

*Steve Silver:* This is an interview with Ambassador James Jones for the Bryce Harlow Oral History Project. Mr. Ambassador, thank you so much for talking to us about Bryce Harlow.

*James Jones:* Good to be with you.

*Steve Silver:* Let's start at the beginning by having you tell us how you first got to know Bryce Harlow.

*James Jones:* I came to Washington right out of college to work for a congressman from Oklahoma and in those days, the Oklahoma State Society was a pretty active group and these were Oklahomans who were working and living in Washington. And Bryce Harlow was a very big part of that. And by that point I guess he was at Procter & Gamble, heading their government relations office. I believe he was also president of the Oklahoma State Society. In any event, he was active. He included young sprouts like me and others and he's just one that I got to know and he took a few of us under his wing so to speak.

*Steve Silver:* Very nice. Do you remember what your first impressions were of were? Did they match what you had heard about him, maybe?

*James Jones:* Well, yeah. I had not heard that much about him until I got to Washington. As I said, I was right out of college and yes, he was an impressive person because of his genuineness. He was – there's no flash to him. There was strictly – he was the real McCoy. And he did have a very sly sense of humor and a rye sense of humor, I suppose, which I like because it sort of meshed with some of my sense of humor. But yes, he was one that you wanted to know and I guess really everybody in the Oklahoma Congressional Delegation respected him and called on him from time to time for advice.

I guess the next time that I really recognized him was when I was at the White House on President Johnson's staff. I forget what the issue or issues were, but I remember President Johnson saying, "Get Bryce Harlow for me." He was very fond of Bryce Harlow and respected him highly. It turns out that Bryce was committee staff in the 1930's when Lyndon Johnson was a young congressman and was on the Naval Affairs Committee in the House. And Bryce Harlow was a staff person on that committee who Johnson, when it came to things military, often times he would say, "You get Bryce Harlow's opinion on this."

*Steve Silver:* Can you talk a little bit about his reputation, since that was such a

big part of sort of his career; how was he regarded within the Congress when you were there?

*James Jones:* Obviously he was a Republican, worked for Republican administrations, but he was regarded as a straight shooter and as someone who could bring people together. He played that role apparently. As I said, I was in high school or college at the time. But in the Eisenhower administration, in the good old days when there was bipartisanship and respect among parties and people, and Lyndon Johnson was head of the Senate and Sam Rayburn was Speaker of the House and Eisenhower was president, you had a divided government. And you had government that was working very well and Bryce Harlow was a very central part of that from what I gather from some of the principals involved; that he was an honest broker on some of these issues. He could get people together to sort of mediate differences and try to work out some common ground and he was respected because he was not known as someone who would betray you, betray your confidence or who would embarrass you and things like that.

*Steve Silver:* Do you remember if he had any detractors or any critics? I mean, it's hard to imagine in Washington everybody likes somebody and if so, how would he handle that?

*James Jones:* Well, I don't know. As I recall somewhere in that period of time, Bryce – there were some articles or something about lobbyists and the revolving door and what have you. And I think Bryce was mentioned in connection with Procter & Gamble and his role with government, but it was one of those passing stories; nothing stuck.

I think the respect that he had of both the media and the political leaders in both political parties in Washington was such that I don't think anybody ever questioned his honesty. I don't recall anybody ever questioning his two-facedness, his duplicity or anything like that. And so the only – as I recall, the only thing that I ever heard negative that I recall was where he was mentioned as head of Procter & Gamble's lobbying operations.

*Steve Silver:* Do you think it takes a long time to build up the kind of reputation of integrity and respect that he had? Do you think some people can just get here and have it right away or do you think it's really a long process to build that up?

*James Jones:* No. I think you have to build it up and you have to go through – you have to be lucky enough to have been discovered by someone to be in a position to be able to show your intelligence, ability and

then your trustworthiness. And Bryce, I don't know how he actually started; I never thought to ask him. But we – over that period of time he was able to create these relationships where people trusted him. So it does take some time. It doesn't take a lifetime because obviously Bryce Harlow, in a few years, was trusted by people who later would become very powerful people from the Richard Nixons to the Lyndon Johnsons, etc.

