

Ronald L. Goldfarb Oral History Interview – RFK#1, 11/02/1981
Administrative Information

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Biographical Note

(1933 -). Assistant to the Attorney General, Organized Crime Section, Department of Justice, 1961 – 1964, discusses the Department of Justice during the John F. Kennedy administration, working with Robert F. Kennedy [RFK], trying organized crime cases in various locations across the country, and personal interaction with RFK, among other issues.

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Ronald L. Goldfarb – RFK #1

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Oral History Interview

With

Ronald L. Goldfarb

November 2, 1981

Washington, D.C.

By Sheldon Stern

For the Robert F. Kennedy Oral History Program of the John F. Kennedy Library

STERN: Prior to your appointment to the organized crime section of the Justice Department, I know your official title was that of a special assistant to the attorney general.

GOLDFARB: Right, and that's a little fancier than in fact it was. This was a beginning job for me. I'd been out of law school for several years, but I was in the Air Force and doing graduate work and what not, so it was not an appointment at a high level. I began as a GS-13 in the Justice Department, and it came about not through any political connections. In fact, I had not worked on the Kennedy [John F. Kennedy] campaign, and, as a matter of fact, was very much back in those days a Stevenson [Adlai E. Stevenson] supporter and so I resented Kennedy's nomination. Considering who he ran against, he had my wholehearted vote. But, I did not work on that campaign and had no contacts with Robert Kennedy [Robert F. Kennedy], and, as a matter of fact, had a lot of hang-ups and reservations about taking the job because I thought so little of Robert Kennedy at that time.

How I got the job was a totally fortuitous circumstance. I had written a book about the contempt power and I was talking to Justice Black [Hugo Lafayette Black] about possibly writing a foreword to it. And a friend of mine came from New York to Washington to interview for a job in the Justice Department and I decided I'd join him, make the trip and go see Justice Black. So we came to Washington. I went to see Black at the Supreme Court; he went to the Justice Department and we met at the Justice Department. Coming down on the

train, I had read about this man who was appointed to run the organized crime section and when I went to meet my friend, I had some time so I visited somebody I knew in the Justice Department and we started talking about this guy, Silberling [Edwyn Silberling], who was recruiting. He sounded very exciting, and what he was doing sounded very interesting. Just for the flukiest of reasons I then found myself in Silberling's office and Silberling said, "What are you going to do?" and I said, "I'm going to teach." And he said, "Well wouldn't you like...."—I had also mentioned that I liked

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trying cases when I was in the Air Force—and he said, "Well, why don't you come down here and try some cases?" He offered me a job. And it was a funny time in my life where I was quite sure I was going to teach, but I liked trying cases so it made sense to do this for a short time. I went home to wrestle with it because I thought that Bobby Kennedy was a little fascist from the days working for McCarthy [Joseph R. McCarthy] and what not and for the way he ran that campaign. It was terribly appealing to me to take a little interlude to try cases and to work with Silberling, but I had a lot of hang-ups about working for Robert Kennedy; so it was with a very anti-Kennedy background that I came to the Justice Department.

STERN: That's very interesting. I wonder if you might be able to describe briefly exactly what your duties and responsibilities were, or even if you could go into what was more or less a typical day for you in the...

GOLDFARB: Our group divided the country up into sections. Each of us had a section, and we each were totally responsible for the entire law enforcement process there if an organized crime figure was involved. And by that I mean we usurped, in effect, the role of the U.S. attorney in that area, and we also had the extra power that Robert Kennedy had arranged for us to control and coordinate the efforts of all the investigative authorities, for example, the IRS [Internal Revenue Service] and the FBI [Federal Bureau of Investigation]. Those two extra powers permitted us to go in and be very much more active than a typical Justice Department lawyer. So I had a part of the country.

STERN: What part was it?

GOLDFARB: It began in Newport, Kentucky, which is a classic "sin city" outside of Cincinnati. Subsequently, I went elsewhere, but for the major part of the time that I was there that was my area. And what I did on a given day differed dramatically depending on whether I was here in Washington, in which case it was going to meetings and doing research and reading files and it was rather humdrum and office oriented, except on those days when we went to see Kennedy which was much more exciting. The days when I was on the road it was much more activist, much more individual, much more courtroom oriented, running grand juries, working with investigative agencies and actually trying cases. In fact, I did conduct long grand jury investigations and some very long such trials. So, it was a very different life, depending on whether I was on the road or home, and I was on the road an awful lot.

STERN: How did your relationship begin, really, with RFK at this point, how would you describe.... I assume from the way you were talking before that you changed

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your mind about...

GOLDFARB: Oh yes! The feeling that I brought to the Justice Department changed slowly but very surely and ultimately very dramatically, so that by the time he left the Justice Department as attorney general, he called me personally and asked me to come to New York with him as a speechwriter when he ran against Keating [Kenneth B. Keating] and I needed to deliberate about a split second before doing that. I resigned over the phone from New York, was up there the next day and that was it. How did it start? When we were here in the Justice Department we had regular meetings with him, our whole group, and we went to see him en masse and often spent the whole day and sometimes two and three days as I recall. He'd go around the room and he had a very personal interest in all of our cases and investigations and he'd go around the room and say, "All right, Goldfarb, what's happened?" and I would tell him everything that I was doing and he would ask questions. He was involved. I had some pretty hot trials so that he was called about me from time to time by people in the area. I once had to call back for authority to do this or that. Eventually I won some big cases so he would call and congratulate me. He always made a practice of doing nice personal touches....

