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Paul S. Smith and Lillian M. Smith (October 27, 1971, second interview)

C. Richard Arena
Whittier College

Second Oral History Interview

with

DR. PAUL S. SMITH
MRS. LILLIAN M. SMITH Present
October 27, 1971
Whittier, California

By Dr. C. Richard Arena

For the Richard Nixon Oral History Project

ARENA: This is an interview with Dr. Paul S. Smith of Whittier, California, formerly history teacher of President Nixon and president of Whittier College. The date is October 27, 1971. The interview is being conducted in the residence of Dr. and Mrs. Smith, Arena interviewing. Before going into the interview in a formal way, I do want to establish, correct me if I'm wrong, Dr. Smith, that you are also at the present time the Chancellor of Whittier College and an ex officio member of the Board of Trustees.

SMITH: That's right.

ARENA: So you still play a very active role in the life of the college. In this interview which succeeds the other one we have already had, the overall purpose will be to concentrate on your direct and indirect contact with the President during his student years at the college between 1930 and 1934. By direct I would mean your being his history teacher. By indirect, your recollecting debates and other extracurricular activities, including possibly talks that he may have given in the local First Friends Church of the city of Whittier or even the chapel of the college. So shall we begin by my asking you the general question and you take as much time as you care in answering it, what was the direct contact between you and the President during his college years, 1930 to 1934?

SMITH: Well, Dr. Arena, the Richard Nixon, as you know from our earlier talks, was a major student of mine in the field of history, and I had him I think in all the classes which I taught, which were four or five, and I have in hand here, looking at this material, my grade books for the years he was a student at Whittier and in my classes. And I never thought of this before, but here is an interesting matter.

There is much speculation over the years about the relationship between grades in college and success in life afterwards, and professional activities of one kind and another, and I think cases have been made that there is not much correlation between the two, and other cases have been made that there is a very close correlation, and so that's an open question. But in these grade books it is rather an interesting thing, as I look over the grades and see the students that were associated with Richard Nixon in classes, it seems to me there is a very close reflection between Nixon, the President, and Nixon, the student. Now what I mean by that is that in the case of Richard Nixon I think you have to take a second look to discern his merits. That is an important observation. Certainly as President of the United States I think that is true. Nixon as President has always had a popularity problem. There's no secret about this. He speaks of it himself. It is a kind of problem. I do believe that in the case of Nixon as Chief Executive, that the closer he is looked at in his job as Chief Executive of the country that he benefits by the inspection. That's what I mean by taking a second look at the man to see what he is really like and what his capacities are.

I think this was equally true when he was a student at Whittier College. I think it took a second look to really check his merits. For example, and that's extremely interesting, I see in one instance here where one grade, in making the final assessment of grades, where one tentative grade I have crossed out and put in the final grade. The tentative grade was not an "A" but the final grade is an "A". Now there's a rather dramatic demonstration of the necessity of reflection on the personality and the capabilities of this man. Very interesting.

Now as it turns out, his grades were rather good. They were all right. Here is a class of twenty-five, and I think my grade curve here runs pretty close to the recommended grade curve for colleges and universities generally. You know how this is. There is an established, fashionable, standardized grade curve, and if you get very far from it, then the critics think you're not running a good operation. But here is a class of twenty-five and I see there are three "A's" only in twenty-five, which is a good acceptable

academic ratio and of the three "A's", two of the "A's" went to girls--we always say the girls are smarter than the boys--and if any boy was to receive an "A", it would be only one, and I see it was Nixon. And in one case I remember one of these girls here more vividly than I remember Nixon in this class. Isn't that an interesting thing? And I believe it took a second look on my part to say, "Well, the business of assessing a student is to see what he's like right this minute and look a little deeper and see that you are really catching all that is there to be seen and to be had."

I want to repeat that, Dick [Arena]. I think it was a terribly important thing that here is the characteristic of the man; he bears a second observation to see what he's really worth. I think it was true when he was a college student and I think it's true in his active political life and as President of the United States.

ARENA: Dr. Smith, would you mind giving the name of that particular course?

SMITH: Yes, I'm going to do that. This particular course is a course in History of the English People, and the textbook we used was Esme Wingfield-Stratford, History of the British People. I think in some respects the best history ever written of the British culture pattern. Wingfield-Stratford is a Britisher, a very famous English historian and author and a remarkable person.

And I would say incidentally that when you choose a college text, Dick, you have to have two things in mind. One is a text that significantly evaluates as well as narrates the culture pattern of whatever the subject people might be. I think you have to have that. And then secondly, if that same text is classic also, in the sense of its being written by a very wise, philosophically commonsense, introspective, innovative mind, then you've got a real piece of work. And in my view of the matter, if a student is exposed to that kind of textbook, I like to believe that it does leave an impression indelible, conscious or unconscious, on the subject himself, that means an awful lot and is influential in their thinking, their actions and their work through the rest of their lives. I think this is terribly important.

ARENA: Dr. Smith, before you go on, and while we are discussing the question of the academic side, in a way, of the President's class for a moment as you just did, it just occurred to me that former students of yours, whom I will not mention now, but former students of yours have made it very clear that one of the main benefits that they obtained from attending your classes was that you made the figures come out live, and I just can't help

picking your brain, so to speak, and asking you what advice would you give the interviewer--I am the interviewer at present, there might be others in this project--what advice and counsel would you give the interviewer to make sure that a person such as yourself, who will be teaching the history, including the history of one Richard M. Nixon, what you would like to see the interviewer get from his interviewers, whoever they may be, not only a teacher such as you but a member of the family, a school chum? What would you like to see the interviewer go after, if I may raise that question?

SMITH: Well, Dick, do you mind if I go ahead with one more thing. I will hold this question in abeyance.

ARENA: That's quite all right.

