

## RICHARD NIXON FOUNDATION

**PROJECT: ORAL HISTORY ROBERT J. BROWN PART 2 OF 2**

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**INTERVIEWERS: FRANK GANNON, JONATHAN MOVROYDIS**

### **TRANSCRIPT:**

Jonathan Movroydis: Could you describe the picture of the young men of the Nixon administration you're holding?

Robert J. Brown: This was described as the "Young Adult Many." These were the folk who were running the White House on a day-to-day basis and therefore, communicate with all of the different departments of government and everything, making it happen. They wanted to do a story on us. I think this first appeared in a magazine that the Republican National Committee had at the time. And that's where I remember this picture from, and it was quite a time during all of our lives and all of us were young guys at the time. I mean, all of us were very young. I think I was like, 33 or something like that. Thirty three, thirty-four at the most.

Frank Gannon: Could you just briefly go around the forum there, and anything you remember about any of these guys, I guess, beginning with Ken Cole.

Robert J. Brown: Well, Ken was...he worked for John Ehrlichman. He was his principal assistant. And he was a get-the-job-done, kind of, young fellow who was very thoughtful in meetings, but where John needed him was Ken was the follow-through guy. He made the notes and made sure that everything that Ehrlichman was supposed to be doing for the president and so forth, he made sure it got done. And then there was Ron Ziegler here. Ron Ziegler was a press secretary, and he was under the gun 24/7 about something. And he was a good person and he wanted to be in communication, and he wanted all of us to be in communication with him.

Because many times, you know, we'd be going off doing this, all of us were busy, you know, going 100 miles an hour every day, sometimes 24 hours a day. But then, something would show up in a paper or on the TV or radio, and if Ron didn't know about it, he'd be put out. So we kept in constant communication. And then there's Pat Buchanan. Pat was always going straight ahead with something. He's a good person and he married a great lady who was also working at the White House, Shelley. And she was the person who was one of our top people who was greeting everybody when they came in to see the president and that kind of thing.

And the rest of them...a lot of them are passed on. They're no longer living, but all these guys, Dwight Chapin and the rest of them, they were wonderful guys and we had a chance to work together very closely. It was a great team. All of us were very aggressive in terms of what we were doing, and we tried not to step on each other's shoes. If we were treading over in somebody else's water, we would always let them know what we were doing and get their advice and counsel. So, it was a wonderful group. It was a wonderful group.

And we were able to coordinate very well, because all of us had something to do with everything that went on at the White House. There was nothing that went on at the White House that this group weren't a part of or didn't know about. There were several of us here who, Laura and myself who attended all the cabinet meetings. And so, we had from that perspective, we always knew all of the different kinds of things, the highly sensitive things, the big deals, and everything else that the president wanted.

And we'd be going out thinking about it and meeting with each other and try to make sure we accomplished it. And so, we did not feel that there was anything that we could not accomplish. That's just the group right here. And it was nothing. So it was a great group, brilliant guys. I have this picture in my office in North Carolina, and every time I sit up and look at this picture and I think about all of those things that we went through all of those years ago, and all that we did, and did it together, you know. Where we were going.

I mean, there was a time when we started coming out here on the West Coast, and the president would stay out here a month, six weeks or something. And we'd be trailing out here. Many of us would be out here for a good bit of that time. A week, two weeks and be working out of some offices that we set up in San Clemente and making things happen. And that was the theme, and that was what we did.

Frank Gannon: Can you talk a little bit about John Ehrlichman?

Robert J Brown: : John Ehrlichman was a good person. He had that really good streak in him and John was kind of laid back. And when we all get in meetings and even when he was meeting with the president, and I was in there many times he would be meeting with the president. And John carried this little pad around with him all the time. He was never without that pad. And he would be making notes. When everybody was talking, John would be making notes about what's going on, and I looked at some of his notes from time to time and he'd have different things about what the president said, about what I

said, or somebody said. And he'd be doing this all the different meetings. He carried that little black notepad around with him everywhere. He was a straight-laced fellow, he was a good person.

And if you asked John, he was going to be very truthful with you about everything. And if you were on sound ground, he would be supportive of you. He would be very supportive, but I found him to be a very good person and met his family on several occasions. He would bring them to the White House and he was very good.