STERN: I've seen a number of references to this extraordinary capacity he had to mobilize people, to galvanize people, the personal part of it is obviously very important. I gather you certainly seem to be confirming that.

GOLDFARB: Yes, it wasn't so much that he gave you a pep talk, which he did not do, it was that those days in government, generally, it was clear where the center of power was. It was clear that there were two really super exciting, well three, super exciting places to be. One was the White House, obviously, one was the Peace Corps because it was new and it had the Kennedy stamp and his brother-in-law was running it and it was very dashing, and the other was the Justice Department. So it was very glamorous and exciting to be there as compared to say the Federal Power Commission or whatever. Because he was who he was, you couldn't help, especially as a young person, being somewhat touched by the excitement and glamour of it. And it was more than anything else. It wasn't that he gave us long talks, it was just that it was much more exciting to go see him than it was to go see his predecessor or successor, even though you were in the office of the attorney general and even though it was exciting, it was just more exciting by virtue of who he was. It was a turn-on. But, I couldn't say it was because of anything he did, it was more a question of the power he had and the glamour and the excitement of his office.

STERN: Do you think that was in part related to the fact that

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he was the President's brother?

GOLDFARB: It was intricately related, it could be nothing else. The area that I worked in was also a favorite of his, historically it was, and he made no bones about the fact that he took a special interest in it. He did not meet with other lawyers in the Justice Department, for example, that had these kinds of sessions, so we felt that we were, it was made more exciting for us, he made us feel we were doing something more vital and watched than anything else. But my respect for him grew just in terms of my observations of the way he did certain things and...

STERN: Can you be a little more specific?

GOLDFARB: Well, episodes that I was aware of when he was in the Justice Department, some that didn't affect me and some which directly concerned me, showed him to be not the ruthless person he was depicted as being so much as a good friend and a very balanced person. My personal contacts with him, especially after his brother was killed, showed him to be a very tortured human being feeling very human things and not at all the machine-like person that he was depicted as. A little unimportant but, to me, revealing an anecdote would be when the United States took Governor Barnett [Ross R. Barnett] to the Supreme Court for contempt and the solicitor general argued the case. It was obviously terribly important. The Kennedy administration had put a lot on the line to take its position. At the same time, I had just written a book about the contempt power, and my book, which was viewed to be a liberal view of the use of contempt, dealt with the right to trial by jury, and it was one of those areas where you couldn't tell who was on the left and who was on the right, because though it was supposed to be a liberal book, it took the position that there should be right to trial by jury in contempt cases which is a good, sound view. It so happened that when you're dealing with contempt cases in the South, in civil rights type cases, it in effect was a way out for people who wanted to violate the law and in this particular case the civil liberties approach was cutting against the liberal civil rights point of view. I was sure that my point of view was right, but I felt embarrassed that here was my book being quoted by Arthur Krock and being read into the congressional record by all the Southern senators as a way to zing the administration. And so, somewhat more dramatically than was necessary, I requested to see Bobby. I went up to see him in his office and I saw him alone and I said, "Look, you know, if this is an embarrassment to you, I'm here to say, you know, I can be.... I can understand that it would be an embarrassment to you, I don't want my book to be cited against your position, especially when I share your civil rights point of view." Instead of taking a kind of stuffy, or easy, way out, he said, "Well, tell me about your point of view," and I told him about my

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point of view and he kind of agreed with it and said it was unfortunate that in this particular posture it cut against another point of view on another subject that I also held. And then he said, "Why don't you autograph your book." And he went and got a copy of his book, The Enemy Within, autographed it, and gave it to me. Instead of it being a heavy moment where conceivably he was going to ask for my resignation, it converted into an act of friendship and it showed that he was very relaxed about things even though it was a tense situation. No big deal, but it just was a very human, it showed the guy to have a perspective and had a sense of humor.

There were other examples of his image and the person that I knew personally being very different. The stereotype I had was different from the person he was. I don't think that I was wrong in my estimation of him before 1960, I think he was a different person. I think he grew, and instead of growing more autocratic in power, he grew more human in power, and more worldly, obviously, and very balanced, and very likeable. So that by the end of the time that he left the Justice Department and I left the Justice Department, I thought that he was growing exponentially and had become a singular voice of, a good combination between hard-headedness and liberalism, not the classic kind of liberal-heart-on-the-sleeve thing, of which he was the opposite, but somebody who could make human, decent decisions, fair decision, but who wasn't afraid to exercise his power and act tough in situations that required the use of power.

