“Lessons From the Nixon White House” A Documentary Screening and Discussion

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Few people ever gain the privilege of stepping behind the revered doors of the White House, but those who do soon become witnesses to history, albeit sometimes unwittingly. One such witness was Richard D Barnett, a Communications Director for the Nixon White House, and my own grandfather. Over the past three years, I accumulated over 20 hours of interview and accompanying footage, and have edited into a 16-minute retrospective about my grandfather’s time supporting the President, and the lessons he learned from one of the most mysterious and powerful leaders in American history. Barnett’s stories are framed within the context of a day spent with my grandfather in Washington, D.C., revisiting his old haunts and hangouts. For this film, I traveled to the National Archives and the Nixon Library to verify my grandfather’s stories, and to capture images and video footage of President Nixon, sorting through over 10,000 photos in the process. Heavily influenced by documentaries of the past, I used films such as Errol Morris’ Academy Award winning doc *The Fog of War* (2003) as a basis of structure to tell my story. Documentaries offer glimpses into worlds beyond the audience’s imagination, and at their core, tell compelling stories. *Lessons from the Nixon White House* does both: offering a primary source behind the scenes of the country’s most notorious presidential administration, and telling a personal story of achievement, chance, and ethics.