

**William O. Douglas Oral History Interview – JFK #1 11/9/1967**  
Administrative Information

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**Biographical Note**

Douglas, a U.S. Supreme Court Justice from 1939 to 1975 and Kennedy family friend, discusses his memories of the Kennedy family, John F. Kennedy as a young man, Congressman, and as President, among other issues.

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William O. Douglas  
JFK #1

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Oral History Interview

with

William O. Douglas

November 9, 1967  
Washington, D.C.

By John F. Stewart

For the John F. Kennedy Library

STEWART: Why don't we begin with just my asking if you recall when you first met John Kennedy [John F. Kennedy]. You say it was when he was fifteen or sixteen.

DOUGLAS: He was about fourteen years old, I think. His father [Joseph P. Kennedy] brought me down in 1934, to head up a bureau in the Securities and Exchange Commission. At that time his father had rented a house out in Maryland, and he was chairman of the Securities and Exchange Commission. I was one of his department heads, so I used to go out there and spend evenings and an occasional weekend, and met the family. And at that time Jack was about fourteen, and on his way.... I guess at that time he was in some private school.

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STEWART: He would have been at Choate.

DOUGLAS: Probably at Choate. I know he went there. Whether he had entered or was about to enter, I don't remember. I knew him slightly at that time.

STEWART: Do you recall any impressions, particularly as to the approach or the method

that Mr. and Mrs. [Rose Fitzgerald Kennedy] Kennedy were using with the children – bringing up the children? There's, of course, been a lot written about their competitiveness and this type of thing. Do you recall anything...

DOUGLAS: Well, it was a family that was very closely knit. The whole house was built around the family. At the dinner table, conversation was built around the family. They were all participants in the conversation: It wasn't two elderly people with an older guest or two conducting the table conversation; it was the youngsters actively participating, and the mother or the father, usually the father, asking some question like, "Jack, what do you think of this?" and so on. It was that kind of a family. They were highly competitive with each

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other. The father particularly laid it on pretty hard trying to make the boys, and the girls, excellent in something, whether it was touch football, or tennis, or boating, or something else.

STEWART: Do you recall any differences or similarities between Jack Kennedy and his older brother Joseph [Joseph P. Kennedy, Jr.]?

DOUGLAS: Young Joe was older. He was more aggressive; he was more like his father. Jack was more like his mother. Jack was quieter, a little more subtle. Joe was more of an extrovert – young Joe. They were very close, but they were quite different people.

STEWART: Do you recall whether you were seeing John Kennedy, or saw much of him, during the period he was at Harvard? He went to Harvard in 1936.

DOUGLAS: I saw something of Jack at that time, not very much. It was only when I was a visitor in the Kennedy home. When Joe left the SEC; he went to the Maritime Commission; and then became Ambassador to England. He had a home in Hyannis, Massachusetts. When he acquired his Florida home in Palm Beach, I don't remember but it was sometime in that

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period. It was either at Hyannis or Palm Beach that I would see Jack, usually on holidays. I was never there in the summer, or very seldom in the summer.

STEWART: Did you get any impressions of his seriousness as a student, or his scholarly interests, or anything of this nature?

DOUGLAS: Well, in those days Jack was rather quiet; he wasn't very outspoken; he didn't take much part in a social circle. He always seemed to be interested in

conversations, but he kept his thoughts pretty much to himself. He was a charming young man. He was primarily interested in outdoor activities. He didn't have the appearance of being a bookish man. You'd never predict at the time that he would make any serious contribution to literature, or anything of that kind.

STEWART: Nothing stands out in your mind, as far as any discussion of political activities, or any political attitudes he may have held at that time?

DOUGLAS: About that time, as he got older and decided to run for the House, I saw a lot of him. Of course, he then was immersed in the topics of the day that were of interest to his constituency in Massachusetts. And he had the beginnings of an excellent campaigner. His mother laid on tea

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parties for women, in the various parishes around the city. The mother and one or two of the daughters would invite a hundred or two hundred people for tea; and they'd come. And Jack with all of his charm would walk into this all female audience and charm them. It was a tremendous impact that he made at the grass roots level of his district in Massachusetts. That was the beginning of, I think, the awakening of Jack to the possibility of the public platform, and to political techniques and public relations, and so on.

STEWART: Going back just a little, do you recall if you saw him at all during the war years? He was here in Washington for a period of four or five months early in the war, just after he'd...

DOUGLAS: Yes, I saw him off and on at that time. But I wasn't ever very close to him at that time. I didn't see him frequently... But I kept up with where he was and what he was doing, through the family, of course, and would see him whenever he'd get back.

STEWART: There was nothing about the writing of his book *Why England Slept* that you could recall at all, any discussion with him of it or anything?

