do recall that she showed me the red carpet that she was standing on in the front entrance of their home. And she said, "Do you know what this is?" I said, "No." She said, "This is where Richard was sworn in as Vice President." And I told her at that time, "Well, he's going to send you another, because one day he'll be President." And she thought very well of that and we had a good chuckle. And then she told me, "Well, I got to hurry now. Sit down and makes yourselves at home, because I'm making Richard an apple pie for dinner."

ARENA: Do you recall, possibly, while you were a student--and you knew her before you realized that you knew she was the President's mother--did you ever taste any of her pies? Did that ring a bell when she said she was going to bake a pie?

GEORGE: No. I'm not saying that to bring in another relationship. This is just what went on at that particular conversation.

ARENA: Do you mind if I ask you if, when the President was a freshman and you were a senior, if you contemplated joining his fraternity, of which he was the charter president, or had you already belonged to a society? I'm speaking now, of course, of the Orthogonians.

GEORGE: No. The Orthogonians were organized during my senior year, I believe, but I was mainly interested in athletics, and I was on the outside, participating in track and football, and the inner-college clubs, other than the Lettermen's Club, which was the varsity club, and the Cosmopolitan Club. I was not interested in it. But I do know that several of my friends who are blacks were members of the Orthogonian club after that.

ARENA: Do you mind if I ask you, besides Mr. William Brock, whom



I've had the pleasure of interviewing, the names of some of the other blacks who were also members?

GEORGE: George H. Venable, retired school teacher, who was in school at the same time I was.

ARENA: And in the same graduating class?

GEORGE: No, because he dropped out a year, and he finished the year after I did.

ARENA: That would have been the class of . . .

GEORGE: '32.

ARENA: Thank you. Do you recall ever witnessing, or appearing at any of the debates in which the President participated, and will you comment on what you recall about that?

GEORGE: I think when he was debating I was running [track]. But I do know that he was a member of the debate team, and I heard several talks he made in the auditorium, I think, in reference to the debates. But, as I said, at that time there wasn't a debate going on.

ARENA: As you know, the President has commented--and it's been in the newspapers, among other places--on his recollection of Chief Newman, whom many others have praised. I'm thinking of Mr. Jack Mele, whom I know you know, also, came later. But Mr. Mele is the principal of one of the local schools, just as an example. And I would like to get your opinion and comment as to the reasons for the admiration that so many of his former students and former athletes have for the Chief.

GEORGE: Well, I think Chief Newman was one of the high-type coaches. He had great personal interest in all of his players. He was a very dedicated man. And he always tried to set an example. He was not too emotional, yet he was strong enough to get his point over, and he was very, very understanding. Each player on his team got the same amount of attention.

ARENA: And as a person who was going to coach, such as yourself, in the physical education field, did you have the Chief as one of your instructors, aside from athletics? Did you have any classwork with him?

GEORGE: Oh, yes.

ARENA: Would you mind commenting on him as a teacher in the classroom?

GEORGE: Well, I thought he was a very good teacher. And, in fact, some of the things he taught I used when I left school and began to coach basketball at the YMCA [Young Men's Christian Association] in Los Angeles, and I still hold some of those things as fundamental truths at this time.

ARENA: Could you recall some particular instances, or some of the points that you found to be worthy of repetition and use in your own area of teaching?

GEORGE: Well, one thing, he taught this: If you are going to coach a team, or coach an individual, never use cheap equipment. Always get the best equipment, in order to give the individual the best opportunity to succeed. And I've never forgotten that, not only for athletics, but I've used that in all types of endeavors. Use the best equipment to work with, rather than inferior equipment.

ARENA: How about the idea of football being on some occasions a rough--and some people even say sometimes a dirty--game, and the idea is to win at any cost? Would you want to comment on the Chief's philosophy regarding that aspect of the game of football?

GEORGE: Chief, as most coaches, wanted to win every game. He taught winning, but he taught winning by the rules. And his rule was to try to be fair and square, play hard, and don't let up.

ARENA: Do you mind if I ask you, where you have pursued your own educational career following Whittier College; that is, not only formally, if you went on and did any more course work, but where you also coached and taught, once you left Whittier College?

GEORGE: When I left Whittier College I was employed right away at the 28th Street YMCA in Los Angeles, where I was the physical director. I stayed there for ten years, coached basketball and track. We had a very fine basketball team because I had the cream of the crop, taken from all the Hi-Y Clubs that we had in the YMCA. We played in nine championship games and won eight and lost one.

ARENA: Did you, like President Nixon, have contact with the YMCA school or special course that Whittier had at that time, and I believe the man in charge was a Mr. J. Gustav White?

GEORGE: He came to Whittier my last year. I knew Mr. White personally, and we had many talks. I was not in any of his classes because I was taking senior work at that time, but I graduated from Whittier with the YMCA's first year of indoctrination at the college.

ARENA: As this interview is coming to a close, Mr. George, would you mind if I ask you if there's anything I have not asked you so far, anything I have not covered, that you would like to bring up at this time for the record?

GEORGE: I would like to put this on the record. When I am talking about the President to various people, I always like to bring this particular point out: That anytime a youngster goes through college and is president of the freshman class, president of the sophomore class, president of the junior class, and then student body president of the whole school in his senior year, I feel that that's enough evidence to show that a man or person of those qualities would eventually be president wherever he goes. And this is one of the fine things I have tried to say about the President, regardless of what other people might have said about him or in favor of him. I felt that this was the most striking thing that could be said, owing to the fact that he has succeeded, an ordinary citizen, up to being President of the United States, which is the greatest office in the world.

ARENA: Mr. George, I can't thank you enough for taking the trouble to come out here to Whittier today, for agreeing to this interview, and for answering all my questions so frankly and fully. Thank you very much.

GEORGE: Thank you.