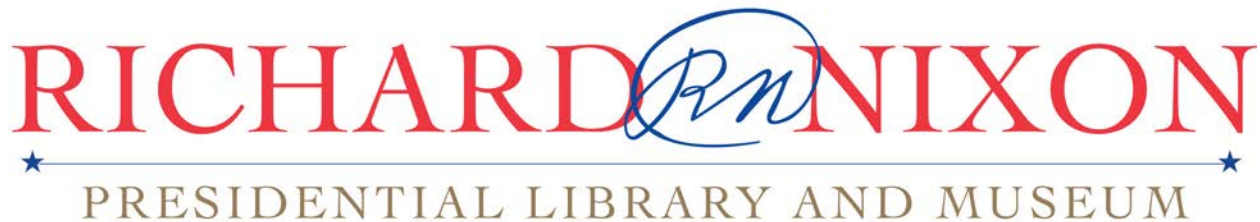


*Part of the Richard Nixon Oral History Project*

# An Oral History Interview with RUFUS CORMIER

Interview by Timothy Naftali  
August 30, 2018  
New York, NY



Richard Nixon Presidential Library and Museum  
18001 Yorba Linda Boulevard  
Yorba Linda, California 92886  
(714) 983-9120  
FAX: (714) 983-9111  
[nixonreference@nara.gov](mailto:nixonreference@nara.gov)  
<http://www.nixonlibrary.gov>

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The following is a transcript of an Oral History Interview conducted by Timothy Naftali with Rufus Cormier on August 30, 2018, in New York, NY.

Naftali: Hi, I'm Tim Naftali. I'm a Clinical Associate Professor of History at NYU. And it is my honor and privilege today to be interviewing Rufus Cormier for the Richard Nixon video oral history project. Mr. Cormier, thank you for doing this with us today.

Cormier: Well, thank you for having me.

Naftali: Mr. Cormier tell us about going to Yale Law School?

Cormier: Well, in undergraduate school, I was not at all certain about attending law school. But after reading about Yale and the flexibility of its curriculum, I decided that that was the law school I wanted to attend. I was not at all certain that I wanted to practice law after and thought that the theoretical approach of Yale's Law School would be most conducive to what I wanted to accomplish during those three years.

Naftali: So what did you learn to accomplish?

Cormier: Well, I really thought at that time I would probably –. Well, to go back a bit, when I matriculated SMU on a football scholarship my hope was to play professional football for a few years, return to Beaumont where I grew up and get involved in politics. During the course of my undergraduate studies, I concluded that I would attempt to do that by getting a PhD in anthropology, teaching a few years and then getting into Oregon politics. I was convinced by law professors that I got to know at SMU that a law degree might be more effective for a political career and therefore I decided that I would go to law school.

Naftali: Tell us a bit about the climate in New Haven when you were there at law school?

Cormier: Well, it was a bit surprising when I arrived, having gone to SMU in Dallas. I had not visited the campus at the time I matriculated. I expected Yale to be very much as I subsequently learned Princeton was. So when I arrived in New Haven and saw that the Panther trials were going on in downtown New Haven that was basically a get on one side of Yale and a very industrial city, which was very different from what I expected. But I had just a wonderful three years at Yale, I loved it absolutely.

Naftali: Please tell us about some of your friends at Yale Law School?

Cormier: Well, five of them were involved in the Watergate inquiry and that would have been Hillary Clinton, Mike Conway, Richard Porter and Larry

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Lucchino in addition to myself. So obviously haven't known my classmates I guess Hillary was on a four year program, but graduated with me. Porter was one year ahead of me. Mike Conway was in the same class. And I think Larry Lucchino was one year ahead. So I had known them quite well from law school.

Naftali: Did you get to know Bill Clinton?

Cormier: Yes, I came to know Bill and Hillary early on in my law school career. In fact, I think it was my first year – it may have been the second that I was not returning to Beaumont for Thanksgiving. And my girlfriend was at Brown University and so she was coming to New Haven to celebrate Thanksgiving. And somehow I learned that Bill was not going to be going home either. I think we were just talking in the cafeteria.

So he invited Yvonne, my now wife and me to join he and Hillary for the Thanksgiving meal. So that was I think the first time that I spent substantial time with them, but I had certainly seen them around. I had classes with him and he of course is a very gregarious and personable person. So I had spoken with him on many occasions, but only brief conversations. But after that Thanksgiving meal we came to know each other much better.