SMITH: Then I'll keep it closely connected for you. Now another class I want to refer to here is a class in History of the American People. That class had in it twenty-four students and there were four "A's" in that class. In this instance I see that Nixon did not have a tentative grade, but his grade again in this case was "A" without any equivocation or hesitation. Four "A's" out of twenty-four students. By the way, the textbook there in this course was Morison & Commager, History of the American People, which you as an expert historian know perfectly well. And again, that book is published by the Oxford Press, which is a hallmark of excellence anyway, is another textbook that is a class with the Esme Wingfield-Stratford text, you see, a text which as you know has been translated into four or five different languages and used quite widely up and down certain areas of the world and which, by the way, the first adoption of that book was by us here at Whittier College. It was subsequently adopted by something like three hundred colleges and universities in succeeding years. And that again is a book which you simply cannot read carefully without being everlastingly influenced by it. And to this day, in my teaching from it, I remember many a sentence.

And I would like to speculate that Richard Milhous Nixon as President of the United States, suffering the barbs that every President has to suffer, must--I would like to check him some of these days, I would like to know if this is true--I would like to think that more than once his mind has gone back to this textbook and that particular sentence that ends the chapter on the Administration of John Quincy Adams, who was disclaimed by the American people, didn't get a second term, when he said something, "Oh, why

does the universe abandon me." Nixon would take a lot of comfort in this, particularly since I have seen in recent literature a comparison made by some of the contemporary correspondents of the country of a certain likeness between John Quincy Adams and Richard Nixon. And I would say there is a likeness. In both of those cases, you had to take a second look to see what their abilities really were like.

But in the case of [Samuel E.] Morison & [Henry S.] Commager's book, the last sentence in that chapter on the administration of John Quincy Adams, the authors say after this lament of Adams, they write, "But the greatest part of his career lies ahead." And they were referring to the twenty years he spent as a member of the House of Representatives as a former President of the United States, if you will. And I would like to think that Richard Nixon, if he remembers this book--I think he must remember this particular episode, it's so close, you see, to his own life experiences--may wonder, well what does life have in store for me in the years ahead. And this is what I think is good textbook writing and hopefully, if the teacher doesn't get in the way, makes the teacher a pretty reasonably good teacher of history.

I want to go to one more class here, a class in historical procedure. We called it Historiography.

ARENA: Do you recall what year that would have been offered, junior or senior year?

SMITH: He'd be a senior in the year 1933. And again as you know, because you're a well-trained historian, historiography can mean the study of the formal procedures, where you put the footnotes and how you use authorities and so on and so on and so on. In the case of our work here, we did none of that. It is important all right and should be done, but in this class we didn't hit that. Instead we primarily gave our attention to the philosophy of history. And the textbook used there was Frederick J. Teggart, Theory of History, a book I suspect now out of print, published by Oxford Press by the way, another hallmark of excellence.

Teggart was a professor of history at the University of California, very unorthodox himself, even to the point of where the time came when he left the Department of History--or was ousted out, I don't know--but he left the Department of History and founded another department called the Department of Human Institutions and he was given to the philosophical study of man. And that's what this Theory of History book is. And it was beyond the understanding of the students, I assume, because it was beyond my understanding, but we wrestled with it. And as a teacher I got an awful lot of

good out of that book and I like to think that the four students I had in there had a similar experience. There were four and by golly, if I may use a Midwestern term, there are two "B's", one "A and one "C" and Nixon gets the "A".

Now the queer thing about this is, I do not remember Nixon when he was a college student as a grade seeker. I don't recall. Today, I think there is a very interesting comparison between his studentship days and his Presidentialship days. I think this is a tremendously significant thing. I don't remember him, as I say, as a seeker of grades. I have no recollection of his ever having come to me and say, "What can I do to assure myself of a good grade?" I recollect no expression of interest on Nixon's part on this whole grade thing. I think he was oblivious to grades as far as I can tell. Now he was an attentive, assiduous student all right, and I've always said in my teaching years that a good student does very well to forget about grades but remember the subject matter, and if he grasps the subject matter and understands it perfectly well, if examinations are fair, he is going to write good examinations and get good grades. That is what I tried to tell my students through many, many years.

But this is very interesting, and I am glad to have you ask this question that leads into this, Dick. I think this is one of the best questions that any oral interviewer could possibly ask--the relationship between college experience and college impressions and what life afterward had to say about the subject. In this case I think there's a correlative, you see, relationship between these things. Well, there you are, an amazing thing. I tell you it really is. Now here of the four a girl I remember very well. I remember her in class better than I remember Nixon. That's Winifred Davies, Lillian, [speaking to Lillian, Mrs. Paul Smith]. You remember her very well, excellent student. But nonetheless she comes out with a "B" and Richard, whom I don't remember in class as well as Winifred, although there were only four there, comes out with the "A".

ARENA: Would you mind giving the names of those other students for future possibilities of interviewing?

SMITH: I don't mind at all. It's very interesting.

ARENA: I would like to interview them from the standpoint of their recollection.

SMITH: And some of them I think you have already, yes, this is great. One of them is Kenneth Ball, whom you know and whom you have talked about. But you may never hit him

quite from the standpoint of being a member of this class, that I don't know. The second is Winifred Davies, now Mrs. Howard Church, who lives up north in Monterey [California]. Her husband is a teacher in the Military Institute up there. He's a very good person. Richard Nixon, of course, and Louis Valla. It was a year course. We only gave one grade and that was the end of the year and, as I say, Richard Nixon comes out with an "A". So this is rather interesting.

I have never quite thought of this in this most important context--I guess it's not strange to a psychologist--but how the characteristics of a young man continue to be the characteristics of a middle-aged man. And it's so predominantly the case here in the case of Nixon, in thinking about his pattern as a college student and his pattern as a President of the United States. A very interesting thing there you see. Now, earlier you asked a question. Would you ask that question again. Dick, so I will have it perfectly clear?

ARENA: Yes. To be sure that this project, the Richard Nixon Oral History Project, will have value to scholarly historians such as yourself, I should like to ask you what you would like to see the oral historian, such as myself, and there could be others in the project, but what type of question would you as a teacher and writer of history like to have the interviewer ask, so that you would have raw material that would be best suited for your preparation of history courses as well as writing about history. In this case, of course, the subject matter is Richard Nixon, President of the United States. But put yourself in my position. What would you like to ask so that you could benefit, and I could benefit, by having your advice regarding this entire question?