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DOUGLAS: He was talking about it. He was talking about that problem. It was a disturbing phenomenon to him. But I didn't, beyond just talking about it – I didn't see a manuscript; I didn't collaborate, contribute, directly or indirectly, to it.

STEWART: Just after the war, and before he actually ran for Congress, there was a period in which he was a reporter for, I think, some Hearst papers up in Massachusetts. It was in this period that he was somewhat indecisive, or undecided, about exactly what he was going to do. Do you recall this period at all?

DOUGLAS: Yes, I recall that. He was under the handicap of being a very rich young man. Therefore, he was not under the compulsion to do anything. He had to pick and choose. He had a hard time making up his mind what to do. I remember talking to him about the time he decided to run for Congress, and I think he looked forward to that with great anticipation. I think when he got into the House and started serving, I don't think it interested him particularly, I think he was rather bored. I think it was at that time Jack became pretty much of a playboy. He was not particularly interested in anything serious.

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STEWART: Would you say there was a change in this period? You say that he *became* somewhat of a playboy, implying that he hadn't been before, or more so then.

DOUGLAS: Well, I think it's a matter of degree and I think it was perhaps more so. I think time was heavy on his hands, and when he was in the House he had nothing of all-consuming interest. I remember I'd see him at Palm Beach, and Hyannis, and Washington, and he never seemed to get into the midstream of any tremendous political thought, or political action, or any idea of promoting this, or reforming that – nothing. He didn't seem to be caught up in anything like that and he was sort of drifting. And when he started drifting, then I think he became more of a playboy.

STEWART: Would you say that most of whatever attitudes he did have about problems of that time came from his father, or his father was the main influence on his political thinking at the time?

DOUGLAS: I don't think so, because as Jack began to raise his sights and aim for the Senate, he began to think in more controversial terms and controversial subjects.

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And, of course, his father, who was a very, very dear friend of mine, and whom I loved very much like an older brother, was very conservative. I remember Joe said to me once, he said, "You know I must be nuts," he said, "I don't understand how the two men that I admire most in public life, my son Jack and your own self, stand for ideas that I so bitterly oppose." Jack was getting mature, making up his mind on controversial issues, and finding himself very often at odds with his father.

STEWART: He did take, though, of course, a number of quite conservative positions in 1947-'48 differing with President Truman [Harry S. Truman], for example, over China policy, and talking at great lengths about Yalta and Franklin Roosevelt [Franklin Delano Roosevelt], and so forth.

DOUGLAS: Oh, yes. I mean there were all sorts of strands in the fabric that made up Jack Kennedy. He was not at the start of what you'd call a liberal person. He was



emerging as such, and I think one for his first breakthroughs was back in the field of labor relations.

STEWART: His decision to run for the Senate in 1952 was, of course, a surprise to many people, although it was a logical move. Do you recall discussing this with him at all?

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DOUGLAS: Yes. He asked me what I thought. I was not in a position to give him any advice on what his prospects in Massachusetts were because I wasn't close enough. I told him that I believed in every young man shooting for a start, and this was a star, and if he was really interested, he should do it; but that it was not peanuts, that it was something big and would require a tremendous organization on his part. I was very happy he did it because I thought from way back that Jack had a growth factor in him that many people don't have.

STEWART: Did you talk to him about the possibilities of running for Governor of Massachusetts, do you recall?

DOUGLAS: Yes. He mentioned that casually. But by the time that he was talking to me, I think he had discarded that essentially and he had decided to run for the Senate. But then when he got into the Senate, I was largely disappointed with Jack because he really had a second or third-rate record as a Senator. I mean he got there, and, like getting into the House, it was interesting and challenging. And in his first years there he did, I think, very little. He was very much of a playboy. He had only occasional streaks of serious work and effort. Looking back, I think perhaps he was pretty much adrift at that time.

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STEWART: Even in his first year or two in the Senate?

DOUGLAS: I think he was. I think that the whole thing changed, near as I can tell, about 1958, and Jack became a wholly different person. What was behind that, I never knew. Whether it was due to outside influences, family, developments in the family and Jackie's [Jacqueline Bouvier Kennedy] influence; whether it was his father; whether it was some religious influence, the mother; I don't know. But about 1958 Jack became considerably transformed. Instead of a playboy, he stepped out more and more as a thinker, as a leader with the world as his oyster. He had a new seriousness of purpose. Maybe he was just heading up to decide to run for President. Of course, he didn't make that decision in 1958. It came later.

STEWART: But not much later than that?

DOUGLAS: Yes. I remember the day that Joe came to see me. Jack had been talking about it a lot, and Joe had been talking about it; and Jack couldn't make up his mind. But it was late; it was.... I don't remember the exact date, but Joe came to my office and sat down and said, "Well, this afternoon we crossed the river." Jack had decided to make a go for it. I think it was '59.