Naftali: Did you know Clarence Thomas?

Cormier: Yes, I did. I knew Clarence very well. He was a year behind me, but there was a close relationship among the African-American students at the law school. And so there was a group of us five or six that did many things together and Justice Thomas was among that group.

Naftali: How welcoming did you find the Yale community to your group of African-American students?

Cormier: Very welcoming. It was just a tremendous experience all around. I think there were 17 black students in my class of around 180. I had a great experience at SMU as well but it was very, very different. I was in the second class of black students at SMU. I think that were three in the class before me and eight in the class that I attended. And I was with the second group of football player, black football players in Southwest conference. So there had been one player, scholarship player the year before and there were three of us that signed to play in the Conference that year two at SMU and one at Baylor.

So in the sense that there was a much larger African-American representation in the Yale then there had been at SMU at the time that I matriculated there. So and it was just my African-American friends at

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Yale were just a tremendous group of people. But Yale was great in so many ways. I mean, the school was small enough that one got to know most classmates and many, many of the professors. And so my relationship with my professors, with my classmates both African-American and otherwise was fantastic. And I was lucky enough to have just a great roommate my first year who challenged me a great deal and we found most days – we had many classes together.

And our general routine was to study for a couple of hours and then get into discussions regarding the cases. In many nights, we argued all night until we could find a professor the next morning to resolve whatever the difference was in our points of view. So it was just a tremendous experience and particularly since I'd not expected it to be so, I did not expect to enjoy a law school, but consider it among the three best years of my life.

Naftali: So who was your roommate?

Cormier: Dan Johnson, who practices law now in San Francisco. He was with Morgan Lewis for a number of years. He has now commenced practice in his own firm. He did that about two years ago as retirement period approached.

Naftali: Who were your favorite teachers at Yale Law School?

Cormier: Well, Guido Calabresi was certainly among the greatest of my teachers. Marvin Chirelstein who I think spent his last years at NYU after teaching at Yale for a number of years. He was a Tax and Business Finance Professor at Yale. When I started law school I thought if I enjoyed anything it would be constitutional law and jurisprudence and classes of that kind. But Chirelstein's business finance and tax courses were fabulous. So Professor Calabresi, Professor Baker who was my advisor, you have to do a major paper at Yale who was a business professor as well.

Geoffrey Hazard was a favorite of mine. Professor Black, I did not – Charles Black, I did not have classes with but we became very good friends during my time there. Professor Bittker in tax I came to know very well. I came to know Professor Bickel to some extent although he passed – I can't remember exactly when he passed away. That may have been my third year or somewhere around that time period.

Naftali: I believe it's in late '73 or –.

Cormier: Yeah, and I finished in '73.

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Naftali: Did you meet Mr. Doar when he came to Yale?

Cormier: I did. Well, there was an organization called the Barristers Union which was a moot court type organization at the trial level, which I participated in with my roommate. We were partners in that moot trial. And somehow I've forgotten what the process was that some of us had got into the later rounds were selected to the board of Barristers Union. So I was on that board along with Bill Clinton and Hillary and my roommate and I think Mike Conway was on that board as well. And I think Hillary and Bill were in charge of one of the Barristers Union's trials and invited John Doar to act as judge in that trial.

Generally, the practice was in the later rounds eminent judges and lawyers were invited to act as judges and they selected John Doar to act in the trial that they organized. So I met him in connection with that process after he arrived. And I'm sure I attended the trial where he was the judge. So well, I didn't get to know him well, I did spend some time with him. And it seems to me we might have even had lunch where Bill and Hillary had organized it but I might've been there. But in any event, I had met him through that process and I had known much of John Doar before that day obviously, he was one of my great heroes.

You know, I grew up in Beaumont as I stated, which was completely segregated. I started school in 1954 at the year of the Brown decision but the schools in Beaumont were not integrated until after my graduation I finished in '66 probably in '68. And so I was very much aware of the role that John Doar had played with escorting my goodness, the name is slipping from me right now. But the University of Mississippi encounter where Ross Barnett was trying to prohibit the enrollment of James Meredith I guess it was.

I knew John Doar's role and the incident after Medgar Evers had been shot, his involvement with the Freedom Riders. And I gather he was also a consultant on the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which made all the difference in the world for me. I don't know what my life would have been but without the Civil Rights Act of '64 it's certainly would have been very different from what it was.