SMITH: I will have to cogitate a half a second on this. But while I'm doing that, let me say this: I think an example of good questions in this field are precisely the ones you have been asking. I think, really, and I'm not trying to flatter you offhand here at all, Dick, but I do think that you ask significant, perspective questions that strike me as being as good an example as I could possibly give, although I will give some others in a moment or two, to really make all history a significant part of posterity and a significant source of information for the future historian. And I want to say that because I think you deserve it.

Now, if I were the interviewer, I can't improve on your questions at all, but since I'm a different person I might look at it a little differently in some ways. If I were an interviewer, I would do precisely what you've been doing and as you go on, I dare say you

have done this to other interviewers, too, is to give tremendous emphasis to the student of history, to--what shall I call it--I guess the interrelationships of the subject to his surroundings, and I don't mean in the case of Richard Nixon, only his academic surroundings.

I think a good historian is not a recluse. Indeed, I think a good academic person is not a recluse, and I am afraid I have to say--and I myself am an unfortunate example of this in my teaching years--that in a real sense academic people, maybe by circumstance of their profession, are forced into positions of being somewhat on the reclusive side. It's an off-the-tongue expression, as you know, that a teacher lives in an ivory tower. And I think to some extent there is truth in that. And if it is so, I think to an extent it is so. . . .

I remember, for example, one of our professors at Whittier College, a professor of French, a few years ago had a leave of absence for a year and he was in France and he fell off the platform of a railroad depot and broke his leg. And I reported to our Board of Trustees that our professor on leave--I thought the board would be interested in this--had fallen off the platform at the railroad depot and broken his leg. I shall never forget the response of one member of the Board of Trustees. He said, "I would have thought rather that he fell out of the ivory tower and broke his leg," you see. Well, now there is a businessman's attitude, and this was a terribly important businessman, formerly president of American Airlines, Eastern Airlines, TWA [Trans World Airlines, Inc.], a national industrialist, a fine person, respector of education and of college professors, too, for that matter, but that's the way he put it.

So I think we tend to, and I think this is very important to establish--and I think you're doing it very well, by the way--on Richard Nixon, that he's somebody as well as his teacher's somebody outside the classroom. I think we keep forgetting this. I think we do. And in this same connection, when a student reads a textbook in the field of history, I think, and this is terribly important I believe, Dick, I have the feeling that if the warning I've just expressed isn't kept carefully and clearly and constantly in mind, that the teacher is prone to forget that the words on the book are much more than words, they're people. These words on the textbook, they move. They are words in motion, because these are people in motion, describing events in motion, describing men and women in motion doing things. And it's so easy to confuse cold print in a textbook, if you don't have imagination and application to the times, to not see these words as words out of the mouth of living people. I think that's terribly important. And the textbooks I've mentioned here as examples of good textbooks, all of them have this characteristic, this sense. Morison, for example, and Commager--well, Commager, you know him well.

ARENA: Do you mind if I ask you, do you know if Commager is still living? I know Morison is.

SMITH: Yes.

ARENA: They are both quite up in years. I did have the textbook, by the way, back in '46 and '47 at Temple University.

SMITH: Well, you know what I'm talking about then.

ARENA: I know well what you mean.

SMITH: Well, now, Admiral Morison when he wrote that tremendously beautiful thing. Is it two volumes, The Admiral of the Ocean Seas, biography of Columbus?

ARENA: Yes.

SMITH: Now he did something that every teacher in history ought to take note of. He made the trip across the ocean, trying to retrace as close as he thought he could the route taken by Christopher Columbus. You see, he knew what I'm trying to say better than I can say it.

ARENA: If ever there was not an ivory tower historian, he would be it.

SMITH: He would be it, wouldn't he? He indeed would. And it is an amazing thing that a person who had such a reputation in the field of the military, the Naval, was also such a distinguished historian. I say it's strange. On second thought, I think it is not strange at all because this is another exemplification of my thesis, that the teacher has to be more than teacher, he has to be a man or a woman, if the teacher happens to be a woman. I think this is terribly important, that these are flowing pages in a textbook and they flutter in the wind of history. They really do. And now there are textbooks written, I think, Dick, that are not like this and they don't move, and these textbooks don't elicit and don't inspire and they don't lift and they don't call upon imagination. But the whole idea . . .

ARENA: Would you carry that over, if you don't mind my interrupting for a moment, to say that what is true of the textbook situation, the writer who makes things come to life because

where possible he has lived them, is true of the teacher in the classroom? You have the two types in that sense. The teacher who teaches from books rather than from personal experience.

SMITH: I think so. And in this connection, Dick, that leads me to say this, which I think is in the same field of discussion. I think it's a great thing to be involved in the community. I don't mean the local community alone but the state community, the regional community and the national community if it can be brought about. And you ask about these teachers of history. It's interesting. One of the basic questions I think every teacher of history faces is--and every textbook writer--how much does he have to write with the idea of acceptance by popular vote of what he is writing and what he is teaching? And if he goes too far, he is not likely to be a very good teacher, and he's not likely to write a very good textbook. I'm going to give you an illustration.

A good many years ago I gave a talk to one of the service clubs. I'll leave it unnamed, but it was one in the city of Whittier. And I'm presently a member of that club, so if anyone wants to go back they can identify it, if they wish. It's one of the good clubs. They're all good clubs--the Kiwanis, the Rotary and the Lions. They're all, all right. I gave this talk on whatever it was and I believe it was on Thomas Jefferson, maybe. It might have been a 4th of July talk on the Declaration of Independence or something like that. But at any rate, in the talk I made reference to Thomas Jefferson. Of course, if I'd have talked on the Declaration of Independence, it would have been primarily Jefferson being discussed. It must have been some other topic. But at any rate, whatever it was, I had occasion to quote Thomas Jefferson or something or other. And I had no more than gotten back to the campus when a member of that club said, "Paul, what did you say in your noon address here in Whittier to this service club?" He said, "I understand you quoted Thomas Jefferson." And what he was telling me was that Jefferson was not in too much local favor. He was a Democrat, you see.

Earlier in these interviews we talked about the close-knit community we lived in; there was pretty much one party and pretty much one church and pretty much one view kind of community that people began to break away from. Nixon began to break away from it, as you know. When he appeared before the Board of Trustees of Whittier College for a particular issue that he was developing, he had that on record earlier I know.