STEWART: Was he all in favor of going for it in 1960 at that

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time?

DOUGLAS: Joe? Oh, yes. Oh, yes. Joe thought the timing was perfect, and that Jack had developed, and that he had a measure of the needs of the country, and had had enough experience in handling people and speaking, and so on. And he had by that time become pretty much of a polished speaker.

STEWART: To go back just a little bit, do you recall ever discussing the whole matter of Senator McCarthy [Joseph R. McCarthy] and McCarthyism with Jack Kennedy in the mid or early 1950's?

DOUGLAS: We talked about it many times, but never in depth. Jack would always dismiss it as, "Well, he's an old friend. Known him for a long time." And he treated him sort of as a screwball guy that needed some help. And it was that kind of attitude, just a friend helping somebody, who, I gathered from Jack's statements, was not deemed to be a particularly worthy guy. I think he had pretty much the same idea of McCarthy as I did, but there was some tie there. The Kennedys were financing McCarthy in some of his campaigns – how much, I don't know.

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STEWART: But you think he had much the same idea as you did, or much the same reaction you did to him, to McCarthy? Do you think he fully understood the implications of McCarthyism as a...

DOUGLAS: Not at the time, I don't think he did. But I think that he thought that the man was dealing in excesses, and that he was stepping over the bounds of propriety. I think he was too close to McCarthy to make a really objective analysis of what was taking place.

STEWART: He saw it personally, both through himself and his own relationship and through his brother's relationship.

DOUGLAS: Right, and his father's relationship to McCarthy.

STEWART: How would you compare the two brothers, say in the early 1950's, as far as in their approach to their careers, and their approach to political problems, and so forth?

DOUGLAS: Well, of course, Bobby [Robert F. Kennedy] was six, seven years younger than Jack. Of course, at that time, the time we're speaking, Bobby was in law school in Virginia.

STEWART: Well, I mean when he graduated I think in 1951 or '52.

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DOUGLAS: Well, Bobby was looking for a career. As I say, it's often more difficult for a rich, independent person to find it than anybody else. Bobby began to find himself when Jack decided to run for President. And then all life took on a new meaning for Bobby, and he stepped in without any prior political experience, and did a terrific organization job – all out.

Then when Jack was elected and was forming his Cabinet, Bobby came to see me. Jack wanted him to be Attorney General, and Bobby wondered what he should do. Up to then he had had no real important bridge to cross, because Jack being in the race made him his campaign manager. And so he had quite a decision to make: whether to continue to sit in the shadow of his brother, would he be criticized? Would it be harmful to his brother? Would he make a good Attorney General? Would he hurt or help his brother? Would it hurt or help him in his future? And so on. Those are the kinds of things he talked about. He made his decision, as everybody knows, and made I thought, a very outstanding Attorney General. And this fact that his brother was President only increased his ability to perform efficiently.

STEWART: Personality-wise what would you say was the most significant difference between the two of them?

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DOUGLAS: Between the two brothers? Well, Bobby was more like his father, and Jack was more like his mother. Bobby was the outgoing, extrovert type; Jack was more introspective, more subtle. Bobby was more direct, dynamic, energizing; Jack was more thoughtful, more scholarly, more reflective. Superficially that was the main difference between them.

STEWART: In 1956, of course, President Kennedy made a race for the vice presidential nomination. Did he ever talk to you about this at all?

DOUGLAS: No. I think that actually developed kind of late. He was certainly in it in the Convention, and was a very disappointed young man. But I think it was.... I'm quite sure it was not until at least 1958 that he turned some kind of a corner and headed for the Presidency.

STEWART: Arthur Schlesinger [Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr.], in his book, I believe, mentions a luncheon in 1953, at which Jack Kennedy was present, a luncheon which you held for the late President Diem [Ngo Dinh Diem] of Vietnam. Do you recall this?

DOUGLAS: Yes, I had it here in this building, yes.

STEWART: Do you recall anything of significance about Jack Kennedy's reactions to Diem, or to the whole situation?

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DOUGLAS: No. I had been out to Vietnam. I'd written a book. I had met the underground, most of whom at that time were not Communists but were rabid nationalists. The one man who had survived the French, the corruption of the French, and had preserved his integrity, was Ngo Dinh Diem. And I got him to come to Washington, because at that time the French were in control of Vietnam. The French propaganda was that the Communists were trying to throw them out. There were actually very few Communists in Vietnam at that time. I wanted some important people to meet Ngo Dinh Diem. So I gave a luncheon. I invited Mike Mansfield [Michael Joseph Mansfield] and Jack from the Senate, and there were two or three from the State Department that I invited. I forget who they were. They all participated in examining Diem, and questioning him closely, and so on. I think most of them left, I know Jack did, with a feeling of having a new orientation to the problems of that country.

