

FOREWORD

Transcript Warning:

All written transcripts are imperfect abstracts of spoken conversation. Variations in sound quality and in the aural acuity of listeners can and do produce wide variations in what is heard. Even though transcripts may be prepared at great effort and with great care, many points of ambiguity are inevitable, and erroneous interpretations from transcripts are always possible. Therefore, to ensure full confidence in any and all quotations from the presidential recordings, users are strongly urged to check all transcript renditions against the actual tape recordings before publication.

Copyright:

The donors assigned copyright that they might have in the recordings to the United States; however, copyright of the donors does not extend beyond statements uttered by John F. Kennedy, his minor children, and the donors themselves. Statements uttered by officials of the United States government in the course of their duties are considered to be in the public domain. Users of this material are cautioned, however, that not all persons recorded were members of the Kennedy family or government officials. A number of the people recorded were, at the time of recording, private citizens. Therefore, those intending to quote from this material beyond the accepted limits of fair use are cautioned to determine the copyright implications of any intended publication.

Punctuation:

The following conventions are used throughout the transcripts:

- * * * To indicate a pause in the recording while the speaker listens to the person speaking at the other end of the telephone. Used when only one side of a telephone conversation is recorded.
- [?] When the transcriber is not certain of what is said on the recording.
- To indicate a sentence which the speaker trails off without completing it.
- . . . When a speaker is interrupted before a sentence is completed.
- _____ To indicate the speaker's emphasis.
- [] Used to enclose editorial comments of the transcriber such as */Meeting appears to be breaking up/* or */Several speakers speak at once and none of the words are intelligible./*

Names:

The first time a name is mentioned, the full name is provided whenever it is known. "JFK" and "RFK" are used for President Kennedy and Robert Kennedy, respectively. When the identity of a speaker is unknown, "Speaker?" is used; when the identification of a speaker is uncertain, a question mark follows the name. The heading of each transcript gives the names of all participants listed in the President's Appointment Books as scheduled to attend the meeting.

Preparation:

These electronic documents were created from transcripts available in the audiovisual research room in the John F. Kennedy Library. The transcripts were scanned using optical character recognition and the resulting text files were proofread against the original transcripts. Some formatting changes were made.

Dictabelt 4C

September 1962

JFK: Hello.

Barnett¹: All right.

JFK: Governor.

Barnett: Mr. President. Yes, sir.

JFK: Oh, will you talk to Mr. Watkins?² Uh, the attorney general did.

Barnett: Uh, no, I haven't talked with him now in a couple of hours. I . . .

JFK: Oh. Well, now . . .

Barnett: . . . I talked with him though about two hours ago, Mr. President, and he said he was going to talk, uh, with the, with the attorney general and go see him tomorrow morning.

JFK: Oh. Well, in the meanwhile, then, the, uh, attorney general talked to Mr. Watkins to see whether there was some, uh, uh. . . . Wait just a second. Uh, uh, the attorney general's right here. He'll tell you what he talked to Watkins and . . .

Barnett: Oh . . .

JFK: . . . Watkins was gonna talk to you. Wait a minute.

Barnett: All right. All right.

JFK: He'll come right on the other phone.

Barnett: Yeah, sure.

JFK: Wait just a [second?].

¹ Ross R. Barnett

² Thomas H. Watkins.

Barnett: All right. All right.

[Brief pause.]

[Barnett coughs.]

RFK: Hello?

Barnett: Yes, sir, General. How are you?

RFK: Fine, Governor. How are you?

Barnett: Fine, fine.

RFK: I, uh, talked to Mr. Watkins, you know, earlier this morning.

Barnett: Oh, yes?

RFK: And, uh, he really, uh, did not have, uh, much of a suggestion. He had mentioned yesterday, uh, uh, the possibility of our coming in tomorrow, uh, Monday, uh, with marshals, and, uh . . .

Barnett: Yes.

RFK: . . . but, uh, that, uh, as, uh, under our understanding for Thursday that, uh, the marshals would show up and that, uh, you and the others would step aside and Mr. Meredith³ would come into the university. Well, he felt, uh, when he mentioned, uh, he talked to me today, he said that he thought that, uh, would create some problems, uh, which they could not overcome. And, uh, he suggested at that time, uh, some alternatives which were, uh, not, uh, very satisfactory.

Barnett: Well . . .

RFK: And then he mentioned the fact that he might come up early tomorrow morning.

Barnett: [Well?] . . .

RFK: I called him back after I heard your, the president's conversation with you . . .