Naftali: For much younger people watching this, could you unpack that a little bit for us please?

Cormier: Well, I grew up in a completely segregated society. It was not an unhappy childhood by any means. But it was completely black neighborhood all-black schools, black students, black faculty, black administrators. At the time that I enrolled at SMU I think that I probably knew by name no more than eight whites. I knew my father's boss I knew a track coach at Lamar

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University because I was a shot putter also. And he had a son who was a shot putter so I came to know him. We did not have a cement circle at my high school. I had to kind of dig out a shot putting circle with a shovel.

And when I was preparing to go to the state meet Coach Terrell at Lamar invited me to come over to at Lamar to practice with his son so I got to know him. I knew the Superintendent of Schools. I knew the Athletic Director for the school district and I knew a few people that worked with my father. But it was just a completely segregated society at that point. With the Civil Rights Act of 1964 things started to change in a significant way. As I mentioned, I started college at SMU in 1966 being the second year that black students were recruited, but that was pretty much true on most major southern schools.

And so the fact that the Civil Rights Act had been passed and then the Voting Rights Act in '65 was really the beginning of significant change in race relations in the south. And I was very optimistic about the changes that were expected to occur and was pretty much convinced that I was going to return to Texas after law school for my legal and whatever career was to follow.

Naftali: Mr. Cormier, tell us please how you get recruited to join with John Doar and Hillary Rodham and Mike Conway on the impeachment inquiry staff?

Cormier: Well, it was as a result of the relationship between Burke Marshall and John Doar. As you well know John Doar worked for Burke Marshall in the Civil Rights division in the John Kennedy administration and they were very close personal friends. I don't really know what conversation took place but I received a call from John in very early January or late December after he had been hired as counsel. And he indicated to me that I'd been recommended by Burke Marshall. He spoke to me about whether I had taken a position with respect to President Nixon's impeachment and I indicated that I had not.

We talked a bit about the inquiry which that would be upcoming. And after our discussion for about 15 to 20 minutes he did offer me a position and asked if I could be up there very early the next week that was on a Saturday morning. I had – I referred to my girlfriend early on who had been my girlfriend since 10<sup>th</sup> grade and gone to SMU with me. And because I made the Yale decision so late in the process, it was too late for her to apply to the biochemistry department and Brown was a school that did accept her application late. But in any event she had a year of – she did two years at Brown, two years at Yale.

And she had a year remaining when I graduated. I had clerked for Baker Botts in Houston after my second year in law school and had a very good

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experience and was prepared to go back to Baker Botts on a permanent basis. But because my wife had a year of graduate school remaining, I decided that I didn't want to leave her for a year, and I would go to New York and see what that experience was like. So I joined Paul Weiss. And I'd been practicing with Paul Weiss about six months at the time that John Doar called. We, my wife and I discussed that weekend the possibility of my taking that position. We decided I should. I went to New York on Monday and resigned from Paul Weiss and I think I was in Washington on either Tuesday or Wednesday. I had a wonderful experience at Paul Weiss.

But one of the things that opportunity did provide was a smooth transition from New York to Houston, which would've been very difficult because I had a very positive experience in Paul Weiss in New York. But I really thought that I would like to go back to Texas and the changes I expected to see occur there. But in any event that's how I came to be in Washington and I was one of the earlier hires to arrive. There were some who came a little bit earlier and I think some had gone to work with the committee before John was hired. But I always wanted the early arrivals. I can't remember the date but very early in January.

Naftali: What duties did they give you?

Cormier: Well, initially John was trying to put together a staff so I did a lot of reviewing of resumes and interviewed a couple of people obviously I wasn't making the final decision since I was the six month lawyer at the time. But I did do some initial reviews of resumes that came in and interviewed few people so that was kind of my first undertaking. I think after that John was assisting the committee in the process of getting authorization for the inquiry by the Judiciary Committee. And John asked me to kind of outline the points that should be made by the Congressman on the floor in connection with that.

And I don't remember whether he asked me to make little speeches outline it and I don't know whether it was used but I remember working for a period of time on that. Then I believe that while my title was special assistant. There were two of us that had that title David Haines and myself. So we weren't assigned to a task force. Our assignments were much more fluid. And early on, I think before Joe Wood arrived who was in charge of the constitutional I think they called it constitutional legal issues but trying to define what an impeachable offense was. But before John I mean, Joe arrived and Jon Leibowitz also worked on that ultimate and I think he wrote the memorandum on what an impeachable offense was.