STEWART: Well, he had been there a year or two before that, I think.

DOUGLAS: Either had been there, or was on his way there. The French got out the next year. I think it was '54, but I think this was in '53 I gave that luncheon.

STEWART: He had gone in '51, I think, and had been quite criti-

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cal of the French at that time.

DOUGLAS: Yes. He'd never met Diem, and I wanted them to meet, because he was one of the Senators who was traveling and observing, and who was critical of American foreign policy. So I knew he was interested.

STEWART: You mentioned he was traveling. Of course, he always traveled considerably. How would you rate him, or evaluate him, as a traveler? Was he always quick to learn from his experience and pick up things?

DOUGLAS: Yes, he was very quick, perhaps too quick in some respects. I don't suppose there's anybody who was more critical of the American community overseas than Jack Kennedy. And he would sit and argue with the ambassador or his aide about what America was doing wrong here, there and everywhere. He was very observant, and not at all docile or submissive. He was out to learn, to try to shape the American influence in the world in a constructive way.

STEWART: Were you generally critical of some of the techniques that were used by the McClellan [John L. McClellan] investigating committee?

DOUGLAS: The what investigating committee?

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STEWART: The McClellan, the Labor Rackets Committee, of which both Kennedy brothers were a part.

DOUGLAS: I never followed those too closely, except as they came into focus here at Court in decisions that we had to render. And then I was not too happy about some of the things that happened and some of the techniques that were used. I always thought, for example, that the Fifth Amendment was a great emblem of civil liberties, that in view of its long history of keeping the individual from being crushed by government, all he'd have to say, "I invoke the privilege," and he wouldn't be judged guilty. In those days the public hysteria in this country about Communism was so virulent that the phrase "a Fifth Amendment Communist" was common, and I thought that was downgrading the Fifth Amendment. I didn't like to see this committee put a man on the stand just to see how many times they could get him to say, "I invoke the Fifth Amendment."

I came out of a different tradition. I came to Washington to conduct investigations. My department at the SEC conducted investigations for a year and a half – five or six days a week, eight, ten hours a day – in the field of finance and reorganization, receiverships. I had a great galaxy of people like John Foster Dulles on the stand. But we never, never, never would even call

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a man if we knew he would invoke the Fifth Amendment. So I came at it from a wholly different point of view, and I didn't like that downgrading of the Fifth. It was in keeping with the mood of the time, because everybody did it.

STEWART: Do you recall ever discussing this with John Kennedy, or with Robert Kennedy?

DOUGLAS: No. I stayed away from that field because these cases were coming to us. They were property of the committee, the contempt cases, and so on. So I didn't want to disqualify myself from sitting on them.

STEWART: Do you recall when you first began to regard him as a serious contender for 1960? Well, I think you said it would have been sometime in 1959.

DOUGLAS: Well, up to 1958 I didn't think that there was anything serious about Jack. He was too much of a playboy; his senatorial record was second or third-rate; he didn't seem to be interested in much of anything. In '58 there was a transformation, and I began to think then that maybe he'd take off and run. So I wasn't surprised when Joe came in – his father – and told me that Jack had decided to go for it.

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STEWART: Do you recall whether you had any reservations about his capacity to become President and to serve as President?

DOUGLAS: No, I didn't have any reservations about that at all because I had the feeling that Jack had what I said earlier was a factor of growth, and a tremendous potential. Nobody would know whether anybody would make a good President or not because the office changes the man, sometimes for the better and sometimes for the worse. But I thought that it would change Jack, if in any way, for better, and that he would respond and rise to the occasion. That was my feeling about Jack.

STEWART: Do you recall him seeking your advice on any aspects of his pre-Convention campaign or campaign...

DOUGLAS: No, he didn't. I'd run into him once in awhile, he'd say how are things going, and Bobby once in awhile, and how are things going. But they never came to me for advice, or to help on trying to line up a delegation, or some person on the delegation, nothing like that.

STEWART: Or on any of the issues – their positions on any of the substantive issues that were pushing?

DOUGLAS: No, I didn't. I was close to both of them, but I wasn't on any kind of a relationship of that kind with either one of them at that time.

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STEWART: Were you generally in agreement with the type of campaign that he did wage against Nixon [Richard Milhous Nixon]? Occasionally he's been criticized that his speeches were too shallow. They weren't like Stevenson's [Adlai E. Stevenson] of '56 and '52. And that his appeal was too much toward his personality and the glamour aspects of it.