Frank Gannin: Talk, if you would a minute, about Mrs. Nixon.

Robert. J. Brown: I would consider her a perfect wife for a President because she was always there for him, for Mr. Nixon, always there. Not only when he needed her, but when she thought that she needed to be in the picture, she was there. She was raising two beautiful young ladies and that was their family and that was their life. And she was always giving you a little boost. I would see her at various meetings at the White House. And at times, when they would be having little private gatherings and they would invite me and my late wife, Sallie. And she was always gracious to Sallie, well, I don't care where we were or anything else, and they would always be over in a corner talking about this and that. Or she had some program that she was trying to initiate, and she would get Sallie involved. And so we had a great, great relationship. She was a marvelous lady, a wonderful lady, very dedicated person.

Robert J. Brown: Well, it's like a number of people that I know and have known, where they would say or will say. I know some people like that now who would say and who would make certain kind of statements about people or make certain kind of expressions that they would never say publicly. They would never utter, they would never even want somebody to think that something like that came out of their mouths. And, for instance, I've known in a number of people...blacks and whites who have used the word "nigga" very loosely from time to time. And many of them or most of them would never even want to begin to say...for people to know that they would ever have used that word.

And so, that's a people thing. That didn't have anything to do with how President Nixon felt about black people or about the policies that related. I think that over and over again, there is a saying that, "You watch what I do and how I commit my commitment, not what I say." I think if you take it from that vantage point and watch what he did and watch what he was responsible for in this country as relates to black people, Indians, and others, those were the critical things. I've heard that word come out of a lot of folks' mouth over years, black and white. And many of them, I would not judge them harshly. I

would not judge them as people who hate black people because they said the word. It was sometimes inexcusable for any of us to use the word, but sometimes people do.

And just like people make mistakes about many things. All of us had made some mistakes. And so I didn't make a judgment, a harsh judgment on Mr. Nixon because he used some of the words that he used, you know. I was watching and concerned about what he did. And I think that's where he ought to be judged, not whether he used that word or not, but on the things that he did. And he showed by his actions. He changed the world for millions of black people. He changed it. And he gave me the opportunity to change it. And he was working through me because without him, I couldn't have gotten to first base.

How do you think I'm going to get to first base by changing the government policy, where they're building government buildings all over the place, and they won't let blacks work on the building? Because they are not members of their union or something else, some other kind of reason. To me, that was ridiculous, it was crazy, and it was un-Godly. Now, Richard Nixon broke that up. There were other things that he did. So I think he showed by his actions, by his actions. And that's what we want people to do in this life. We want people to show us by their actions. You know, anybody can use words loosely, but anybody can't do the kinds of things that he did to lift the lives of people up, black people, white people, everybody. And it put this country on another level, economically, politically, socially, and whatever.

Other people had their chance but they didn't do it. They may have never said the word, the "N-word" before, but they didn't do nothing either. I would rather you to go ahead and, you know...if you would use the "N-word" from time to time, that's your problem. But if you show me that you are going to change lives and lift millions of people up and lift their children and the country up, that's what's going to matter to me, not whether you used the "N-word" a few times.

Jonathan Movroydis: Could you tell us a little bit about the desegregation of schools in the Nixon Administration, and what your role in that was?

Robert J. Brown: Well, I think I had a pretty sensitive and important role because when we found out that the Supreme Court order was going into effect and there was none of this messing around anymore. The order that they had set out in 1954, and here it was 1970 or '71 and the schools were still segregated. And that meant that the Supreme Court's order, we're not following orders, that it was a hollow situation. And so, the Supreme Court sent down the order that in the fall, all of these schools would be

integrated, one way or the other. And so, the administration of that fell to the Nixon Administration, and the President appointed a group of us with George Schultz as the head of the group within the White House. I think there were like 8 or 10 of us. And I had a lot of responsibility because I came from the South, and I knew a great many of all the leaders there, black and white.

And so what we did is I organized a group within my office and considered two or three people. And one of the main persons was Dr. Tom Haggai, H-A-G-G-A-I. And Tom Haggai was the executive head of Boy Scouts of America at one point, he was a nationally-known preacher. And he was also head of a group called IGA, thousands of grocery stores all across America and other countries across the world. And he was one of my closest friends. And so, I brought Tom in to help me break the code. When I say "break the code," I mean...because he knew all of the top executives all across the South.