In fact, I wrote an article which was published in the Washingtonian magazine around that time when he was first, in his early days as senator, commenting on my experience in New York when he ran for the Senate. Everybody in New York hated him and all of my friends in New York were against him. In fact, there were the Democrats for Keating and all that. I came back and tried to analyze what it was about him that liberals found so difficult to accept or believe, because I thought those people were voicing the same kind of skepticism that I had felt four years earlier, but four years earlier I was dealing with a different man with a different track record. Here was somebody now who was a clearly different person with not just talk but a different track record. And it was interesting now that liberals just found him as somebody they couldn't appreciate. And I thought it was an interesting thing, in fact, Time magazine some months later did an analysis of Kennedy and quoted it in that piece. He wrote me a note about it. But, basically, I did think he was the hope for the liberals in the future, though he wasn't the kind of classic liberal candidate in the mold of a Stevenson or a Chester Bowles [Chester B. Bowles] or some of those people he didn't get along so well with.

STERN: I wonder if we could talk a bit about some of the other people who were in the organized crime section, for example, if you have any insight into why Silberling didn't work out, why Hundley [William G. Hundley] was brought

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back to replace him...

GOLDFARB: I think Silberling got the job because he was so dashing and he lost it because he was so dashing. He was, I think he was viewed by some people to be not a good team player or, at least, I think he was viewed by Jack Miller, who was the head of the criminal division, as a threat because the criminal division was rather ho-hum except for the organized crime section which was its hugest part, and therefore Silberling was competition to Miller. Because all the excitement, everything that was happening was really there, and I think those two guys tripped each other up. I don't remember the details now, but my impression is that Miller felt Silberling was moving too fast or being too assertive or grandstanding or wasn't following protocols or not deferential enough or something like that. And I think his well got poisoned because different people in the Justice Department felt him to be a challenge. I don't think it had anything to do with his competence or the spirit and good feelings of the people who were in that section then because I think we all liked him, I know we did.

STERN: Why do you think RFK brought Hundley back?

GOLDFARB: Because Hundley was the company man. I happen to like Bill a lot too, and I enjoyed working for Bill, but Bill was the company man. I think he was an ex-FBI agent, and he knew all of those people, he had been around for a long time, and to the extent that he had somebody who had never been part of the system coming in and getting everybody nervous, what's the best antidote, somebody who had been through the system, who was a career guy, knew the FBI guys, could make the old-timers comfortable, so I'm sure that that was the reason. What was interesting is that everybody, all the workers liked Bill as much too. I think the young guys who weren't in the Justice Department before Kennedy and left after Kennedy tended to like Silberling a little bit more because he was more their kind of guy and the careerists who were brought in from other sections at the time Kennedy came and stayed after Kennedy and were doing internal security work before the organized crime and then were doing something else, I think that they all preferred Hundley. But, I don't think that was anything substantive.

STERN: That's very interesting. I want to talk a bit about...

GOLDFARB: Why, did you hear, do you have other impressions from other people?

STERN: I've gotten some from others, year, but that basically squares with what the sources that I've seen say. I want to talk a little bit about the FBI, which I think is one of the most fascinating aspects of the whole thing.

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RFK-Hoover [J. Edgar Hoover] relationship, Courtney Evans' [Courtney A. Evans] role at the time, and the whole difficulty that you had really in mobilizing Hoover and the FBI to work in the whole organized crime area.

GOLDFARB: I would challenge that last remark because I never saw the latter.

STERN: You never saw the latter?

GOLDFARB: No. As a matter of fact, the FBI was mobilized where I went and did work for us, very well. I never met Hoover all the time I was there, and I sat in on no meetings so I have no information about Hoover. Courtney Evans was Hoover's man to deal with Kennedy and when we had these big sessions in his office, Evans was always there, and I presumed that he was somebody who Kennedy found acceptable and Hoover found acceptable and he was a go-between. Power struggles from on high I don't know anything about. What I do know about is when I went out to the field, and had FBI agents to work with, again, much to the, to my surprise based on stereotypes I had, I liked my FBI agents. They were nice guys and they, I worked with one man in particular, very intensively and over a long period of time, his name was Frank Staub and I loved him. He was a wonderful guy, very helpful, never gave me any Mickey Mouse stuff about the FBI. We talked very frankly with each other, and that was it. I'm not unaware of the fact that there was a whole level of something else going on, but it never touched my life because I wasn't in on the inner sanctums back home, and, when I was out in the field, I was the recipient, the beneficiary of Kennedy's ability to get the FBI to relax those rules, prior rules, that had been an impediment to collaborative law enforcement. And those guys work very effectively. In fact, there was another man, named Ed Mason [Edward S. Mason], who was very powerful. He was one of these big field chiefs who was considered to be a potential replacement for Hoover. But he ran the office in Cincinnati. He was very spooky in some ways because he really bought the whole FBI mystique, but I found him charming, and interesting, and competent, and helpful. I had a long trial there; he found me a house so I could bring my wife out to stay with me.

STERN: That's a very interesting thing, then, to see that on the practical, working level that kind of relationship could go on and, yet, most of the people who have written about the Kennedy Justice Department have emphasized the tensions between Hoover and RFK....