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But very early on John asked me just to do some preliminary research on what an impeachable offense might be. So I did a little work on that but once Hillary and Joe and Jon arrived they had complete responsibility for that. I would mention that since David Haines and I both had the Special Assistant title and David was three or four even possibly five years more senior than I was and had clerked for Chief Justice Burger and so I kind of looked at him as kind of a senior associate. And so quite often he asked me to assist him with whatever he was doing and sometimes John would give me assignments directly.

Sometimes he would ask me to assist David with something that he'd asked David to work on. So there were various discrete assignments that I was given over the course of the nine months approximately that I was there.

Naftali: And let's talk about a few of these elements of the challenge that Mr. Doar faced and see if he talked to you about them. When he arrives he has to get to know the Watergate Special Prosecution Force and he is working with Jaworski and he is working with an old colleague Henry Ruth. Did he share with you some of the discussions that he was having with them about the nature of impeachment?

Cormier: Not in any great depth. I was aware that John and Henry Ruth had a relatively close relationship. And I knew that he had known Mr. Jaworski from some prior experience. I was aware that his view that John's view was at the special prosecutor by virtue of the nature of its assignment was looking for a crime. And I think John's view was more a review of behavior over a long period of time that the cumulative effect – reviewing the effect of cumulative behavior over a period of time.

So I think the difference largely related to John's view of the role of a special prosecutor versus the role of one conducting an impeachment enquiry.

Naftali: Do you think that he came to this position at least when you came to work with him with a sense of the importance of the – had a misconduct which would be maybe as you said a key to when would he thought about this process. I think had that in January when you were there or is it something he developed over time?

Cormier: Well, it's been 45 years so it's very difficult to remember timelines. But I think fairly early on John started to develop a view that it was cumulative behavior that would make the determination as to whether there was a case or not. I don't think John came in with any preconceived notions of whether an impeachable offense had occurred. I think his view was very



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much. We were not there to make a case, we were there to determine whether there was a case.

And I think he made a determination fairly early on that we would not conduct an independent investigation that we would depend in large part on work that had been done by the Senate Select Committee and some other committees that had looked into some of the relevant issues. But I think it was fairly early on that John came to believe that there had been a pattern of conduct that needed to be looked into and explained and that was the way I think he approached the inquiry. And I'm sure he was impacted by the views of Chairman Rodino and Mr. Hutchinson now that's on the committee but I was not party to those discussions.

Naftali: Did he share with you at all how his experience as a civil rights pioneer and overseeing legal cases himself had shaped how he thought about this impeachment challenge?

Cormier: Well, we did not have very many extended discussions regarding issues of that kind. But because as I indicated earlier I still admired John for what he had done when he was involved in the Civil Rights division. I did speak with him at times about his approach with respect to some of the matters that he looked into there. Yes, he tried the case of Goodman, Chaney and Schwerner. And I certainly came away from those discussions with the view that in that very hostile atmosphere that it was terribly important to be meticulous, thorough and impartial when conducting investigations and being certain that any allegations that were made are almost indisputable.

And so I think that his approach toward this investigation was probably similar to the approach that he had taken with respect to incidents that were investigated or cases in the south. He was very much of the view that many of the allegations being made in the statements of the information either be supported by sworn testimony or by document. So they were basically undisputed facts that were put forward in the investigation. And John as you probably know was somewhat skeptical or suspicious of computers.

And I think that approach of using the index cards that was used in connection with the investigation was similar to what he had done in his Civil Rights cases. I got that impression. I'm not positive of that but I think that's where that idea came from and this idea of organizing them in a chronological fashion. So I'm sure that his experience at the Civil Rights division influenced the way that he approached the inquiry.

Naftali: Did Mr. Doar ever tell you the story of Jack Brooks' anger that took you were recruited from Beaumont without him having been involved?

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Cormier: Well, he didn't have to tell me. I think that John brought Jack Brooks to my office expecting that he would be pleased that I was from Beaumont, an area he represented. And Mr. Brooks let John know in my presence that he was not pleased that I'd been hired from his district without his approval.

Naftali: This became I understand of quite a bit a source of tension between Mr. Brooks and John Doar?