And so, he worked with me in my office and we created lists of people in every southern state. And we traveled to each one of those states, he traveled with me, and we set up meetings with people like Ed Zane, who was the chairman and CEO of Burlington Industries. And Burlington Industries was the largest textile company in the world, at that time. And they had thousands and thousands of people employed mainly, all across the South. They were based in Greensboro. And there were people like that that Tom knew and I knew and we went to see them. And we told them on no uncertain terms that the America that we know, it wants to move ahead, and we need their help because the Supreme Court's order is going to be followed, and the President's going to be carry it out. And we need their help because the President is not going to stand for any kind of violence, that if there's any violence, then you're going to see a lot of what none of the states want to see.

And so, all of these top people agreed to be on a committee, and in each state, we subbed these committees. And then we brought them to Washington, to the Roosevelt Room in the White House to meet with the president. And so, when we would bring them here, the president would wait until we had a little meeting with them and then he would come in there and greet each one of them, take a picture with everybody and shake their hand, and then he would make his talk. And in every talk, he said basically the same thing. And what he said essentially, he said, "A integration of the schools is going to take place and it's our responsibility to carry this out. And we don't want any trouble. We're not going to have any trouble." And he said, "If there's trouble," he said, "I'm going to end it."

He said, "But none of you all are going to like the way I'm going to end it, because we're not going to stand for nobody hurting children or being in the streets and with weapons and causing a lot of trouble." He said, "If that starts," he said, "I will put whatever forces that I have at my command to stop it. And then we'll take over and you won't have anything to do with it." And he made the same speech to everybody. So when in September, when the schools were opened all across the South, not one incident occurred in the integration of the schools in carrying out the Supreme Court's order. Not one incident occurred during that time. It was a miraculous thing.

But we all worked very hard on it, and it was carried out the way that the President wanted it to be carried out.

**Interviewer: Frank, do you have anything else? Do you have anything?**

**Frank Gannon:** Can you talk about the Philadelphia Plan and you wrote a memo of rejected orders the President assigned on set-asides that I think Pat Monahan had called one of the important documents that had been written in terms of changing the way things were done.

Robert J. Brown: Well, when we went to the White House, America, for all time, had not played it exactly fair in terms of minorities and other people. And so, we decided to have what we call a set-aside program, where there would be contracts and grants and other kinds of things within the government and in different departments that black people could access. Now you had to be quality, you had to know what you were doing. It wasn't a giveaway program because none of us wanted that. But people who had the expertise to do whatever needed to be done, then we opened the doors to them. Those doors were closed up until President Nixon became president of the United States. Those doors were closed.

And the contracts. We had said, "We're going to work this thing a little different now." And we called top people in, whether they were ship builders or aircraft builders or other companies, we called them in and had conferences with them, and told them what the law says and how we're going to administer this thing. And we'd like to have them on board. And they will be on board one way or the other, that we'd try to make sure they were on board with us. And we didn't try to play big time hardball, but the way President Nixon conducted himself all the time was above board, but he was firm. And everybody knew when he projected programs out there and he was behind it, they all knew that he was serious, and they all knew that he would do whatever he had to do to take care of that business. And that's what I loved about him.

Because it was no false kind of deal just to show somebody that he's a big political animal who will be one way on this side today, and another way on that side tomorrow. And that he'll go with a group of people just to get their votes. A lot of those people didn't like President Nixon, but there were many of them who liked him a lot after he started doing and being fair to everybody. And that's all he was trying to do. That's all he wanted to do. And he gave me the big stick to do whatever needed to be done, to get the job done. And that was my responsibility. I attended all the cabinet meetings. I was there when the decision's being made. I met with him many times over the years about what I was doing and if I needed his help, I would tell him, I'd call him in the IO or in the office line, or I would tell Rosemary or some of the other guys, like Haldeman or Ehrlichman who was in to see him all the time.

But I would communicate with him. Most of the time, if I had something very important, I would take the message to him because I want to deliver my own message. And he would listen and then I'd have it all worked out. And there was never a time that I took something into him that he sent me back out empty handed, never a time. Because we were changing things and he knew. He knew that a lot of the things that had occurred in terms of black people had left blacks on the side of the road, and nobody seemed to give a darn. And so, we were changing those things, opening up the doors for blacks and women and others, and he was not only all for it, he backed it to the yoke.