ARENA: I do want to get your views on that and your recollection of that incident.

SMITH: Okay. But, my friend who was on the administrative staff here queried me as to what in the world I had said to this local business club. And I said, "Yes, I quoted Thomas Jefferson." And he said, "Well, a member of the club was talking unfavorably about that observation of yours, and what shall I say to him?" Well, I said, "Howard [L. Hockett], this is what you can say to him. You call him up and say this: That the Pennsylvania Railroad is one of the great railroads of the world and their motto is 'Standard of the World'" Your readers in years to come will laugh at that because presently the Penn Central is in bankruptcy, but it's still a great railroad system, you see. It was in those days. And their crack train in those days, this must have been the late thirties or early forties I'm talking about, that ran from New York [New York] to St. Louis [Missouri] and back again, their fastest, most deluxe train was called in this capitalistic corporation, the Pennsylvania Railroad Company, was called The Jeffersonian. I said, "That's the answer to this gentleman. He's probably ridden on that train and didn't object to it." I said, "Of course, Jefferson is one of the great figures of American history, and he is the author of the Declaration of Independence and he is highly quotable."

And I may say in passing right now, Dick, as a member myself of the American Revolution Bicentennial Commission, planning a national celebration and observation for our 200th anniversary of this country of ours, it is built around the philosophy of freedom, the Declaration of Independence, and all the rest of it. Of course, since the impact of people like Nixon and others on this community of Whittier, there has been a great loosening of feelings on all these things and a new receptivity. There are not near the closed minds that I think I first encountered at Whittier when such things as smoking or drinking or dancing were regarded as immoral acts. It's no longer regarded so by our community here.

ARENA: Excuse me. Before we leave the Jefferson business, I can't help but bring up this quote. I used to work for the government as a historian in the National Park Service at Independence Hall and I used to give that tour--that was one of my functions, on the hour, every hour practically, in the summer. And I do recall standing at a commemorative plaque placed in the cement by the statue of [George] Washington right in front of Independence Hall on the Chestnut Street side. And the suggested information that the guided tour historian should give was this: That [Abraham] Lincoln in passing through Philadelphia [Pennsylvania] and visiting

Independence Hall--the first successful Republican President by the way--said that the Declaration of Independence had a special significance to him and this is a quote. Lincoln said, "I never took a political breath that did not in some way emanate from that document," the Declaration of Independence, and that has always stuck in my mind and I could just see the truth of that. If ever there was a man, of course, where the Declaration of Independence and what the United States stands for and everything, if ever that could be wrapped up in one man, it has to be Abraham Lincoln. And that makes so much sense.

SMITH: Yes. And on this whole subject, and it's a tremendously rich field, as you and I and all historians know, this good textbook feature we're talking about and this good professor aspect you're talking about. Just a moment ago I was talking about the word flow in these textbooks. If they're well written, they're not static, they're mobile and they keep going right along. And in some ways the best preparation, I think, you can make in the study of history is to do something to make oneself conscious that these folks were living, breathing people. And that's hard to get across, Dick. For example, I daresay that most students of history never thought of these great historical figures getting sick. But they got sick like you and I get sick. And if you read--whatever that book is, I've forgotten the author's name now--The Health of the Presidents, it's a definitive book on the health of the presidents, and when you read about their afflictions, all the way from George Washington on down, in days of medical infancy, you wonder how in the world they stood up under the burdens of state at all. They had all kinds of terrible diseases and difficulties and what not. And how they lived I don't understand and how they so illustriously discharged their duties, I don't see how they did it.

And it's this thing I'm talking about, Dick, about these people being people, people, people. And they keep forgetting it. And this is the atmosphere of realism that has to surround the mind of the student before he comes into the study of some particular chapter of history. History is never only political history. We have textbooks written or history books written on The Political History of the United States. That's all right. That means that book is emphasizing the political aspect, but it is not saying this is written ignorant of the many other aspects that complement the political. There's the social, the economic and the religious and the medical and all the rest of it. These are the things that I think are significant for this general question you asked me a moment ago.

ARENA: May I ask you this question about your reference earlier to the President's not standing out in your mind as an "A" student as much as the other "A" students. Where did it come to your attention that he was going to major in history, with a particular objective in mind, say, the law or teaching? Did it come clear, say, in the second year or the last year that he was going to use his history as a basis for the study of law later on?

SMITH: That's a very interesting question. I'm going to preface that by my statement relative to what we've been talking about to get into this. I think I may have said for your tape before, I'll say it again for certainty, that Nixon's answers were always disturbing to the professor--I mean his written examination, answers to the examination questions--were always disturbing to me as a teacher because of their ultra-brevity. They were super-brief. And a college professor figures when he asks a given question that it will take a given amount of space to adequately answer it. And we'll say, for illustration, he'll allot two pages in the blue [answer] book, and he estimates it will take fifteen minutes to adequately answer his question. To be realistic, he has to approach it that way. And Nixon's answers always came in using maybe half the space, or less than half the space. And you turn to his blue book and there were sometimes as many vacant pages as filled-in pages.

Well, now here you have two blue books, Dick, and one here is wholesomely written all the way through and it's heavily laden with words. And here's another guy over here, Richard Nixon, and there's empty pages in his blue book and the answers are sharp in nature. And on the face of it you see the heavier thing here is the better thing. And that's why I said a moment ago, you had to look at this guy. I'd read through the paper and say, "Well, this is not bad, not bad at all. It's a good "B" all right." And then you'd stop and say, "But what has he left unsaid." And then you begin to look for the unsaid things, and you don't find the unsaid things in there. They're all said. Exasperatingly brief for the leisurely pace of the college professor but, confound it, it seemed to be in there. So what do you do. You've got to kind of eat a little crow and say, "Well, I guess, I guess, that's a good answer."

And so that's another illustration of what I mean by saying you had to kind of look at this fellow to perceive the stuff that was there, you see. And maybe that was a tipoff to an interest in some profession in which you begin to hammer the nail with the first stroke. Lawyers only equivocate when they do it purposefully. For

some special reason they may go around Robin Hood's barn. But if they do, that's a part of their planned course, and when they don't do it, then you get the brief thing, you see.