Cormier: Well, I was not aware of that. I know he expressed his displeasure that day in my office and he may have had discussions with John subsequent to that. But my relationship with Jack Brooks became quite good over the period that I was there. So I had assumed that the issue had been disposed of. He made his point that if anyone from his district was hired that he wanted to know about it. And John I think acknowledged that that's the way he would precede.

But I think the staff was pretty much fully employed by that time. So I don't think it was really an issue. But I don't – I did not perceive that John had any great problem with Mr. Brooks' requirement that that be the case. And as I said, over the nine months, I developed a very good relationship with the Congressman.

Naftali: Did you have a chance to observe the relationship between Chairman Rodino and Mr. Doar?

Cormier: Not up close in very many instances. But it was clear from the way that John spoke of Mr. Rodino that he had developed a tremendous respect for him. And certainly when I saw him conducting the few hearings that I did attend or other meetings, I was very impressed with the way that he conducted the investigation. He was very impartial. He tried to be as fair as he possibly could was my impression. And he conducted the hearings with great dignity I thought. And everything I heard John say about Mr. Rodino was very, very positive. And so I'm certain that he had a very high regard for him.

Naftali: Mr. Doar tried and I think to succeed he tried very hard to bring the Republicans on the committee into the process. There were however some debates and I was wondering if you'd recall this as special assistant to Mr. Doar the debate over the role that James St. Clair should play, the President's counsel should play in the inquiry?

Cormier: I was aware that that was an issue. I was not directly involved with that, but because John Doar was so insistent that the confidentiality of the process be maintained and that we not speak with anybody outside of the staff. There was a great deal of informal discussion among staff members,

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so I was aware that Hillary was working on procedures for the hearings. And I knew that one of the issues was what role that Mr. St. Clair would play in the hearings. And I think that ultimately he was given a fairly broad role.

And I think that he was involved in questioning some of the few witnesses that were ultimately called. I know he was very much taken the position that they had to be a crime, which was at variance with John's view. But that's about all I know about that.

Naftali: Do you recall the discussions of whether or not there should be witnesses at all that came before the entire committee?

Cormier: Yes, early on, I think that John did not expect to conduct an independent investigation at all. And I think that was largely as a result of the time limits that were involved and that the select committee had accumulated so much material that he thought that the investigation, the inquiry could be completed if we were to organize and synthesize the information that was currently – that was then available. And I don't know how the idea of calling some witnesses came about. I seem to have some recollection that some committee members very much wanted that to occur.

And I also seemed to remember because I was involved in some way with either John Mitchell's interview with John Doar and Mr. Jenner or his appearance as a witness. And that it may have been Mr. St. Clair who was interested in having Mr. Mitchell testify. I remember something like that but I don't remember the details.

Naftali: As you say, it's been a long time?

Cormier: It has been a long time.

Naftali: What do you remember of Mr. Jenner?

Cormier: Oh, he was just a prince of a gentleman. And I really developed a pretty close relationship as well. I used to just go to his office and speak with him at times. In fact, I mentioned earlier that I had always been pretty much determined to return to Texas. But Mr. Jenner had invited me to join his firm in Chicago. And I really gave some thought to that because I thought so much of Bert Jenner. Ultimately, I went a lot and continued to think that my future was in Texas. But it was some indication of how highly I thought of him that I seriously thought of gave consideration of going to Chicago.

Naftali: Mr. Jenner and Mr. Doar I understand were a great team.