And if anybody came to him... I remember a group of people, and I won't call their names, but they were pretty high-powered people in terms of the business arena in this country who wanted to get to him because they had indicated to Haldeman and Ehrlichman that a lot of the things that I was doing in this black enterprise, though, was taking business away from any of their companies and companies that they owned or associated with. And they wanted to tell the president that he needs to slow this thing down. They went through Ehrlichman and Ehrlichman told me, he said, he had talked to the president about this, and the president had told Ehrlichman to tell them that they needed to come and resolve this matter with me.

And so then they went to Haldeman and they tried to get Haldeman to deal with the president on this. He wouldn't deal with them. And in fact, their word came back to me, Haldeman went to them, after they went to Haldeman. These were top...big companies, top people. And after Haldeman went to them, the word came back to me that the President used some not-too-gracious words to tell him to tell those people that he didn't quite see it like this, that they better get on in there and see Bob Brown before I

take away what they got, you know? So, of course, they called me. And, as always, I tried to be very gracious and they came to my office, they sat down.

And I just told them, I said, "Look. We're not trying to take anything away from anybody." I said, "We want everybody to have a hand in building this country." I said, "You guys have had it all." I said, "We just going to take a bite off of this and make sure somebody else has the chance and opportunity at this, and not just you all." I said, "That's the way it goes." I said, "If you all need help, I'll work with you. I'll open up any door. I will do whatever it is that I have to do to make sure that you all have continued success." I said, "I'll work with you. But here's what we're going to do now. We're going to open the door so somebody else can share it and you're not going to have all this by yourself. So this is what we're trying to tell you and I will work with you."

And then they pretty much agreed. And then the next two or three weeks, they called me back. They wanted to come over and have lunch and tell me they had talked to a lot of their people and everything and everybody agreed that they need to work with us and we would all work together and so forth, so. And they became some of my biggest supporters in this thing with other businessmen across the country.

Jonathan Movroydis: Why did you decide to leave the White House?

Robert J. Brown: When?

Jonathan Movroydis: When? When and why?

Bob: Well, I decided to leave in February. Well, I decided to leave after the campaign was over in '72. And I decided to leave because I went to the White House and I stayed one year. I told President Nixon that I would stay with him for a year to get everything going and then I had to go back to my business. And well, a year was approaching and I couldn't leave. I was involved in too many things. And then he was seemingly creating other things. Every time I look up, something else was going down. And he said, "Bob, I want you involved in this and I want you here." And one thing happened after another and I couldn't leave. I couldn't just drop everything.

And then he asked me to stay and I said, "Okay," so I stayed. And I told my wife and my family, I said that, "I have to stay." So I stayed until February 1, 1973 and that's when I left. And I left here working. The day after I left, I was in two or three different executives' offices in two or three cities. Because I was trying to, not only build my business back, but to do some very constructive things in different places. But, the president asked me



to stay. When I decided to leave, he had Haldeman to call me and say that he wanted me to come up to Camp David and spend some time with him.

So, I got on the helicopter and went up to Camp David, and we talked for a hour and a half, maybe. And we had coffee and had a little something to eat and we talk and talk. But he wanted to know himself. He said, "Bob, why are you leaving?" He'd said, "Everything is available to you here, and you've done a lot." He said, "But there's plenty more to do and, you know, it'd be great if you stayed." And I said, "You know, I can't afford to stay." I was taking care of my grandparents. And, I had my business was kind of swerving around.

And I said, "I've got to save myself financially and so forth." But I said, "I'll still be available." And the first thing he said, "Well, why don't you just take an ambassadorship or something like that even if you don't keep for six months a year?" And then he said, you know, "After you do that, everybody'll have to call you ambassador the rest of your life." And I said, "No, sir, Mr. President. I can't do that." He said, "Well, ain't there some job you want in the administration?" I said, "I can't think of any job." I said, "I wouldn't even want your job right now."