Now in the case of Richard Nixon, this is a story I heard about him as a practicing attorney. It's very interesting. His lawyer friends used to tell me--this is in his early days of law practice in the case of Nixon--that Dick would come into the court--a jury trial we will say--into the room just at the minute the case was to be called, not earlier but just then, like a good surgeon. Now some lawyers prefer to come in 20 minutes earlier or 15 minutes earlier and sit down and study the faces of the jurors or try to catch the temper of the attaches, aides and what not in the courtroom, or maybe catch the mien of the Judge if he comes in two or three minutes early, you see, size up the situation. And lawyers who practiced with Nixon told me that he just came in in the nick of time and took it from there. And I don't know what sort of philosophy you draw from that. Maybe it means self-assurance. I don't know. Maybe the guy had a heavy law practice and couldn't get there ahead of time. I don't know. I have no explanation for this. But it is kind of interesting nonetheless. And maybe it was a surprise tactic. It's said of the President, you know, that he pulls a lot of surprise tactics. Maybe again here we are having a replay as the President, of chapters of his history as a student at Whittier College. It's kind of a funny thing, Dick, the way you see these similarities and talk about them.

ARENA: This could tie in with a point you made earlier that he never did anything directly to indicate that he wanted a certain grade or that he wanted to use any pressure. Could he possibly be doing the same thing with a judge by his not calling attention to himself but rather just to his works, so to speak. In the case of your grade from you, it was his paper or the report or whatever he turned in that was going to speak for him. And possibly this work that he did during the actual working part of the court trial was going to do the speaking for him and, of course, his client. That's just an observation.

SMITH: I think that's a good observation. And as I reconstruct those college days of the President, I think that he was at least as much thoughtful as he was loquacious. I think his brevity of participation all in class was very much like the brevity of his written examination papers. He was a great person to listen as well as to talk.

BEGIN SIDE II TAPE I

ARENA: In respect to the President's interest in history, is there anything else in the formal sense of his work before we move on, we'll say, to how history and his other subjects and other extracurricular activities interrelated? Can you think of examples possibly where a report in another class or participation in a play worked its way into your course? But that I would like you to answer after we exhaust your recollection of his full 100 percent history attention.

SMITH: Yes. I keep thinking in terms of comparative values here this morning, as you can see, and if a thing doesn't have a comparative value, it's without value I think, Dick, actually. If it doesn't have a use, you see, it's not much good except as a subject for curious study, and so relevance comes in comparisons and relationships. [Static on tape]. And I have been interested in seeing the pictures of President Nixon in meetings of all sorts around, you see, and I am impressed with what the pictures seem to say, that he is listening to his compatriots in meetings of one kind and another, listening very carefully.

And as President of the United States, his pattern, we know, in decision-making is to listen to all of the arguments and then to withdraw up to his study to make, as he says, to make MY decision. Now that doesn't mean that it is his decision, sub rosa, tabula rasa, not out of his own mind and his own heart but after he has heard all of the evidence, what these folks have got to say, then he makes the final decision, in contrast to the way--[Lyndon B.] Johnson for example--where it was more ostentatiously a group decision there, made under the eyes of the observer. And I think this characterized Nixon as a student in class. I have an idea that more than once he withdrew from a class of mine thinking to himself and maybe saying some things to himself that he didn't say in class. It might have been complimentary and it might not have been. I don't know. Although he was very kind, as you know, as President of the United States, to say some things about his history training that he alleges was terribly important to him.

And if the President called me up today. . . . Well, I'll put it this way. Our friend, who was an advisor for two years, went back to Harvard, professor over there at Harvard. You know who I mean, Lillian. Oh, dear, Nixon asked him for ten books--political histories for him to read--[Daniel P.] Moynihan, Moynihan, a very brilliant mind as you know. And he gave a list of ten books for President Nixon to read. And, as you know, in a group of historians,

you make a list of anything and you find a lot of other historians disagreeing and I think many times with plenty of cause. You can draw up a list of ten books just as good as Moynihan's and, therefore, you have the right to criticize Moynihan and vice versa for that matter. But if I had been giving a list of ten books for the President of the United States to read today, Richard Milhous Nixon, I would put on that list the three books I mentioned a while ago, and I would say, "Mr. President, you ought to read these again." I'm going to, by golly, get those three books and send them to him and say, "Listen, fellow, this is good stuff," and it appertains to the study of life and the manipulations necessary to preserve the peace, which Nixon talks so much about and all the rest of it.

ARENA: Moynihan had been formerly possibly with President [John F.] Kennedy and later with Johnson, I believe.

SMITH: Yes, he was.

ARENA: And the fact that President Nixon would retain such an advisor is of interest in itself, going back to the idea that he would take the counsel of all.

SMITH: Yes, and Moynihan said something terribly important. You better talk to that thing for a moment, Dick, I want to call this to your attention. When Moynihan left his position, he was with Nixon for two years as his advisor and was advisor to his two predecessors, to go back to Harvard, before he left. . . . Well, I guess he wrote an article for LIFE, or was interviewed by the press or something. At any rate, he wrote this, Moynihan wrote this, and he was intimate with Nixon, you see, that is, he was a close advisor, and Moynihan has a pretty agile mind too, I'll tell you. And this is what Moynihan wrote. "Time and time again the President," (he's speaking of Nixon now) "has said things with startling insight, taken positions of great political courage and intellectual daring, only to be greeted with silence or incomprehension." Now that observation of Moynihan is tying in with what we have been saying all along here, you see, that this particular character that you are putting on the tape requires a second look, a good, hard, compassionately critical look, not a crass critical look. I am not trying to make a case for President Nixon at all. Any historian is only interested in reality--what are the capacities and abilities of an individual. And the country is too much in need of ability to overlook it when it exists, or for that matter to speak in a lament if it doesn't exist. But this is an interesting

thing I think, Dick, here and I've been saying this morning that Nixon is the type where you want to take a double take to be sure of your evaluation of the man.