He did have, going back to the first part – he did have a whimsical sense of humor. And one of the things, when I first came up here – the Oklahoma State Society was going to have its annual big festive event and a few of us were tasked to do a spoof on the Oklahoma Delegation. And what we did was we took tape recordings of their messages back home and their weekly broadcasts and stuff like that and we would take it out of context and say, “Senator,” for example, “Senator Robert Kerr was a big proponent of the Arkansas River Navigation Program and the bank stabilization and Senator Kerr also had a lot of investments and we'd say, “Senator, what do you think about such and such?” And we took out of context, “Well, I think we should have bank stabilization,” and things like that. And Bryce Harlow had a wonderful sense of humor to even be able to pick those things out.

One other thought about getting trust is being able to spot younger people and work with them. I was lucky to be spotted by Bryce. He gave me informal advice at times when I was moving up the political ladder. And then later on I remember him calling me and saying, “I want you to keep an eye on this young fellow that I've brought into the White House named Lamar Alexander. He's the Jim Jones type.” And that was my – I would never have thought of who Lamar Alexander was except Bryce Harlow was out there helping another young fellow move along.

*Steve Silver:* Is that sort of thing not as common nowadays, do you think?

*James Jones:* I don't know. It seems a lot more calculated now and it seems a lot more partisan than it used to be.

*Steve Silver:* Could you talk about, I mean here we are 20 years later after the scene; could you talk about what the name Bryce Harlow—

*James Jones:* When did he die?

*Steve Silver:* 1987.

*James Jones:* I was just out of Congress that year. We went to his funeral at a

church near American University. There was an overflow crowd, number one. And number two, it represented everything in his life, you had Democrats, Republicans, Blacks, Whites, you had the whole spectrum of the United States political power structure there, which was very nice to see.

*Steve Silver:* Could you talk a little bit about here we are all these years later, what does the name Bryce Harlow still mean to people from Oklahoma who are in Washington?

*James Jones:* I think one of the problems we have now is we don't have a very long sense of history. And I think so many new people coming to Washington now, in my judgment, don't really know what Bryce Harlow means to Oklahoma. And they should know. We are – maybe I'm getting older and looking at it like an old guy but I think that our sense of history is very short and 20 years is a long time or 30 years is ancient. So, I think projects like this – I hope you'll get it out more because Bryce Harlow meant an awful lot in a lot of ways when he was at the White House, whether it was Eisenhower or subsequently with Nixon. He was the go-to-guy when the Oklahoma congressional delegation was trying to do things like build highways, build the Arkansas Navigation System, develop airports and those kinds of things, which was very important to the state at that particular time to develop our infrastructure.

Bryce Harlow is someone who they could call up and say, "Here's the problem; can you help us work it through?" And he rarely would have his fingerprints on how it was done. Somehow he was able to help shake loose some of the problems that might've occurred inside the administration.

*Steve Silver:* Sure. What was he like to work with on political issues?

*James Jones:* Well, I never, in terms of working with him, I never had a prolonged one particular issue. It was – when I was at the White House, it was particularly a military matter at that particular time, "Call Bryce Harlow and see what he has to say," and he was always very forthcoming and would give his honest opinion which I would report. If he didn't see the president himself I would report to the president.

In terms of when I was in Congress, there were a few things that I would talk to him about from time to time but it was a conversation – it's not a prolonged working with him on a project that took a period of time.

*Steve Silver:* Why do you think he was such an effective lobbyist? Why was he good at bringing business and government together?

*James Jones:* Well, his personality, number one. He projected an image that was not threatening. In other words, in this town or in finance in New York or whatever, there are a lot of peacocks around and Bryce Harlow was not the peacock. He was the one who was providing information and assisting the peacock, so to speak. So, he was not threatening that he was going to take center stage away from the ones he was trying to convince; the powers he was trying to bring together. So that was one very important element. The biggest element, though, is his honesty; his sense of truthfulness. That is a currency that once you are known to have, it lasts a long, long time.

*Steve Silver:* You mentioned something which I find very interesting and I just want ask you about it because other people have mentioned the same thing – the idea that he was non-threatening and a lot of people, I think, would have the idea that if you're of shorter physical stature, as I know he was, that might be an impediment to the big overarching intimidating people that can rise to high levels of power. Do you think it was the opposite with Bryce Harlow? I think that non-threatening became an asset, really.

*James Jones:* Yeah. No, I think he used his intellectual and physical assets to the utmost. And I think that it was a combination of his physical size being relatively small and his intellect being very, very large that he melded those two together very nicely.