And we a laugh about it, but we talked a long time about a lot of things. And he said, "What I want you to do," he said, "I want you to decide who was going to be the best person to replace you. And then you work it in and you work it out." So, I figured that it was Stan Scott, who was a close friend, and who we had brought into serve as a deputy communication director under Herb Klein. And Stan was a close friend of many years and we had brought him in and he knew what we were trying to do, and I felt he would do a great job, and he did.

We brought him in and I took him over to spend some time with the President in Oval Office and so it worked out. It worked out extremely well. And then, I just kept on going, you know, doing a lot of things for a lot of companies and people all over the world as I was doing before I got there. And that's what I'm still doing.

Jonathan Movroydis: Were you ever called back by Nixon to work on any projects?

Robert J. Brown: All the time.

Jonathan Movroydis: As a consultant?

Bob: All the time. I didn't want to work as a consultant, as such, in terms of getting paid, but I was called the heck a lot of times for a lot of different things. If there was some crisis or this or that, the other. Not only by the president, but George Bush who I knew both the Bushes and other presidents, Clinton and others would call me back to the White House a number of times when there was a crisis of some sort or something they were trying to do.

Jonathan Movroydis: Did you ever make any foreign trips on behalf of President Nixon?

Robert J. Brown: I don't think so. I don't think so. I can't recall at having made any foreign trips on behalf of President Nixon. Well, you know, I went to Africa, to Nigeria, when Whitney Young was killed. The President wanted me to do that and Don Rumsfeld went with me on that trip. Haldeman had called me in about four o'clock in the morning and said that our people in Nigeria had called to tell him that Whitney Young was killed while he was swimming in Bar Beach in an area around Lagos. They didn't know, really, what had happened.

And Whitney had been a good friend and he would had a series of meetings with the President. There were a lot of good things going on and the President liked Whitney. And so, Haldeman said, "Bob, the President wants to do whatever is necessary to help and get the situation straight and get to the bottom of it." He said, "That means anything." Well, I, you know, I knew what that meant, and so I called in a number of people in the Pentagon and in the State Department, and they didn't know a lot. And so, I set up a plane, a special plane, a special mission plane to go to Nigeria that afternoon, that same day.

And I took some of Whitney's family with me. I took several people from the State Department with me, and I got General Chappie James, who we had made him the deputy assistant secretary of defense for public affairs, and he was a close friend and he also knew Whitney. So, I got him to pull the logistics together and set up two or three pilots who would pilot us over there and pilot us back. And when I asked him about it and I told him what was happening, he said, "Bob, Whitney was a great man, he was a good friend." And he said, "I'll go on a plane and I'll fly the SOB myself, and operate everything so you all won't have nothing to worry about in that regard."

He had been an ace pilot in two wars and we made him a general. And when he ended his career, he had four stars. But that was an awesome trip because I got to see a lot of people. And that was my first time in Nigeria. And I met a few Nigerians that I later saw when I went back to help them put together their government, a democratic government.

And then we brought Whitney's body back. And then on the plane, I was making notes in terms of how we would interface with the funeral and all of what was going to come when we got his body back.

So, we set up where the president would do a graveside eulogy in Kentucky where Whitney was buried, where he was born. And so, we had a big funeral in New York, and I attended along with other top people in the administration. And then when he was buried, we took one of our planes down along with some of our top people in the administration to Kentucky. And we took them down on the Air Force One with me and the president and others, top people in the administration and have the president gave his eulogy, gave him a graveside eulogy in Kentucky where he was born. The president went down there and with Mrs. Nixon, she went along with us.

And it was an unbelievable time. But that was the kind of man he was. How many presidents have we known in history to go give a graveside eulogy for a friend and somebody they knew and they would lift up the situation? I doubt very seriously you know or have heard many of those.

Jonathan Movroydis: Could you describe his relationship, the president's with Whitney Young?

Robert J. Brown: Well, his relationship was very good. Whitney would come to Washington all the time. And he would stay at the Mayflower. He kept suite at the Mayflower. And then we would have breakfast. When he would come to town, he'd let me know. We'd have breakfast. And we'd talk about what was on his mind and where we need to go, and he'd give us his ideas. And then, from time to time, I'd set up a meeting where he would go in and meet with the president, tell him what we talked about. And he'd tell the president what he wanted to tell him and he was out of here. But he had a great relationship.

Jonathan Movroydis: Did you see the President Nixon at all when he left office in 1974, after he left office in California or New York or New Jersey?

