

Freda Laski Oral History Interview – JFK#1, 08/05/1966
Administrative Information

Creator: Freda Laski
Interviewer: Joseph E. O'Connor
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Biographical Note

Freda Laski was the wife of Harold Laski of the London School of Economics. This interview discusses Harold Laski's poor opinion of *When England Sleeps*, a book written by John F. Kennedy [JFK], and the Laskis' friendship with Joseph Kennedy Jr. and JFK.

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Oral History Interview

with

MRS. FRED A LASKI

August 5, 1966
London, England

By Joseph E. O'Connor

For the John F. Kennedy Library

O'CONNOR: Mrs. Laski I had asked you just a few minutes ago what contacts you had with John Kennedy, and one contact in particular that your husband, really, had stood out in your mind and concerned the book that John Kennedy had written.

LASKI: Well, I remember, about 1939 his father sent a copy of the book that he had written called While England Sleeps, asking my husband if he would write a

blurb for it and a review. My husband at the time was not very friendly with the father because he was a great isolationist and he was ambassador here. He read the book and wrote back to Mr. Kennedy saying that he thought it was the book of an immature mind; that if it hadn't been written by the son of a very rich man, he wouldn't have found a publisher, and if he had found a publisher, people wouldn't be very interested in reading it; and, therefore, he was not willing to write any blurb; but that in twenty years time the writer would be very sorry he'd written the little book. And of course we didn't hear anymore from Mr. Kennedy. In 1946 John was over here, and he met my husband and he said "You were quite right about the book." Which pleased my husband.

O'CONNOR: Okay, we can end this now unless you have any other memories that you can think of that you'd like to add about John Kennedy or really about Joe Kennedy, Jr.

LASKI: Well, they used to sit in my husband's room and discuss who was going to be president. And it was evident that Joe would never be president because he was too much to the left. But John hadn't made up his mind. He was very young still. But they always had very interesting discussions. We had a great time with Joe, Jr. We took him to Russia with us, on the boat both ways, and we traveled around with him. He was good company. We used to see him a great deal at the house here. On Sunday evenings he used to come with other students. I think we were devoted to him.

O'CONNOR: I guess John Kennedy really wasn't a student here long enough . . .

LASKI: No, he was a very short time here. He was a sick man. And then he went home and finished at Harvard, I think. I don't know what year it was.

O'CONNOR: But you didn't ever see him, I presume, after that.

LASKI: Not much, no.

O'CONNOR: Well, okay we can shut this off. That particular comment about the book was the thing I was essentially interested in.

LASKI: Yes.