GOLDFARB: Well, I'm not saying that they didn't exist....

STERN: Yes, I see that you're saying that and obviously the two could exist simultaneously.

GOLDFARB: Well, Victor Navasky [Victor S. Navasky], who wrote the big book on Kennedy

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Justice he's a good friend of mine, I'd tell him the same thing I'm telling you. He used some anecdote that I told him in the book, I don't remember which one...

STERN: He mentioned, or I think it was Navasky, who mentioned for example that when Bobby Kennedy became attorney general, in the New York FBI office there were 400 agents working on Communist subversion, and four were working on organized crime, which he took as something of an example of Hoover's priorities. It was a very difficult process for the Justice Department under Bobby Kennedy to reorient...

GOLDFARB: I don't challenge that, I really just don't know that. Just like when he wanted to know about wire tap stuff, I don't know that. Did I think wire tapping was going on? I suppose I wondered. But I know that I talked to my agents, first of all, because I was leaving the Justice Department and I was going back to a world where I had come from and I didn't want to go with the ethical baggage of having been a bugger. Plus, I wanted to win my cases and I didn't want them to get reversed. So, when I went out to the field, I sat down first day with my agents and I said, "Look, I don't want to know what the policies are around here, I don't care what they are around here, what they have been; I want to tell you what the policies will be with every case that I've got, and if anybody has any problem with it, let's deal with it now. If not, I'm going to presume this is it. None of this is going to go on, and I'm not going to give you a philosophical speech as to why, it is because I'm going to get convictions with you guys and I want them to hold up. And so, you're not going to play any of those games. No matter whether it's wire tapping or anything else, I want everything cleared with me, and I don't want any of it." And I truly believe that there wasn't any of it and I know that, with the evidence I put in my cases there wasn't. Now, does that mean that they weren't playing some game with me and doing something else? I don't know, but I didn't feel that it was hypocritical of me to not follow them home and demand to search their records. I mean, I didn't say what I said winkingly, to encourage them to do it and not tell me, I meant it and they knew that I meant it, and I know that in fact my cases all survived and that we never used any of that stuff. Would I, then, argue therefore one could extrapolate from that there wasn't any other wire tapping? No. But I don't know that. I just stayed out of that stuff. I didn't want to know about it.

STERN: Do you feel that your personal experience in telling this is probably in some ways analogous to Robert Kennedy's?

GOLDFARB: No. I think he has to have known more... Oh, of course, whatever the policy was he knew it.

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STERN: You say that carrying on.

GOLDFARB: Oh yes. There could be no... I couldn't anything that happens in this office I know it or I intend to not know it, which is the same thing. He ran a tighter, he was smart....

STERN: There's a lot of very contradictory evidence on this question of course. For example, there's the Katzenbach [Nicholas deB. Katzenbach] statement, you're probably aware of that, saying that he knows that Kennedy did not know.

GOLDFARB: Yes. Well, mind you I'm not saying what I know to be the case. I'm telling you what I surmise to be the case. I would be surprised if Kennedy didn't know what was going on in the Justice Department. With something as big, important, and as controversial as that it would fly in the face of logic, experience, and everything else. But, then again, the president's been killed—so it could be. It wouldn't be my surmise.

STERN: I wonder if you have any insight at all into the relationship with the IRS. I know that it was unique at that point because of Kaplan's contacts with the White House and it was certainly mobilized by the RFK Justice Department. Was that any use to you?

GOLDFARB: Well, the IRS was always the weaker sister-in-law enforcement and had complained in the past about not having the cooperation of the FBI. So, again, when I went out to the cities that I worked in, I would sit down the first day with the IRS and the FBI and Narcotics and everybody else, but for all intents and purposes it was the IRS and the FBI. And I'd say, "Look, I want you guys to exchange information, we're working together, we're part of the same team, our check all comes from the same place, and we're working together, right? Right!" And they did. But I knew that that hadn't been the case in the past. I attributed it to Kennedy's being able to force change. But whether it was anything that lived after him, I don't know. I wouldn't be surprised if it did not. But, the reality was, and I don't know what they were arguing back here in Washington at the higher levels, when I was out there I had the FBI sitting there and the IRS sitting there and I was sitting here and we were working on our cases together.

STERN: Do you think there were any, well, let's say dangerous precedents set with the use of the IRS? Things that would later be used in less ethical ways?

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GOLDFARB: I don't know what you mean.

STERN: Well, I mean some of the kinds of things that happened in the Nixon [Richard M. Nixon] period. There are those who say that in a sense the Robert Kennedy experience set the stage in a way.