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- Cormier: They were.
- Naftali: They were different individuals. Could you give us a bit of a word picture, first of all, please describe Mr. Jenner to those who had known him and what he was like?
- Cormier: Well, first he was one of the great trial lawyers of his era. And obviously by virtue of this name being the first name in Jenner & Block one of the great law firms in Chicago. And I think he had been President of the American Bar Association or held some other high office. So he was nationally recognized as one of the leading trial lawyers in the country. And he was extremely personable, articulate. He knew how to obviously like so many trial lawyers they have this drawing personality and he was a very gregarious man. He was something of a natty dresser. He used to wear socks that were unusual for the time as I recall.
- So he was just a wonderful man. He was a great storyteller. He was a lot of fun to be around. John was a great leader, a great man with tremendous judgment and integrity. But he was very self-effacing and he was not – he didn't lead by being one of the boys. He was certainly a very, very nice man. It was fun to be around him, but he was relatively quiet. He was not a very voluble personality. And in that way he was somewhat different from Bert Jenner.
- Naftali: What was the environment like for members of the staff you were describing how important it was to maintain confidence and everybody in Washington wanted to know what you thought? What was it like to be in Washington on this staff at that time?
- Cormier: Well, one thing that made it much easier was there was not a lot of time away from work to be exposed to the questions that were ultimately raised by outsiders when in their presence we worked very, very long hours. There were many days we worked 16, 17 hours. And particularly when the hearings were going on it was almost constant. But John had so clearly made the point that we were not to discuss what was being done outside of the staff. I think it just resulted in close relationships developing within the staff as I mentioned there were five of us from Yale, we're already friends.
- Tom Bell who was a very significant member of the staff, he was had the liaison with the select committee and John, I mean Tom shared an office with Hillary. Lee Dale, I believe shared an office with or shared a suite with Mike Conway who was a good friend of mine. So I came to know them very well. Now Larry Lucchino ultimately became the President of Boston Red Sox was very involved in baseball. He is a really great guy who I had known at Yale. And so not only did I developed friendships but
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I developed friendships with half the people they had developed relationships with on the staff.

So it was a very close-knit group and we used to have a lot of informal discussions around in the office space and we'd often I don't remember what restaurants or anything but we used to get together and go out to eat in little groups when well, not so little at times when if the timeline worked out with the assignments of the various staff members.

Naftali: Was one of your assignments at one point listening to tapes?

Cormier: My recollection is that I listened to at least one tape and I may have listened to a couple of others. But I was not very much involved with the tapes and I had forgotten why I listened to the one that I'm pretty sure that I did. You know, there was so much discussion of the tapes that my memory is really not vivid regarding what I heard and what I heard discussed. But I certainly didn't listen to very many of the tapes, I'm sure of that.

Naftali: As we're getting into July of 1974, Mr. Doar has given his presentation of statements of information. And there is a question as to whether he would give an argument for impeachment. And as you mentioned that he didn't feel that it was his job to be partial. But at a certain point ultimately he does give the case for impeachment. Do you have any recollection whatsoever of the process by which he came to do that?

Cormier: Well, again, I'm not sure that – well I'm positive I never had a direct discussion with John about that. But my sense was that there had been some impatience on the part of some committee members with the process, the way the process had worked because this was over six weeks that the statements of information were read to the committee. And I think John's approach was to read that in a very methodical way. And I think probably the others who did some reading were instructed in the same fashion that this was to be an impartial presentation of the information, which was not called facts at the time.

And I got the sense that some of the committee members were looking for John to express his views at some point and I guess that he was persuaded to do that. I'm not sure of whether he planned to do it all along but I know that there was a great deal of a number of requests that he do that and I know that he did ultimately elect to do it.

Naftali: Did you participate in any way in creating this summary of information which was sort of a boiled down version of the 36 volumes or sort of statements of information?

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- Cormier: No.
- Naftali: Did you have any notable interaction with the elected members of the committee which you can share with us?
- Cormier: Well, to some extent –.
- Naftali: Other than Mr. Brooks.
- Cormier: No, I had a couple of conversation with Congressman Conyers. Barbara Jordan was from Houston and had been the debate partner of a very good friend of mine when she attended Texas Southern University. So she became very friendly with me. And in fact I guess her campaign manager was also a Texas Southern graduate who was a very good friend of mine. So we shared a few relationships and obviously knew what a tremendous role she played as a politician in Texas being the first black congressperson elected since Reconstruction.
- So I admired her a great deal and came to know her a little bit in connection with the process. I think those were the two that I spoke with more than any others. I may have had a few conversations with others but they were very limited.
- Naftali: Did she share with you the fact that she was on the fence about impeachment that she wasn't sure which way she was going to go?
- Cormier: We really didn't discuss that. I think I've subsequently heard that that was the case. But I do remember the eloquent speech that she gave during the debates and I guess by that time she had come to some conclusion. But I have heard or read that that was a period when she was not certain.
- Naftali: What do you remember of Dick Kates?
- Cormier: Oh, again Dick was just an amazing man. He was just a great storyteller. He was very folksy, very animated. And again, I developed a very good relationship with Dick. And Dick was – I'm not sure exactly what his title was but he was very much one of the senior people and seemed to be involved in all the big decisions that were made. And he had such a – I think that he may have been hired by the committee before Doar arrived and so it probably as a result of that he had relationships with the committee.
- And I think Congressman Kastenmeier was from Wisconsin and they had known each other for some time. But Dick seemed to have a very good relationship with a number of the committee members. And I gather that he used to meet with them and what the staff used to refer to as sessions
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when they would sort of be spoken, they would receive in more detail what had been provided in the statements of information. And I think they relied a great deal on Dick when they had questions.