DOUGLAS: I think all that's true, but I still think it was good politics. And he was way,

way, way, way ahead until about three weeks before the election. And then he almost met sheer disaster because the bishop, or archbishop of Puerto Rico made some very foolish pronouncement about the church and state issue. And the religious groups in Puerto Rico – the Catholics in Puerto Rico – had actually been excommunicating people who voted the wrong way. Where I come from, the state of Washington, the Baptists are very strong, and the Baptists had been saying all this. And Jack's statements on the separation of church and state were terrific. He was sincere about it, and he carried away, swept away, all the Baptists. Once this archbishop in Puerto Rico made that statement, the Baptists in my state, the state of Washington, went around and said, "This is what I've been telling you. You thought I was fooling. See, here it is in the paper." And the state of Washington turned overnight; Oklahoma turned overnight;

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and Jack almost lost. Nothing that he could do about it. He'd done everything that he could. But the old-line, traditional Catholic clerics almost lost it for him.

STEWART: Do you think you had anticipated the extent of the religious controversy when he first started running for the Presidency?

DOUGLAS: I didn't think it would be too serious. I was perhaps prejudiced because I was a great supporter of Al Smith [Alfred E. Smith] in 1928, and I knew Jack, and had many Catholic friends. I knew that Jack was a devout Catholic, but I knew he was anti-clerical, and that he would be an independent person. Joe Kennedy was running his polls. And I talked to Joe three weeks before the election, just before this Puerto Rican episode happened, and Joe's polls showed that Jack couldn't possibly lose more than eight states.

STEWART: Really? Before this Puerto Rican thing?

DOUGLAS: Yeah. And then the whole thing just collapsed and became a near disaster. He won by a hundred thousand votes, or something very close to that – very, very narrow.

STEWART: You used the phrase that he was anti-clerical. Do you mean that in the traditional sense that...

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DOUGLAS: In the French sense of the term, yes.

STEWART: Do you recall any specific discussions of this with him, of his opinions of....

DOUGLAS: Oh, yes. As I say, Jack was a very devout Catholic, but he didn't think that the Catholic clerics carried around the storehouse of wisdom on what to do about

such things as labor law, public health, relations with Russia, trade agreements, birth control – you know, the whole package of pressing problems with which modern nations have to deal.

STEWART: President Kennedy was criticized quite a bit, and even by many liberal Catholics, for seeming to totally divorce the influence of his religion on any of his political decisions. He, of course, drew a complete separation between the two and said that his religious values had no influence whatsoever on his political decisions.

DOUGLAS: Of course that's nonsense because they gave him a sense of moral enlightenment and, let's say, moral quality of many decisions that are tremendously vital and important, whether they're Presbyterian, or Catholic, or whatnot.

STEWART: In the spring on 1962 you gave a series of lectures which were published in the book *America Challenged*. Many of

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the ideas and themes in this book, of course, were reflected in the campaign, the campaign that Kennedy used – the whole matter of the need for greater economic growth, and the need to change our aid programs. I think you even mentioned or hit at the idea of a Peace Corps in the book.

DOUGLAS: I had been talking about that since at least 1952 in various speeches and papers around the country, debates and so on. So that what I gave at Princeton in the early '60's was a sort of composite of my previous thinking. Yes, I'd talked a lot about that. I talked to Jack about some of those ideas. I don't say that Jack got the idea of the Peace Corps from me; of course, a lot of people had similar ideas. Most of those who traveled saw what was terribly wrong with American foreign policy. Jack knew it, and I articulated some of those in that series of lectures.

STEWART: Do you recall specifically discussing this book with him, or the lectures with him, or with anyone on his staff?

DOUGLAS: No. I wrote those letters in my office, or at home at night, and nobody saw them until they were published.

STEWART: No, I meant after the book came out.

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DOUGLAS: Oh, yes. I think I sent him copies, and we talked about some of the ideas. Jack made a nice gesture; I think I was the first honorary chairman of the Peace Corps.



STEWART: Of the advisory....

DOUGLAS: Something or other. I had a title and an office in the first year. And I used to attend some of the meetings and help formulate their policies.

STEWART: Were you convinced during the election that the alternative of Nixon or Kennedy would make that substantial a difference as far as the course of American society was concerned?

DOUGLAS: Yes, that would make a tremendous difference – the difference between separating the world further and further into ideological camps that would ultimately end in nuclear holocaust, or bringing the two worlds closer together in some kind of cooperative scheme. There was no doubt about that, that was the vital thing at stake. It wasn't so much on the surface in that campaign, but it was right under the surface, in the minds of many of us.

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STEWART: But you were convinced that a Kennedy Administration would make a change, would take off in a different direction, so to speak.

DOUGLAS: Oh, yes, I felt he would.

STEWART: You mentioned talking to Robert Kennedy about becoming Attorney General. Do you recall whether you were consulted or asked about other appointments to the Kennedy Cabinet?

DOUGLAS: No, no, I wasn't.