ARENA: In your reference, as we have just done, in tying in the Nixon of today with the Nixon of Dr. Paul Smith's student days, this thought comes to mind. As you know, the President refers to history in his major addresses. He gives historical examples, referring to the country in its infancy and its early self-governing days and so forth. What comes to mind is: Other writers, other thinkers who were very prone to make historical references were the 18th Century philosophers, and in his book Carl Becker spends quite a bit of time on the importance of history to that generation, which would include people like [Thomas] Jefferson and [Benjamin] Franklin. My question for your reflection is, is there this meaning of history to the President? In his making references to historical examples, is it similar, do you think, to that used by the 18th Century philosophers or is it just the President's own recollection of his own history major days?

SMITH: Well, I'm hoping in a way that they are one and the same thing, really. I'll have to brush up on my history here, Dick. I haven't worked with it for twenty years, you see. But these philosophers you refer to probably were, next to the men in the Constitutional Convention, given to theoretical considerations of the nature of man, which I think is just fearfully fundamental.

ARENA: As a matter of fact, it is my understanding that those men who did write the Constitution were very much in the same category. They would be considered philosophers.

SMITH: Exactly.

ARENA: I'm sure Carl Becker would say that.

SMITH: There isn't any question about that. And if you wade through [James] Madison's notes of the Constitutional Convention as I've been doing--it drives you mad by the way--they're great notes and how Madison found time to write them I'll never understand. But to catch motions made and negated or affirmed or postponed, or what not, drives you mad, but those men. . . . There's one thing I wish we could have gotten into Nixon's undergraduate work in history and that was our course [Dr. Albert] Upton and I gave together on Critical Procedures.

That's the one thing I would relish additionally to what he had at Whittier. And in that course we spent the whole year reading Madison's notes and the youngsters, members of the class, wrote a major paper on some subject discussed at the Convention like, "How shall a Chief Executive be Chosen?" "What was the Intent in Establishing the Judiciary?" "What about the Relationship Between Large and Small States?" and all that kind of thing; a magnificent exercise really. And Arthur Corey, member of the Board of Trustees, by the way, and longtime head of the California Teachers' Association, a very able person by the way, a Whittier College grad, once sat in that class Upton and I taught together, and said that should be given in every college and university in the country, which I think is true. And that was not a compliment to Upton and myself, but it was a recognition of the tremendous importance of this source document. It was tremendous.

And those men there gave such uninhibited expressions. Gee, when they talk about how power corrupts and how wealth corrupts-- [Charles A.] Beard writes an economic interpretation of the Constitution in which you know as well as I do has a thesis that they were largely motivated at least natively so by economic interests and maybe they were. But at the same time in their conversations, they sure lay it out cold as to what the dangers of living are really, and how you handle power and how you handle money and how you handle slaves. I was amazed the other day to see where someone said we ought to free all slaves. That was said in the Constitutional Convention back in 1787. And that's something the blacks ought to be quoting too, by the way. There's a lot of compassion in this country for servitude as there was back even then.

But I think you are exactly right, but I don't know in our work, other in that course in English History, and that didn't give much more than a touch to what I am talking about now, but a tremendous study of the English philosophers, like Hobbes and Locke and the other man I can't think of right now who wrote such a magnificant thing there.

ARENA: Did you say Locke?

SMITH: Yes, Locke, John Locke.

ARENA: And Thomas Hobbes.

SMITH: Right.

ARENA: Speaking of Hobbes, Dr. Roy F. Nichols, I believe it is just one "L", at any rate his The American Leviathan is a kind of fruition of his complete life work in history in which he makes a very definite connection between the Protestant revolution in England and the rise of successful self-government in the United States. I don't know if you have had a chance to read that yet, but I would love to get your reaction to it.

SMITH: I might look at it. I can't think of the name of the English philosopher, I think the book he wrote . . .

ARENA: [Thomas R.] Malthus?

SMITH: No, I think the book is entitled Oceana, I'm not sure of this, but at any rate it was a tremendous piece of work, and he developed what he called an ideal, a sample constitution for an ideal commonwealth.

ARENA: Let me correct myself quickly. It was John Stuart Mill that wrote that and Malthus who talked about a current popular topic--population, of course.

SMITH: Yes. Well this fellow, he was one of these philosophers you're talking about and he wrote this magnificant thing. I'm trying to think of the name of it right now. Oh yes, I have it now, James Harrington was the author. And it reminds me of the draft of the model constitution written up here at Santa Barbara [California] by the Institute for Democratic Institutions. It's underwritten by one of the affiliates of the Ford Foundation--the Institute for Democratic Institutions. And you know the former president of Chicago University is the head of it.

Mrs.
SMITH: Robert M. Hutchens.

SMITH: Yes, Robert M. Hutchens, and I think who they had out to consult in the work they did was Chief Justice [Warren] Burger, I believe.

ARENA: I believe Chief Justice [Earl] Warren is now doing something regarding the history of the Supreme Court or certain aspects of government.

SMITH: Yes.

ARENA: I don't know if that would be the same project or not, but I do know that this was mentioned by Mrs. Willa Baum and that is one reason why she has not been able to interview him personally. He has been tied up with some project.

SMITH: I see. But at any rate this Oceana book written by Harrington made this basic proposition, and I think it has come back to what has been a major theme in the last hour talking together here, Dick. He proposed that every citizen in this ideal commonwealth trade jobs with every other citizen every six months. Now there is an old Indian saying, I think, isn't there, "You don't know a man 'til you walk in his moccasins," or something like this, and that's true. I think it's true. I think this man was a very wise man.

Now in a complex society like we have today, I guess you couldn't do it, but if it were possible, and how unfortunate it is that it isn't possible--maybe we're too overcivilized, you see--if we could have that kind of experience. I think the philosophy of that author was sound, although the practicality of it might not be sound today. But I talked about flowing words in a textbook a while ago, and here it is all over again, this fellow who says the way to get that is to put every man in every other man's position for every six months or so. It's like these colleges that require their professors to go out once in a while--one or two colleges do this every seventh year you know--and get a job out somewhere doing anything and then come back. That's your sabbatical. I think Oberlin [College] does that. Is it Oberlin? Some Ohio college has been doing this for years. I don't think it's Oberlin.

ARENA: Antioch [College].