Naftali: As the process was building to the debates, did you have a sense of which way you thought this would go? Did you participate at all for example in shaping the articles of impeachment that Mr. Doar drafted?

Cormier: Well, my role in that was very small. John told me early on he liked the way I wrote because I wrote very succinctly and tried to write with some clarity. So from time to time he had asked me to look over something that he had written or he had received. But I was really not involved in the drafting of the articles. But from information that I had kind of either heard or reading between the lines as to what I did hear, I was not at all certain of what the vote was going to be. I know that both John and from what John said to Mr. Rodino very much wanted the vote to be nonpartisan whether it was a positive vote or a negative vote.

I had heard from various sources that there were some of the Republicans on the committee that wanted consideration of a possible censure rather than impeachment. And I knew that there were some of the Republicans on the committee that were very opposed to the idea of impeachment. So exactly where it all was I was not certain. I did believe that based upon the accumulated information there was a sound basis for impeachment, but whether the committee was going to come to that conclusion I just didn't know.

Naftali: Did you have any opportunity to interact with the three southern democrats Thornton, Mann or Flowers on the committee?

Cormier: No, not directly. I think that I was present during some of the debate and heard their statements and I – from some of the sources was pretty much aware of the difficult decision that they were facing on the point. I did not get the sense that, at least in the case of Mr. Flowers and I'm not sure about the others. But I knew that it was my sense was that it was Mr. Sandman and Mr. Wiggins who were very, very opposed at least until after the smoking gun to the impeachment.

Naftali: Well, July 26 Sandman, Congressman Sandman and Congressman Wiggins went after the draft to part one, the obstruction of justice and wanted specificity. And that night staff went into overdrive to provide assistance to what would be the majority goal?

Cormier: Yeah, I think Mike Conway was very much involved in drafting, in revising well, in accumulating the specifics that Mr. Sandman had requested. But I think that there was the way that the cards were organized

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with the support behind the statements of information. I think that that those specifics were pretty readily available. It was a question of just pulling them together and providing them – not that I'm understating the importance of that and certainly doing again on the kind of time schedule that was required. But I was aware of that, yes.

Naftali: The next day July 27, the First Article is passed by partisan majority. What do you remember of your reaction?

Cormier: Well, as I indicated I think that the facts very much supported the article. So I was glad to see at that point that the committee had agreed because I think the staff had done a thorough meticulous impartial job of pulling together the facts and I thought the facts spoke for themselves. So it was not surprising to me that they reached that conclusion. I didn't know, I can't say that I had a real sense in advance of how it might go but I can't say that I was overly surprised that that was the vote.

Naftali: After three articles passed and two were rejected, what do you think your next responsibility would be at that point the end of July?

Cormier: Well, I don't know what would've happened on what the full House vote. I think that the debates had been handled with such dignity and such sincerity by the staff members, by the committee members. I think that they conveyed their confidence in the way that the inquiry had been conducted by John and the staff so I thought that their vote would be very persuasive in the House. But while I expected that the House would approve at least some of the articles I was not certain about what was going to transpire. And John had really not spoken to me about what he expected me to do. So I was just prepared to do whatever he asked.

Naftali: Do you remember when the Supreme Court in an 8-0 decision went against the President and US v. Nixon. Any reaction to that decision?

Cormier: Well, I was very pleased to see that. Obviously it was a very tense time and I think there had been some – I think the President had not answered the question as to whether or not he would comply with a Supreme Court decision on the issue. And I think Mr. St. Clair had not addressed the issue directly either. So I knew that that it could result in some kind of constitutional crisis, depending upon what the Supreme Court did rule. And I remember also that there seemed to be some stories around about a Kamikaze flight into the Capitol or something I don't recall.