STEWART: Were you generally satisfied with those appointments?

DOUGLAS: I didn't know too much about them at the time. I knew hardly any of the men whom he had named.

STEWART: Secretary Udall [Stewart L. Udall]?

DOUGLAS: Oh, I knew Udall slightly, but even him I didn't know except very casually.

STEWART: Were you generally consulted on any judicial appointments, including those to the Supreme Court?

DOUGLAS: No. That's not customary for a President. I was very close to FDR [Franklin Delano Roosevelt]. He talked to me sometimes about decisions that he had made, but he never said, "Find me a good Justice," or anything like that.

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STEWART: Neither of the two appointments – Justice White [Byron R. White], or Justice Goldberg [Arthur J. Goldberg] – you weren't consulted at all?

DOUGLAS: No.

STEWART: Do you recall whether you saw President Kennedy during the transition period before he took office? If so, did he give any impressions of the oncoming burdens that he was going to take, or his change...

DOUGLAS: I saw him once or twice very casually, but not for any serious, considered discussion of anything important.

STEWART: Very early in his Administration he ran into this disaster of the Bay of Pigs. Were you surprised, one, that he went through with the operation...

DOUGLAS: I was very much surprised. Yes, I thought at the time he'd been taken in by, I don't know, somebody – CIA [Central Intelligence Agency], probably, or Pentagon, or both.

STEWART: Do you feel that this whole experience had any effect on future events in the Administration?

DOUGLAS: Oh, yes. He talked to me afterwards about it. This episode seared him. He realized the tremendous power

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that these groups had, these various insidious influences of the CIA and the Pentagon, on civilian policy. I think that it raised in his mind the specter: Can I, Jack Kennedy, President of the United States, ever be strong enough to really rule these two powerful agencies? I think it had a profound – it shook him up.

STEWART: Do you recall seeing him after or soon after his meeting with Khrushchev [Nikita Sergeyevich Khrushchev] in Vienna? This, again, according to many people, shook him quite a bit. It was a very sobering experience.

DOUGLAS: Yes, it was. He talked to me about it. The face-to-face encounter with Khrushchev was quite different from meeting the Prime Minister of England, or some member of the Cosmopolitan Club, or some other congenial person. This was the tough opposition, and it was much tougher, I think, than Jack had ever realized. Part of that, I think, was due to the mistake that Khrushchev made in treating Jack, in view of his youth, as somewhat, you know, immature, a little boy, and some guy he could push

around. And Khrushchev, of course, found out later that he couldn't do that. I think that was the basic error on Khrushchev's part. But it certainly shook Jack up.

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STEWART: Did he ever admit to any mistakes he may have made in the course of his meetings with Khrushchev, or some wrong impressions he may have given Khrushchev?

DOUGLAS: No, I don't think he gave him any wrong impressions; I think Khrushchev misread the man he was talking to.

STEWART: In a general way, do you think the Kennedy Administration did everything possible, or everything feasible, during the three years to improve Soviet-American relations?

[TAPE I, SIDE II]

DOUGLAS: I think they started a new epoch, or new era. I don't know if they did everything possible. After all, Jack was only in, what, two and a half years. Jack's problem in '61, '62, and '63 was to be reelected in '64. And the great achievement would have been made after '64, if he had been reelected, as I think he would have been. But for a first-term President, I think he was on his way to laying the foundations for better understanding because I think he, more than anyone else, knew, in a sense, the terrible, awful power that we had and the Russians had.

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STEWART: Could you see from your conversations with him a deepening of the understanding that he had of this whole conflict, this whole area?

DOUGLAS: Oh, yes. He had a great nervousness of the acquisition of these atomic bombs by the small powers. And I think one of his greatest concerns was the threat of the spread of them into the hands of little Hitlers [Adolf Hitler] around the world. I know he talked to me specifically once about how to keep the atomic bomb out of the Egyptian-Israel complex – how exciting it would be for a guy like Nasser [Gamal Abdel Nasser] to just drop the bomb on Tel Aviv, you know, wipe them out completely. This specter haunted him. He was on his way. The ban on the testing and whatnot was a start. But the great things he would have done, would have been done in that connection, I think, after '64.

STEWART: Did he talk about this—this fact of doing more in the second four years, in the second term?

DOUGLAS: Well, he talked about it, I'd push something on him. I didn't see him

regularly, but I'd go over, and he'd ask me over for lunch, and we'd sit around for an hour or so. And I'd push something to him, and he'd say, "Well, you forget – I've got to be reelected." He was very conscious of that,

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quite naturally.

STEWART: In the fall of 1961, or approximately, it was in the summer, you took a trip to Mongolia. And then in the fall, I believe, there was a great discussion over, 1) the admission of Mongolia to the U.N., and 2) the United States recognition of Mongolia. Do you recall discussing this specifically with the President?