SMITH: Antioch. I think Antioch is the one I wanted to think of. But at any rate those things are all very tremendously germane. Did you have another question a moment ago that I didn't get to?

ARENA: Well, the question dealing with the President's extra-curricular activities that from your recollection and your observation tied in with his historical interests. Say, in campaigning for the presidency of the student government, if you recall any of his speeches that might have been made in front of the faculty as well as the students. Was there a particular historical bent to any of these? Do his campaign speeches of that day

remind you in any way of his campaign or Presidential speeches of today in tenor and tone and approach and structure?

SMITH: Well, I feel just a little bit in a vacuum there. I'm trying to think of any memories of that.

ARENA: Need not be his political campaigns, but any of his debates or any of the public addresses he might have made as a student.

SMITH: Well, I have to speak negatively on this. Nixon never came to me with any queries or requests for help in his debates. I guess this is Nixon again, maybe. I think of these grades a while ago and I saw the name of a lad who won a statewide oratorical contest, and he sure came to me for help that lad did. Not Nixon, another student. Maybe I helped him so much I was in a sense the co-author of his oration, I don't know. But I'll never forget that student. He came to me and I worked very closely with him on this.

ARENA: Would you give his name, please, and possibly recall if President Nixon was one of the competitors who lost, which would be of interest.

SMITH: I can't remember his name.

ARENA: Possibly there could be a record by year, by my rechecking the Yearbooks of that era.

SMITH: It was 19 . . .

ARENA: You're not sure it was the same era?

SMITH: I'm not sure that was the same era. I'm afraid that's kind of a lost cause, maybe. But negative results are sometimes as illustrious as positive results, and I don't think that Richard Nixon ever came to me for any suggestions or any help in his debates at all. I don't know. Of course, in those days they had a Debate Coach as I guess they still do at Whittier, and it may be that the Debate Coach took that on pretty much, and I don't know who the Debate Coach was. But I have no recollection of that kind of contact with Dick Nixon out of class in his debates or his speeches, really.

ARENA: Do you recall attending any of his debates and discussing them?

SMITH: No, I'm sorry to say this is negative again here. I'm a little puzzled as to why I don't have any memory of it. It just may be that that activity was so much restricted to the student body that it was a normal thing for a member of the faculty not to be present on those occasions. But I have no recollection of Nixon's speeches on campus. I have recollections of some speeches on campus, just immediately after graduation, when he had been newly made a member of the Board of Trustees and that was in the first year or two or three when he was out of law school and perhaps here in Whittier.

One of them I remember very distinctly. In those days we had high school visitation days. Now Nixon is a very young man and just a fledgling lawyer. And I never will forget in the basement of the First Friends Church of Whittier we had, I suppose, five hundred high school visitors from all over Southern California visiting the campus, touring the campus, and in the evening we had this dinner and Nixon spoke. And this is as vivid as though it happened yesterday. He said, gee, I remember this. He said, "Not all of you should come to Whittier College as students." Well, that was kind of a new message at Whittier. We were hard up for money and hard up for students and hard up for reputation and hard up for everything, really. We were a good little institution, to be sure, but we were no Pacific Coast Harvard by any matter of means, of which there were none out here, for that matter. We were about as good as the next one of the small colleges, but we were all small operators, really.

That's what he said. And that burned into my mind. I'll never forget it. In a sense he was counseling some of these people, "You shouldn't come to Whittier College," I think inferring that they weren't fit for us and maybe we weren't fit for them. I don't know what his inner message might have been. But I remember there was a critical sense there, you see. And he was saying to the young folks, "When you choose a college, you want to do it thoughtfully." And when we choose a student, we should do it thoughtfully too. He sounded a critical note on missions and college selection. I remember this very clearly, Dick. Don't I. I really do. And he was just a kid doing this, you see. He was just out of law school and, gee, I suppose that was before his military service, wasn't it?

ARENA: Well, he did graduate from law school in 1937 and his practice began, I believe, in 1937, too. It was in the spring that he graduated, studied very hard for his Bar

exam. Another former student of yours brought me the details of that period, of course. [Thomas W.] Tom Bewley himself, who recalls his study for the Bar, strictly down to business. At the same time and I would like to get your reaction . . .

SMITH: I have no doubt in my mind at all but that the technique and the approach that Nixon made that night, only two or three or four or five or six years after graduating from Whittier College, will be symbolic and symptomatic of the way he spoke on campus as an undergraduate. I have no doubt of this at all. It would be kind of on the hard side, you know what I mean, we'd say, kind of hard. I don't mean this is an uncomplimentary way. I mean this bare-fisted--he's a man with a fist, you know.

ARENA: Sparing of words, as he was in your history class.

SMITH: Oh, yes, sparing of words once more. He didn't say, "Enroll here and if you don't like it you can transfer." He didn't say that. He was saying in essence far more briefly, "If this isn't the place for you, see if you can find out before you come. And if this isn't the place for you from our point of view, we want to know it and suggest you enroll elsewhere." Yes, the same thing all over again, and I think that what I saw of Nixon in that little period of time was a pretty reliable mirror of what he must have been like in his speeches on the campus, although I did not hear those delivered to the student body.

ARENA: However, I do believe earlier we mentioned and said we might go back to the question of his campaigning to bring dancing on the campus, and I believe your reference to appearing before the trustees dealt with that, or did you have this incident in mind when we mentioned earlier about his speaking to the trustees?

SMITH: I think it was this incident.

ARENA: I see. And you had no personal contact concerning the dancing?

SMITH: No.

ARENA: However, what does come to mind concerning that episode of his campaigning to bring dancing on campus, which I understand caused a bit of sensation, not only on campus but in the community itself?

SMITH: Well, it did. And this I remember quite well. It's interesting. The first dance, and I expect it was the first one, was held, if my memory is right, in Wardman gymnasium. I think it was the first dance held on the campus of Whittier College, and I think Walter Dexter was president then, wasn't he Lillian?

ARENA: I believe so. I was talking to [Richard] Dick Thomson about that and he recalls definitely that it was, and he was the man against whom the President ran and lost. And that was the campaign issue that the President brought up.