GOLDFARB: I don't know. I'll only say this, that I had my share of cases and never did anybody tell me what to do, to a fault. When I once was out there and I was a young guy and I was trying a big case and mind you this stuff was

on the nightly television news every night and the front pages of the newspapers every day and month after month, it was exciting. It was also tense, and I remember one point calling back to Silberling and saying, "God, the press is here and this guy is doing that and this witness is jumping out the window and this man is a threat... What am I going to do?" and he said, "You're a poker player," and that was it, that's all the advice. "Thanks a lot, Ed, I'm really glad that..." In fact we did have an office poker game, but basically, what he was saying is you're on the scene, I have faith in you, it isn't the kind of thing I can give you judgment on. On cases where I... inevitably I would come back with proposals to prosecute in unusual kinds of cases because the kinds of people we were going out after were clever and you had to be cleverer than them and so there were always debates, you know, if you wanted to indict somebody under the Civil Rights Act, well, not only would the head of the Criminal Division be there, the head of the Civil Rights Division would be there. I was making my case, nobody was telling me what to do, and they were differing frequently, so I know that there was nothing... I mean nobody was telling me what I should or shouldn't do, nobody ever did. Zero. And I tried more cases, or as many cases, as anybody in the organized crime section. Now is it conceivable things were done elsewhere? I would doubt it. It is possible that things were done differently with the Hoffa group that Sheridan [Walter J. Sheridan] ran. They were a separately run entity, and they operated by themselves and I don't have the slightest idea what happened there. I certainly know it would be disingenuous to not acknowledge that Kennedy had a special interest. If he had a special interest in organized crime, he had a special interest in them. But I'll tell you this, I was there four years, I sat in on all the group meetings, I talked on a regular basis with all of my colleagues who went to other cities and I never heard that anybody was told what to do. Zero. Right up to the time that, the moment, you know we all play this game of where were you when Jack Kennedy was killed. I was sitting in Robert Kennedy's office with one of these group sessions, and discussing at exactly that time, 11:30, came to be my turn, and I had proposed, I had cleaned up my area of the country and I had gone to someplace else because I had nothing to do, and I said, "Give me something to do. I'm not one of these career guys, either I'll

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leave or give me something to do." So They gave me a file that everyone else had written off involving some very big Mafioso type, I won't say his name, and I looked through it and I said, "I think maybe there's a, let me go down to Florida, let me do a little grand jury work, a little this and that, see if I can come up with anything." I went down and sure enough I got some lawyer to break down and confess and I came back with a theory of indicting this very high up guy under the tax laws. Hundley loved it, and Jack Miller went along with it, and Louis Oberdorfer [Louis F. Oberdorfer] was against it because in his judgment it was using the revenue laws in a way they weren't designed to be used. I thought that was laughable, I mean that was what we were all there to do, right? Kennedy heard my proposal and he said, "Jack, what do you think?" and Jack said, "I think we should go with it." And he said, "Lou, what do you think?" and Lou said, "No, I don't think we should because of, such and such." And I knew that Kennedy respected Oberdorfer's intellectuality more and I figured I was in trouble, and he said, "Well, let's break for lunch and we'll decide this after lunch." It was important to me because I had nothing else to do and it was kind of my last shot at making

something to do for the next six months and I had just spent a lot of time on it and that's when we broke for lunch and I went down to my office and somebody said, "Did you hear the president was killed." And I said, "That's a stupid joke, it's not funny." But I used it to illustrate one point: no one was telling me what to do. I was telling them what should be done and there were two guys who were running different divisions arguing about it. Each arguing their own colloquial interest. One was saying, "Don't screw up the tax laws" the other guy was saying, "You told me to indict criminals if you can come up with a criminal theory." And Kennedy was going to make the decision. But it wasn't Kennedy telling them go get this guy and then telling me go get this guy.

STERN: That's fascinating. What about Kennedy's, there are a number of people like Navasky now who talk about his intense personal interest, for example, in regional offices, in prodding federal attorneys, FBI agents, even immigration officers, prison officials, various people. Did you ever observe that sort of thing?

GOLDFARB: A little bit. I think that it was his style wherever he was to stop into your office or to, if he was in a city to go into those places. Again, he had that ability to generate excitement so that what was nothing more than natural, administrative base-touching. In this situation alone, Bobby Kennedy was in Cincinnati and he stopped into the FBI office—why the hell shouldn't he? If I work for him, if he's in the town, I mean if I had a law office in different cities and I was in that town to do some business for something else, of course I would stop by that office and it would be good for morale, etc. If one of my partners is trying a case in court and

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I'm down at court that day, I would walk in to see how it was going. Well, if it was Bobby Kennedy who was doing it, you know, the gossips would say, "Gee, Robert Kennedy stopped in and this young attorney was trying a case, and he stopped by and sat at the table for five minutes and patted him on the back and left. That's no more than sensible administration. It's just that what he did was so much more exciting just because he was an exciting guy.

STERN: Did you have any direct role in the '61 anti-crime bills legal? You didn't work on those things at all?

GOLDFARB: No. I came to work in the Justice Department early in '61 just when he was on the Hill testifying in favor of those bills being passed. I remember very distinctly because he was up there and someone said, "You say there is organized crime. Can you possibly give us an example?" Somebody who was being skeptical. He said, "Yes. Why there's this city in Newport, Kentucky and it's been corrupt and there's been official corruption through the years," and he went on and on, using it as an illustration, just at the time that I was mustering in and being given a desk and I walked in to Silberling and said, "Well, what do you want me to do?" And he said, "How would you like to go to Newport, Kentucky?" And I said, "Newport, Kentucky? Why Newport, Kentucky? I

thought we were going after organized crime? What's Newport, Kentucky?" and he said, "Well, read the papers tonight."