DOUGLAS: Yes. When I got back from Mongolia, I went over to tell him about the trip. And I said that the great tragedy was that his negotiations with the Mongolian government for an exchange of ambassadors was discontinued in July of that year, 1961. I knew about it because I was waiting in my summer place in the state of Washington for the State Department to produce a visa for Mongolia. And they said, "Don't worry. We'll have it all worked out by mid-July. We're exchanging ambassadors." And Jack laughed and said, "Well," he said, "I'm sorry about what happened to you and the inconvenience suffered, but Chiang Kai-shek sent his Vice President to see me and said that they would consider it an unfriendly act if we recognize Outer Mongolia because Outer Mongolia belonged to China." And I said, "But, Jack, if that's true, then we belong to England, because Outer Mongolia got its

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independence from China.... They were subdued by China in 1691, and they got their independence in about 1921. They drove them out with force of arms, and established their own government." And he said he realized that, but this was a big complex of forces. The China lobby here is very strong. Chiang Kai-shek is very strong in American politics. And he thought that the thing to do was to just coast along awhile, and he'd take it up later. He never did take it up later. If he had lived, he would have by now, I'm sure, because it would be a great thing to have an American ambassador in Ulan Bator, and a relationship to that part of the world, which is Communist, but which is a different form of Communism than they have in China or in Russia.

STEWART: Did he mention at this time, or at any time, the problems he was having with the State Department, getting things done by the State Department, organizing the State Department as he wanted it to be?

DOUGLAS: Yes. He never thought much of the State Department. He knew the State Department when he was a world traveler, and he thought less and less of the State Department as he continued in office as President. He told me he took Rusk [Dean Rusk] because he was a good errand boy. Jack was his own Secretary of State,

and he knew what he wanted to do. Rusk was never the great formulator of policy, the great thinker. He

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was pretty much the errand boy, and at that level he served Jack faithfully. He was loyal to Jack and served him well. But the whole weight of the State Department, as Jack knew, and as Jack often told me, was on the side of the status quo, not rocking the boat, not doing anything.

STEWART: Was, again, his feeling, or his feelings, as far as the division of the policy on China, division of the U.N. – would this have changed in the second term?

DOUGLAS: He would have found some solution to that, I'm sure. Now what one, I don't know. Maybe he would have been defeated in the U.N. on it, but he would have worked out something because he thought that that was one of our central problems, perhaps more important than even the Russian problem.

STEWART: Do you recall anything about his understanding of Asian political affairs....

DOUGLAS Oh, yes. He understood them. He knew the people pretty well. He had a great rapport with the offbeat nonconformists of Asia – the men who did not wear homburg hats, and the men who did not come out of Harvard or Eton, and who did not have conventional ideas. Jack, he understood them and realized that they were people that we had to deal with, that we

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couldn't remake them to be like us, and so on.

STEWART: He was also occasionally criticized for placing too much emphasis on the personalities of leaders in particular countries, and not enough on the substantive issues involved – with economic and social and cultural forces involved. Would you agree with that criticism?

DOUGLAS: No, I don't. He had an instinct for people. He knew that, whatever the problem, that he could get along and work things out with Nehru [Shri Jawaharlal Nehru] because he took the measure of the man, and he realized that he was an offbeat, but that he wasn't a Communist out to subvert things and destroy agreements, but to try to find a way of life that would accommodate the ideals of the Indian people. His first impression was to take a measure of the man or woman, and then work out something from there on.

STEWART: Do you believe the Kennedy Administration made substantial progress, or some progress, in reorienting the whole aid program, both by the

reorganization and by such changes as the Alliance for Progress and this type of thing?

DOUGLAS: I don't think so. I think Jack tried to; I think

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Jack wanted to. He named Teodoro Moscoso as head of the Alliance for Progress. And Ted asked me to swear him in, and I went over and swore him in in Jack's office. Jack was filled with ideas, and so was Ted. Thirty days later Jack called me over and he said, "Maybe I've made a mistake with Moscoso," he said, "nothing is happening." And I said, you didn't make a mistake on Moscoso. You made a mistake, with all respect, of giving Moscoso that old, old agency, (that has been known as ICA [International Cooperation Administration]), because ICA is the bureaucracy that he has to work with, and they're utterly opposed to what you believe in, and what Moscoso believes in." And he said, "What would you do?" And I said, "Fire the whole bureaucracy and let Moscoso pick his own men." I don't know what I would have done if I had been President, whether I would have followed that advice or not. But it was a paralyzing situation, because, for example, Moscoso came to my house, and he wanted to – we had dinner – he wanted to put in a village reform program. And he had Dr. Yen [Y.C. James Yen]. I was on Dr. Yen's committee. We'd been in the Philippines for a long time; we'd been through practically all the villages there. And Ted wanted to adopt that – start with the villages of Latin America. That was on December 21<sup>st</sup>,

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1961, at dinner. And in July 1962, Jimmy Yen and Ted Moscoso were still boxed in by the bureaucracy and finally had to give it up because the bureaucracy in the Alliance for Progress wanted to take all the American money and build a new middle class. Well, that meant putting up factories and reproducing in these feudal countries the kind of conditions that Karl Marx wrote about, and would make inevitable the invasion by a Communist regime, as I saw it, and as Ted Moscoso saw it, and as, I think, Jack Kennedy saw it.