But I do remember that it obviously raised the possibility of a real constitutional crisis. Again, I think that my view was consistent with that of the other members of the senior people who were making the decisions that executive privilege should not protect the materials that had been



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subpoenaed by the committee, as well as the subpoenas of the special prosecutor. And I guess that Judge Sirica and the appellate court had already ruled in favor of the compliance of with these subpoenas. So I guess I wasn't overly surprised about where the Supreme Court came out. And I thought it was the correct decision.

Naftali: What do you recall of when you heard that the President was resigning?

Cormier: Well, I certainly was aware that there had been a lot of discussion about the fact that some of the Republican members were concerned about a senate trial having an impact on the midterm elections. And that as a result of that there might be some pressure on the President to resign rather than having a trial linger on for four months particularly if the headcount or whatever was done in the Congress seemed to show that the House was clearly going to vote for impeachment.

And if there was not pretty strong assurances that there would be an exoneration or at least not a conviction in the Senate that there might be a lot of pressure on the President to resign. But I had no idea of what might happen. The President had given strong indications that he would never resign and he was a strong-willed man. So I had no idea of what might happen.

Naftali: Do you have some stories you want to share with us which you can recall at this remove of working with your colleagues on the staff?

Cormier: Well, it was a very talented group that worked and very collegial group everybody worked very well together. I thought it was very fortunate to have four other Yale people that I'd known for years and having an opportunity to work with them so closely. I was very proud of the fact that our staff did work in such an impartial fashion, particularly that we were able to protect the confidentiality of that whole process as well as we were able to I thought the work that we did was intellectually rigorous because John demanded that in part.

But also because we had lawyers on the staff that were also very talented and very proud professionals who wanted to do a very judicious job. And John provided such great leadership that we all knew what was expected. But our senior people I mean, Bernie Nussbaum and Joe Wood and Dick Kates and Kevin Davis and Gill were all just tremendous lawyers. And being six months out of law school I felt that I learned so much about how really good lawyers functioned and particularly working with John.

So it was just a tremendous experience and so I was just very pleased to have had the opportunity to be involved with a historically important event and to work with such great people in particularly to have an opportunity

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to work with a hero of mine who I came away with even a more positive view of than I had based upon what I had read about him. So it was a very good experience in a very difficult time for the country.

Naftali: What if any lessons did you learn about impeachment the process from your experience on the staff?

Cormier: Well, I certainly came away with a greater appreciation of our constitution. I think that I also gained a greater understanding of the vulnerabilities of our system. I don't know what would've happened had the tapes been destroyed. I think that there were many things in that could be established outside the tapes. Many of the senior members of the President staff had extensive notes that were not relied on to the extent that they might have been had we not had the tapes. But I think the tapes made a lot of difference and who knows what would've happened without that.

And I think the fact that the result that came out of the inquiry and the vote of the committee certainly validated. I think the requirements of the constitution and I think that anyone in power would have to take into consideration what happened as a result of that inquiry and it should have some impact on their determination to comply with the constitution and their oath of office.

Naftali: Mr. Cormier before we end this, are there any stories, issues that we've left out which you'd like to add to your interview?

Cormier: No, I can't think of anything. I guess one of the anecdotes not only was the story of Hillary telling Bernie Nussbaum that Bill would one day be President of United States. And I think the next day there were a group of us around the coffee bar somewhere and Bernie came up laughing at what Hillary had told him the night before about Bill being President. I guess my reaction I didn't say anything was that there are a number of fortuities that will determine whether any person becomes President of the United States.

But among all of the people of our era I knew or had read much about that if anybody did it was going to be Bill Clinton. Also I remember well that on my modest salary on the inquiry staff I had leased three apartments. My wife had a year of graduate school remaining in New Haven and I'd gone to work at Paul Weiss in New York so we leased an apartment for a year in Stamford, Connecticut. And when I moved to Washington obviously I needed a place to live in Washington. And my wife indicated that she was not pleased about having to drive 50 miles everyday back to New Haven when I was no longer there.

So she leased a little place in New Haven so on roughly 20,000 a year I was paying rent on three apartments. So that was interesting. And as I said, the experience did allow me a nine month period to make a final decision as to whether I would return to New York or go to Houston and go to work for Baker Botts where I had the very positive summer experience after my second year. So everything about the experience except having to pay the rent on three apartments was really fantastic.

Naftali: Mr. Cormier, thank you for your time today.

Cormier: Well, thank you.

Naftali: It was wonderful.

Cormier: My pleasure.

Naftali: Thank you.