STERN: That's the Ratterman [George Ratterman] case, isn't it?

GOLDFARB: Yes, that was the case. Then I went down to investigate and try the Ratterman case. That was my first indoctrination by fire because it was a hell of a case. Tried it twice; it was a hung jury the first time.

STERN: So you had no role in that at all. The number of organized crime prosecutions convictions, of course, rose dramatically during Robert Kennedy's tenure as attorney general and Silberling, for example, had that list of all of the top figures of organized crime which grew from I think forty in early 1961 to over 2000 by later in the administration. Did you feel at the time that this was, that this effort was commensurate with the problem? Did you feel that it was an overreaction?

GOLDFARB: I believed in it all along and when I went, when I travelled because I was really relatively young and inexperienced and it was all theoretical to me until I got out to different places and saw what was going on. When I got to the places I was at and saw the official corruption and evidence of it, and the results of it, it was unmistakably real and important. It only made easier my own personal

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discomfort with being a tough prosecutor. It hadn't been my background to do that. But I didn't have a lot of compunction about prosecuting these people.

STERN: It's kind of ironic that a number of people that have written about this period refer, for example, to the fact that the FBI, with its gangbuster's reputation which it had at the time, there was even, of course, radio programs, in reality did very little in terms of organized crime. It was more of these kind of very showy figures that they would occasionally get, but they were not doing very much in terms of the structured, or layering. That's one of the things, I guess, most interesting in Bobby Kennedy's comprehension of this thing was the layering of organized crime, its role in legitimate business and things of that sort which.... As to why Hoover was not interested, I don't know, there are all kinds of theories about that including Navasky's, which are very interesting. But certainly this was a qualitative as well as a quantitative change, and indeed there are those who go so far as to say that it may have contributed perhaps even to the president's assassination. I'm sure you're aware of those. Of course the number of convictions was growing so, prosecutions and convictions, was growing so rapidly. What about, for example, the Alcohol and Tobacco Bureau of Narcotics, and the Dillon's Hold? Did you have any, you didn't use those people at all? Under no conditions?

GOLDFARB: Well, I may have read reports they had, but I don't recall dealing with them, and if I did, they were so incidental that they don't stick in my mind.

STERN: How about some of the major cases like that big heroin...

GOLDFARB: I never had any of them so I just don't know.

STERN: You had no contact with that. There's a quote in Arthur Schlesinger's [Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr.] book, his recent biography of RFK, he quotes you on saying that, "RFK's organized crime drive was knocking off one politician after another, regardless of party." Do you feel that's an accurate assessment?

GOLDFARB: No, I don't remember saying that. What he got was I did a book, I did a chapter in a book, this book, called Conspiracy, which is about the Berrigan [Daniel J. Berrigan] case, and several different people were asked to comment on broad subjects of interest, that were suggested by the Berrigan case as opposed to talking about the Berrigan case itself. I wrote a chapter called "Politics at the Justice Department" which tried to analyze what is a political trial and what is not a political trial. And, I think that's where he got that from, he never talked to me about it, and I think it was that it was taken out

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of this book. In any event, I think the incident that he was referring to was a kind of funny story that I repeated at one of these sessions. We were sitting around the office and everybody was making reports, you know, saying, "What's going on in West Virginia?" and this guy would say, "Well, we're just about to indict three city councilmen and what not, and they're Democrats" and everybody would go "ha-ha-ha" and there was nothing anymore, nobody pulled any punches and there was one guy who was just about to indict the ambassador-designate to Greece. Jack Kennedy had appointed this guy and we were about to indict him. I remember the guy mentioning it....

STERN: Do you remember his name?

GOLDFARB: Yeah, Jay Goldberg, you ought to talk to him because he has got wonderful stories for you, he's a character.... He practices in New York City, he's the funniest guy I've ever met, he's a—and he has some very funny unorthodox experiences in the Justice Department—definitely you'll get more anecdotes from him than the whole section. But Goldberg was about to indict a lot of public officials up there and the head of the Indiana's it was all in Gary, Indiana, and the lawyer for these guys was a national committeeman and all kinds of pressure was put on Bobby, [and] simply said something like, then someone said, "I'm badgered by so-and-so who is a public official," and he said, "What party?" and the guy said, "Democratic" and he jokingly said, "If you guys keep this up I'm going to have to have my brother put me on the Supreme Court," But if you call that pressure, I mean, that was a laugh. That's why I think, I mean, I know that nobody was pulling any punches there. It never would have occurred to me to inquire

about whether or not anybody that I was going after helped the Kennedys in the past or not or whatever, nor did anyone ever tell me anything like that.

STERN: There are so many examples of that, the Chacharis [George Chacharis] case, the Keogh [J. Vincent Keogh] case.