But the episode I was illustrating is indicating how a President sometimes can't run his own affairs. FDR was boxed in: the Corps of Army Engineers proposed a dam, and FDR said, "No, this is going to be a reclamation dam. I, as President of the United States, say so." And the Corps of Engineers went to Congress, and it ended up as the Corps of Engineers' dam. FDR was boxed in. The bureaucracy does things like that. And in this vast scheme that they have, Jack didn't have much of a chance. I asked him, "Would you make me head of AID for three months, three weeks?" He said, "Sure, why do you want it?" I said, "So I can just fire everybody."

STEWART: Were you generally satisfied with the approach the

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Peace Corps took in getting started, and the time it took to get started?

DOUGLAS: Yes, I was. But as I look back I realize that things could have been done differently. But it was a new thing; it was a dazzling thing; it was a fine, energizing, exciting thing. It was probably the best thing we've done overseas since the beginning, symbolically representing change and innovation rather than bolstering up an old status quo.

STEWART: You, as you mentioned, were on this advisory committee, or commission...

DOUGLAS: Yes, for one year.

STEWART: Do you recall any issued of great import that the committee was asked to discuss or discover, or was it basically a ceremonial type committee? Was it a working committee?

DOUGLAS: Yes, it was a working committee. And I told Jack and I told Shriver [Robert Sargent Shriver, Jr.] that I thought it was a terrible mistake to make it a working committee because we spent hours and days sitting around with a dozen people trying to decide what to do. The important thing is to do something. And, I think as a result of that talk, they stopped these meeting, and they did start doing things.

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STEWART: In the whole area of conservation and natural resources, it has frequently been said that President Kennedy had, 1) little interest in the small area, and 2) little knowledge of really what the issues were, what the problems were. Would you tend to agree with this?

DOUGLAS: I think so, yes. As I always, well, not always but sometimes, said to Jack, I said, "The trouble is, Jack, that you've never slept on the ground." You see, he never had backpacked. He never had been way back alone in the wilderness, never saw for himself.... He had flown over them, he'd perhaps gone through by car. Of course, Jack's interests were in other areas. He was interested in the seashore and in the ocean. Jack didn't understand the problems of the wilderness that were not familiar to him.

STEWART: Do you think as a result of this that there was a lack of progress in the whole area of natural resources during the Kennedy Administration?

DOUGLAS: Well, he served such a short period of time. A lot of things were under way, and how he would have come out, I don't know. I just don't know. But he died in '63, didn't he, in November. Let's see, the Wilderness Act, which was the greatest thing since Teddy Roosevelt's [Theodore Roosevelt] time, was passed in

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'64, and it had about two years' work behind it, you see, so Jack was behind that. So, his instincts were pretty good in this field, but he never had the personal experience. Now in foreign travel he did. He knew firsthand sights, and smells, and sounds, and contact. But he just knew it intellectually – the wilderness problem.

STEWART: One of the comments that has been made about President Kennedy's Administration is that he stifled dissent by absorbing it. Dissent during those years was of a different nature, of course, then what followed in the two or three years after that. What, in your opinion, was John F. Kennedy's whole approach to the matter of dissent, and argument, and opposition to the Establishment and so forth?

DOUGLAS: Oh, I don't think he had any.... I just think he took it for granted. I don't think he enjoyed criticism; nobody enjoys it. But he was not paranoid. He didn't take retaliations. He was fairly good-natured about it. He had a knack of kidding, and making fun, in a light-hearted way, not in an offensive way.

STEWART: Do you think he could have coped with the type of dissent, the rabid dissent, that certainly came to the fore in the years after his assassination, in the area of civil rights and the whole peace movement?

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DOUGLAS: Well, nobody knows. I think he could have; I think he would have. I think his whole makeup was different, more light-hearted – not that he didn't lack serious purpose, but that was his technique was the lighter touch. He could produce a laugh, where most other people would produce nothing but scowls and anger. Does this about wind it up?

STEWART: Yes. I guess, unless there's anything more you want to say.

DOUGLAS: I think that'll wind it up.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

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