Robert J. Brown: I saw him in a number of times. In fact, after he left office, he got sick and he went through all of that. And I didn't see him for quite a while. I spoke to him by telephone a few times. But then one day after he had written a book and he was seemingly getting out and he was writing letters to the editor and doing all that kind of stuff, I decided that we should have a meeting commemorating all of his work with the whole of the black enterprise and minority enterprise programs in the country with both

the white participants and the black participants. He had some major companies. And so, I went to him. I called him up to talk to him about it. And he said, "Well, Bob, you know, I haven't made any speeches since I left the White House and, you know, and I've been sick." And I told him all the benefits I thought it would do for him and his legacy and the family and he listened. And he said, "Well, let me get back to you, Bob. Let me talk to Pat about it and let me get back to you. And I'll get back to you in the next couple of days."

So a couple days later, he had tried to call me...after he didn't reach me, he had one of the ladies in the office call me. And she said that President Nixon said he would do that speech you wanted him to do and you should send him all the information about what you doing and everything. So we had the meeting. The place was jam-packed with top people, blacks and whites. I think they were probably about half and half. Heads of companies, heads of organizations. And he came because we also honored Secretary Stans, Maurice Stans.

But the president, it was his moment. This was his first speech because he hadn't made a speech to any other major group. And so, he got up there. I introduced him and he got up there. And he spoke like I'd never heard him speak before. He didn't have any notes, no paper before him. He just got up and started telling what he thought about, what our administration had done, and about what was happening in the country, and how we needed to come together and lift each other up and all that. It was a brilliant speech. And the crowd just got up and clapped, clapped for minutes and minutes. They wouldn't let him sit down.

And I think that raised him up because after that, he made some more speeches. I think he wrote a couple of more books and all of that. But that was his first speech he made after he left the White House, after he got sick and everything.

This is my book that I've just written, "You Can't Go Wrong Doing Right." That's what my grandmother used to tell me all the time. And now I'm going to read a few passages from this book.

"My grandmother sat with me at the head table, and I can attest the fact that she had the time of her life. She loved the limelight and everyone fawned over her. Such a joy it was to see her and the daughter of a slave, raised in a big shack in eastern North Carolina with nine sisters, and one brother, talking and laughing with senators and Supreme Court justices. She looked absolutely regal, sipping her coffee. She loved coffee and taking it all in.

"President Nixon had told me earlier that he couldn't make the honorary event because of a previous commitment, but he'd sent a very nice letter of congratulations. I was grateful, of course, but I had a nagging feeling that he still might show up in person. His secretary, Rosemary Woods, and others in his office kept calling during the planning, asking how it was going, how many people were coming, and what all was on the schedule? My suspicions were confirmed around 8:00 p.m. when the president's Secret Service contingent showed up. Then a few minutes later, the band struck up "Hail to the Chief." President Nixon, wearing a tuxedo, walked right up to our table.

"He bypassed me and Sallie and went straight to my grandmother. She popped up out of her chair, planted a kiss on his cheek, and gave him one of her legendary hugs. The ballroom went up for grabs. Nixon, the supposedly cold and remote man, beamed with a warm smile and hugged my mama as if she were his own. The president then stepped to the podium and apologized for his unannounced appearance, saying that he had another engagement, but had decided to drop in and pay his respects.

"He credited me for being tenacious and fighting for equality of opportunities for minorities and said other kind things. But, for me, the best was the look on my grandmother's face. When he said, 'I was delighted to meet his grandmother tonight. She really looks like his mother or sister, for that matter.' It was a corny line and I know this, but my grandmother reveled in all of the attention she received that night, and rightly so. This event never would have occurred if Miss Nellie Brown hadn't taken me in all those years ago, and filled me with love and wisdom.

"She was a humble woman from humble origin, but she multiplied her gifts and passed 'em on to me, while making sure I made the most of them. This wasn't my night. It was mama's. At one point, Nelson Rockefeller came up and gave her a hug and welcomed her. She turned to me and said, 'Lord have mercy, Bobby. God is good. You know, He guided us from where we came to where we are on this night. Man had nothing to do with this. God ordained this.' She got no argument from me. I simply did what she taught me. I put my hand in God's hand and He showed me the way."

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