*Steve Silver:* Why do you think he did enjoy, as you said, such a good working relationship with Democrats?

*James Jones:* Well, again, I think it was personal.

Democrats knew that when he worked for Eisenhower, when he worked for Nixon – I clearly knew it when he worked for Nixon – that he was a Republican first; that he couldn't – if he was going to be effective in anything, he couldn't compromise or undercut his own boss, so to speak. And you respected that. But beyond that, if he could help you, he would help you and that was important. So, when you always knew that, you just knew where you were with him.

*Steve Silver:* Right. With so much being made about the partisanship today and of course you mentioned that as well earlier, do you think there

was something about the climate back then that just lent itself more to compromise versus today? Could a Bryce Harlow exist to the extent that he did, today you think?

*James Jones:*

I think it's harder today just because – and we're seeing that in the Congress today where those who tend toward the middle, those who tend toward working out bipartisan compromises are shunned and scorned in both of their political parties. And so that makes it much more difficult for the peacemaker, so to speak. I think that that is due to a number of unfortunate events that go back about 20 years.

In the first Reagan administration the political decision was made not to cooperate with the Democrats, those like myself in the middle, but to work with the very most right or most conservative wing for the Democratic Party, which numbered 20 to 25 people and a solid phalanx of Republicans. Then the Democrats who lost those battles came back in a very partisan way and partisanship has gotten worse and worse ever since.

I think there is a lot to be said for coming out of World War II with a country that was united, a country that was building, a country that suddenly we were considered the power in the world and a country that was facing what was perceived as a major threat from the Soviet Union. All of that tended to sort of bring things to the middle and to make people want to work together. I think as we got out of that period of time when a whole bunch of other things just happened, partisanship has taken over. I think bipartisanship can come back again but it's going to take a confluence of certain people and issues to make it happen.

*Steve Silver:*

Right. Do you think you can teach the kind of integrity that Bryce Harlow had to other people or do you think it just has to be—

*James Jones:*

No. I think people have to be essentially honest people and people with integrity. I think what you can teach is that in any kind of a highly competitive undertaking, whether it's politics or business or finance or religion or anything else, there will be a lot of temptations to shortcut, to go around the rules, etc. And so I think you can teach that integrity is very important and will win out in the end. Examples like Bryce Harlow who had both success and respect and it was enduring, I think, was a good way to help teach that.

*Steve Silver:*

What about political instinct, because aside from integrity, he was just known for having one of the sharpest political—

*James Jones:* Yeah.

*Steve Silver:* Is that something you think you can teach to people or—

*James Jones:* No. I think some people are just tone deaf there.

*Steve Silver:* Really?

*James Jones:* Yeah. They have tin ears there.

For some people, it's just instinctive. And part of that is – where it becomes instinctive is to be able to like people and observe people, to listen to people as opposed to talk to people. And Bryce Harlow was very good at that. He enjoyed it. He knew how to listen.

*Steve Silver:* That really collaborates what some of the other interviewees have said – that he loved human relations.

*James Jones:* Yeah.

*Steve Silver:* And he studied human relations.

*James Jones:* Yeah. And he talked less than he heard when he listened.

*Steve Silver:* Yeah. Do you think the media is so invasive today to the point that it would be difficult to have a Bryce Harlow? Do you think they would try to clip his wings somehow?

*James Jones:* I think probably not because number one, Bryce was very careful not to go over the line. And so therefore, I don't see him in a position that would make him a target of the media as doing something wrong. Secondly, Bryce was such a low key guy that he was not a media star. So, he was not – the media likes to take someone who they make a star and then tear them down and so I don't think they would build him up to begin with before they tore him down.

*Steve Silver:* Right. As sort of a final thought, Mr. Ambassador, how deep did Bryce Harlow influence your own political career? What are some of the more important things that you learned personally from Bryce Harlow?

*James Jones:* Well, you learn it from a composite of people and Bryce Harlow is clearly one; an important one. I think you just you learn, one) integrity, two) respect for others, three) to not say something you

don't know what you're talking about. Do your homework and number four) just keep working. Keep working at whatever it is you're trying to accomplish. You don't have to be flashy; you can just get the job done.

*Steve Silver:* Mr. Ambassador, thank you so much for talking to us. You've been generous with your time. We appreciate it.

*James Jones:* Alright. Thanks. Good luck to you.

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