GOLDFARB: Yes, well, the Chacharis is the case that I was referring to, he was the ambassador-designate to Greece. The point is that there were a lot of smaller potatoes and that was it. There was never any, "Aren't those public..." even joking things like, "Can't you guys get any of..." Nothing like that.

STERN: Even the Landis [James M. Landis] case, which is in some ways the most interesting case...

GOLDFARB: Oh yeah, it was heartbreaking.

STERN: It would have been so easy to just not do it, and of course the personal reasons were so compelling, and

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yet, that's not what happened. Although you could even make a judgment that they should have... well, I don't want to get into that. What about putting Valachi [Joseph Valachi] up to testify in '62, do you think that was a wise move?

GOLDFARB: No, I thought that was a circus.

STERN: You did?

GOLDFARB: Was that a Kennedy...?

STERN: Apparently it was effective in terms of its impact on Hoover, though, because Hoover was forced to acknowledge publicly that organized crime was more serious than he had...

GOLDFARB: Oh, well, if they had ulterior purposes that I was unaware of and they were playing a game, fine, and it was a... I am a critic of congressional investigations that are misused, and I think that this was an example of that because it was more of a circus than a deliberative thing. If in fact it was calculated, because that kind of a circus was necessary for some purposes that I was unaware of, well then judge it on whether or not it was effective. But just as an observer I thought it was a silly waste of time.

STERN: I remember watching it, finding it absolutely fascinating.

GOLDFARB: Oh yea, I mean it was funny, I went up there one day to see it. I think Hundley was kind of, his lawyer for the Justice Department. I'll tell you what it says about the Mafia, if anything it says what a phony case he made for his own point of view, because I see that if there's a black in Washington who's in Lorton and whose brother-in-law is screwing around with the wrong girl at some DC high school, that guy is dead the next day in Lorton. The ability of the prison network to get somebody is so absolute that, you know, Valachi couldn't have lived if what he said was really that important, that serious. I can't imagine he would have been alive, and he's still alive today.

STERN: Is he? I was about to ask you that.

GOLDFARB: I think so, maybe he died, but clearly, nobody ever did anything to him. And, it's too easy to do something to somebody in prison if you really care about doing something to somebody.

STERN: How did the, as you recall, how did the Justice Department change when President Kennedy was killed?

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GOLDFARB: It went back to the way it was. Fred Graham quoted me in the New York Times as saying that and Katzenbach has never spoken to me again. It just went back to, I mean, the people who were there who wished it to be different kept trying to keep....

STERN: This is even when Bobby was still there, you're saying.

GOLDFARB: No, I thought you meant.... When the president died there was a long kind of period where it was the same but wasn't the same, the momentum was gone, and he was such a haunting and dominant personality while he was going through his Hamlet stage, nobody quite knew what was happening and it just, things just quieted down. For example, I never got the answer on that case, nobody ever did anything about it. It stopped; it simply stopped. And you know I supposed that says something about the personalities of politics because everybody was there, the laws were there, there were even people there wishing it to be the same, I believe Katzenbach did.

STERN: Can you illustrate some of your own experiences of what RFK experienced between say November of '63 and when he left the Justice Department, how he changed, the impact it had on him, any specific incidents that you might recall. I know many people have talked about it.

GOLDFARB: Well, I was not one of his close coteries so I won't exaggerate what I can tell you, and I'm sure that people like Douglas [John W. Douglas] and others who no doubt he talked to would have real information. I was just

somebody who was around who could divine from the vibes and the moods that there were differences. My personal contact with him came when he was kind of coming out of his period of remorse, was still attorney general and was thinking about going to New York to run for the Senate. By coincidence, I believe, I found myself on the shuttle one day going up there on business and he was there and we sat together and then when we got to LaGuardia, he had a car waiting to drive him into the city and he said, "Let's take a ride" and he was with Ed Guthman [Edwin O. Guthman], I believe, somebody who was very close to him personally. And there was stuff in the paper about will he or won't he run and we were talking about that kind of thing and he asked my opinion, just that kind of thing, and he was trying to come out of it and find something to do and, had to carry on, but I can't think of any other personal contacts I had with him during that time.

STERN: Do you have any insight from that period of his desire to be vice-president? Apparently there is evidence that he really wanted to be vice-president.

GOLDFARB: I've heard that, I can't say that I know more than

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anybody else, I just don't know.

STERN: I wonder if we could talk about the campaign, what you did in it and...

GOLDFARB: Well, the whole Democratic apparatus, like there is in any state-wide campaign, and then there was, and this is the period where I did work on the inside with him, and I would not advertise my experience in the Justice Department then. I got a call one day at home saying that he needed an extra speech writer and could I come up and I was eating dinner and I said, "When did you have in mind?" thinking that he meant two weeks from then, and he said, "How about tonight?" and I said, "May I finish dinner? How about tomorrow morning?" And that was it. So I went up, it was at the Chatham Hotel which no longer exists, and they gave me a room to stay, and I stayed throughout the whole campaign. And it was just a very small group of us who worked together in a suite there. It was Milton Gwartzman [Milton S. Gwartzman], Peter Edelman [Peter B. Edelman], and Adam Walinsky, and in and out would come from time to time and secretary administrator, Polly Feingold, and that was it. Joe Dolan [Joseph F. Dolan] was always around, and that was it. And, he, whenever he was around, would just stop in. I saw him regularly. I didn't travel with him. Our job was that we would get their schedule for the next two or three days and we would divide it, you do the speech in Buffalo, you do this and that, and I did that.