SMITH: That is right. And I remember this that Dexter was awfully embarrassed at that first dance, not that he objected himself to it, he didn't. He either favored it philosophically or certainly wasn't opposed to it, or maybe had been won over by the arguments of Nixon, which was to the effect that these kids are going to a dance, now what do you want? Do you want them to go to Los Angeles [California] to some place where there are no sponsors or chaperons or what not, or would you rather have them right here on the campus where they're carefully looked after. And the Board of Trustees, I think, wisely decided on the latter.

But it was a forced decision. I mean by that, it was--I'm guessing on this--the cold logic of this circumstance of this, "Do you want them to go to Los Angeles or stay on the Whittier College campus to do this thing," and they voted to do it here on the campus. But that didn't mean at all that the board was unanimously in favor of the thing, though they voted for it. And it certainly didn't mean that the community was in any sense, particularly the Quaker community, and particularly the community of the First Friends Church, was certainly in no sense in favor of this, and it must have the hard campaign logic of Nixon before the Board of Trustees, somewhat in the same temper as I heard him speaking there to these prospective students of Whittier College, that carries today for his particular cause. I have no doubt if I had been the college president then I would have felt and seen about what I felt and saw over at the First Friends Church when Nixon spoke to these high school students. I think my guess would come awful close to be the way it was.

ARENA: Dr. Smith, is there anything about the school years that I haven't brought up, whether it deals with history or other aspects of the President's era when he was a student that comes to mind before we move on, maybe to the period we just touched on, the period from graduation through 1945, where you had

contact with him. Before we go into that, we'll say from 1934 to 1945, which is the beginning of his political era, which we do not touch on in this project, is there anything in the school years?

SMITH: From 1933 on?

ARENA: From 1934, the school years, before we move out of that, that I haven't touched on that comes to mind.

SMITH: Yes. Well, Whittier was a good little college in a sort of restricted sense. I mean by that this, Dick, that not many members of the faculty were very active in professional organizations, for example. It was very seldom if indeed ever, that the faculty members of those days, we'll say, read a paper in a professional organization, or had an article published in a professional periodical of some kind or other. The emphasis was on good teaching. I think, Dick, in a sense--I think I have to say this--in the sense that the capacity of the faculty in those days was for good teaching rather than anything else, and I am afraid I have to say that that emphasis was in part a rationalizing for the lack of ability at the time to do the other thing.

In my view, a teacher is a better teacher if he has the added ability of being able to do some original thinking and some original research, and to participate in a creative level in professional associations and things of that sort, which today the Whittier faculty does abundantly, as you and I know. But in those days that had not matured, Dick, and I think any student in those days, including Richard Milhous Nixon, missed this segment of college life that I think is tremendously important, a segment which I say does exist in Whittier today and has existed on the Whittier campus I suppose, Lillian--I'm speaking to my wife here, Dick--that probably from about 19--, what would you say, 1940-1945 on, that the Whittier faculty grew in expertise and began to engage in all the activities that a full-fledged academician does.

So that aspect of official college life at Whittier Nixon didn't see and didn't have. I'm not saying that necessarily hurt him. Maybe it didn't hurt him at all, but that was something. A professor, for example, who would hardly ever be absent from a class session because he was reading a paper to the American Historical Association or the American Economic Association or the American Philosophical Association in Chicago [Illinois] or New York or Washington. He would be in his class, you see. Now those were good people back there. I'm not saying that they weren't, they were. They did a good job and President Nixon says they did

and I think they did. We had excellent teachers of the languages in those days, and we had occasionally good social science teachers.

I will say that this characterization I am making of the Whittier faculty of the Nixon period, that that faculty was getting ready to become a more meaningful faculty, much more so than the period that immediately preceded Nixon. That was really a period of sparse academic participation in the affairs of the country generally. So Nixon came in kind of midway, you see, between what Whittier [College] was and what Whittier [College] soon came to be. Now I would say that we had a sprinkling of faculty members in the Nixon era who had published, maybe not in a big way but in a small way, and some of them probably in a small way as much as, well, faculty members in our best universities. Many of them today with limited publications weren't publishing any more than some of the boys were publishing back there in the Nixon era. It's a relative thing I'm saying here. So Nixon was beginning to see a faculty, I would say, that was in its growing period and was showing the signs of academic fulfillment. He had that much to his advantage, but part of it wasn't there. Well, fortunately, that was made up by dedicated teachers. They weren't cynics. And certainly Nixon was surrounded by a faculty that was consistent in its point of view about the value of being good and compassionate and forgiving and the Corinthian aphorism of "faith, hope and charity, and the greatest of these is charity." I guess that's the most important thing in life and that DID exist in those days very wonderfully. And Nixon did have that.

ARENA: Finally, I might have mentioned this in passing but maybe we can clear it up one way or the other, do you recall Nixon the football or athletic-minded man? Do you recall seeing him seated on the bench at football games, because I don't believe he played too often when he did?

SMITH: Yes, I can see him there. It's a queer thing how you do have some vivid memories. I don't remember where Nixon sat in the classroom, but I do remember where some of my students sat. I do remember Nixon sitting on the football bench. I wouldn't say he was dejected, but he was on the bench, he wasn't on the field, and he was suited up. And it may be that there is something to the allegation that athletics are character-building. I think sometimes they're not, all right. I don't think athletics always makes necessarily a good person, but I am amazed at the fact that Nixon sat on the bench and stuck it out. I don't know what kind of theory you can develop on that, but I read something the other day

where someone was saying that that sort of thing explains his persistence. That he wasn't really terribly crazy about being elected Governor or President or Senator or Congressman, not as much as we think, but that when you look at him on the bench, it could be a seeking of a playing position on the team, just as well as seeking political office. That he was just as insistent over there to play football as he was insistent to come back and win the Presidency of the United States. And if that is a valid observation, then it does go a long way to what psychologists tell us, that maybe he was not out of character as we sometimes think in his dogged perseverance for political preferment. That may be a part of the man we saw over there on the football field. Maybe if he had been a good football player, golly, he may be playing with the Washington Redskins today. Well, I guess it wouldn't be quite today, he's too old for that. But who knows what direction persistence might have thrust him into? Maybe it was just fate that it turned out to be politics. Who knows?

ARENA: Thank you very much, Dr. Smith.