STERN: Did you think he was going to win?

GOLDFARB: Oh yeah, I never doubted it. I must say that my perception of things was always distorted by the fact that everybody I knew in New York was against him. And, doing this “he’s not a liberal and what’s he doing here” thing. So I never talked to a soul who ever thought he was going to win. But I couldn’t believe that he wasn’t going to win.

STERN: Plus, he did run way behind Johnson [Lyndon B. Johnson]. But the margin was still very substantial. I remember the debate very well, the Keating debate. Keating tried to debate the chair.

GOLDFARB: Yea, I remember, I mean there were a lot of funny things, the guy who I started this law firm with, who is no longer here, who was a personal friend of mine and who worked for Javits [Jacob K. Javits], and he was assigned to the campaign to go work for Keating, and when he came back we started a law firm together. He and another lawyer who went to Yale Law School when I was there were working for Keating and they were on these television programs where you could phone in questions and they would take the questions and ask it to Keating and he would answer it spontaneously. I phoned in once, watching the television show, and I got this woman who I knew answered the

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phone and I said I would like, I think I’m going to ask the one question that he couldn’t answer successfully before a New York audience. “I would like to know whether or not it isn’t true that he’s a white Anglo-Saxon Protestant?” It was kind of funny, stuff like that throughout the campaign. It was exciting. I did not enjoy the process too much, ‘cause I’m really not a political animal, I don’t even work for other people. And I didn’t like the kind of pace and the style of the others who were around him, who were trying to make careers out of it. I just wasn’t good at it and I didn’t like it and I was uncomfortable in the whole scene. So that when it was over, we were at a big party and then, the next day before we all went home, a party was hosted by Kennedy at the Democratic Club in New York and four or five of us were invited. And it was, without exactly saying it that way it was a kind of dividing the spoils type thing with “what do you want to do next?” And Walinsky and Edelman made it clear that they wanted to go back and work for him and I said that I did not, and I was quite amazed when Katzenbach said if I wanted to go back to the Justice Department I could go back there, but I did not want to do that. So, I went back home not really knowing what I was going to do. As far as I was concerned, it was over. I didn’t want to work for him, I didn’t want to work with those people any more. And in fact, I took about three or four months and finished a book that I was in the middle of writing and worked on my own, and then this law practice evolved and I started a law firm of my own. Kept in touch with Kennedy, saw him from time to time.

STERN: Did you have any role at all in ’68?

GOLDFARB: I was about to. I was thinking of going back, my family was in New Jersey and I had kept New Jersey as a voting residence, and I was going to go back and run in Bergen County from my parents home, which was my voting address, as a delegate to the convention as a Kennedy delegate. In fact, I think McCarthy won that precinct so I wouldn't have gotten elected. I had contact with them and I was doing insignificant stuff in the early days, trying to figure out what I wanted to do, and before I could do anything, he was killed.

STERN: I wonder if just sort of as a summing up question, it's been now twenty years since you first went to work for RFK in the Justice Department, how's your perspective on that period changed in the last...

GOLDFARB: For the better. I didn't realize then, being a natural critic, I was finding fault with this and that, and while I was excited by what I was doing, I didn't realize how good those days were until subsequent administration after administration came along and I had something to compare it to. And so, progressively, to the present moment, things have gotten worse and worse so that I realize now what a heady and

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exciting and opportune time that was. And I see it now as more so than I saw it then, simply by having something to compare it to. And if I have any regrets it's only that I didn't take more advantage of it because as I get older I don't know that there will be a chance for me to serve my country again in government. And I see that as a more important time than I probably realized it was at the time. And it's on a personal level it's all the more poignant because it turns out that I have a kid who goes to school with his kid who was born—I have one son who is in class with Douglas Kennedy [Douglas Harriman Kennedy] who is the next to the last child. He was just six months old when his father died, and I have another kid who is in class with Rory Kennedy who was not even born when her father died. Now, the youngest is not friendly with Rory, but my son's closest friend at school is Douglas Kennedy, he's up there all the time. So I see Ethel [Ethel Skakel Kennedy] more now than I did then, and I know Douglas very well and my kid spends a lot of time there, and more of what he sees is still a very glamorous life, what he doesn't see yet because he's not old enough to see it, is the sad life this kid has never having had a father. So, the poignancy at a personal level of his death is something that I feel every day because I see that kid a lot. My kid's life is very involved with their life and their family and he has spent time together.... So, I'm still in touch with the family and it all seems just very sad, sadder than it would be if I was just someone who observed it arm's length.

STERN: Well, unless you have anything to add, that's....

[END OF INTERVIEW]

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