³ James H. Meredith.

Barnett: Yes.

RFK: . . . and, uh, said, uh, that I thought, I'd be glad to see him, but I thought that unless we had some real basis, uh, for, uh, some understanding and working out this very, very difficult problem that the, really he was wasting his time; and that, uh, that one of the basic requirements, in my judgment, was the maintenance of, uh, law and order, and, and that would require, uh, some, uh, very, uh, strong and, uh, uh, vocal action by, uh, you yourself. Uh . . .

Barnett: Well, I, I'm certainly going to try to maintain law and order, Mr. . . .

RFK: Yeah.

Barnett: . . . uh, General, just, uh, the very best way that I can.

RFK: But, in the . . .

Barnett: I, I talked to the student body the other day and told 'em to really, uh, to have control of the physical and mental faculties. But it didn't do much good it seemed like.

RFK: Well, uh . . .

Barnett: They cheered and carried on, but then they just started raving and carrying on, you know.

RFK: Yeah. I think . . .

Barnett: Uh . . .

RFK: . . . uh, Governor, uh, that, that if we c-, if, as a st-, very minimum and as a start, uh, an order by you and the state, that, uh, that, uh, people could not congregate, uh, in Oxford now in groups of three or five, larger than groups of three or five ; uh, the second, to get the school, uh, authorities to issue instructions to the, uh, students that that if they congregate in groups that, uh, they are liable for expulsion. If that was done this afternoon, I think that would be, uh, a big step forward. And that anybody carrying an arm or a, arms or a club, or anything like that would be liable to punishment.

Barnett: Well . . .

RFK: Those kind of steps by you . . .

Barnett: Yes.

RFK: . . . would indicate a interest in, uh . . .

Barnett: Uh . . .

RFK: . . . maintaining law and order.

Barnett: Well, General, I certainly, I'll tell the chancellor to announce to all the students to keep law and order and to, uh, keep cool heads. But, the trouble is not only the students, but it's so many thousands of outsiders will be there.

RFK: Yeah, but, I think, if you said, Governor, uh, uh not just to . . .

Barnett: Yeah.

RFK: . . . keep cool heads, but that they couldn't congregate.

Barnett: How many do you figure on sending down?

RFK: Well, that's a . . . I think that the president had some questions for you that he thought that maybe if we could get some answers to them that . . .

Barnett: Yeah.

RFK: . . . that would be what depend. /Speaks to JFK in the room/ Mr. President . . .

Barnett: Mr. General, why don't you, uh, uh. . . I believe if you and Tom Watkins could get together it'd help a lot. He's a very reasonable man, and, and he's, he knows, he knows the situation down here as well as anybody living. If you all could get together tomorrow morning, I really think that it would pay. I think it would help.

RFK: Well, he doesn't have any suggestions, he just told me, Mr. Governor.

Barnett: Yes. Well, I . . .

RFK: So I don't know what . . .

Barnett: . . . I thought he did have.

RFK: Well, he didn't. I mean he said something about sending the, Meredith, uh, sneaking him into Jackson and getting him registered while all of you were up at . . .

Barnett: Yeah.

RFK: . . . at Oxford. But that doesn't . . .

Barnett: I . . .

RFK: . . . make much sense, does it?

Barnett: Well, I don't know. Why? Why doesn't it? That's where they'd ordered him to go at first, you know.

RFK: Yeah.

Barnett: You see, there's an order on the minutes, Mr. General, for him to register . . .

RFK: Well, would you . . .

Barnett: . . . [there?].

RFK: . . . you'd get. . . . As I understand it, you'd get everybody up at Oxford, and then we'd, and then . . .

Barnett: Oh, well, that's exactly what Tom Watkins must have had in mind, you know.

RFK: Yeah.

Barnett: Uh, let me talk with Tom and, and call you back in a little while. He's, uh, not but a block from me. Uh, that's, uh, that's what he had in mind, I think. And, of course, uh, you know how it is in Jackson. Monday they, no school's going on here, you know, and. . . . Uh, of course nobody would be anticipating anyone coming here, you know.

RFK: Um.

Barnett: Uh . . .

RFK: Are you going up to Oxford on Monday? Is that your plan?

Barnett: Well, that's what I'd planned to do, yes, sir. Uh, the lieutenant governor and I, both, I guess, we'll have to be up there to try to keep order, you know.

/Phone rings in background/

RFK: Um.

Barnett: And, uh, we're to be up there pretty early Monday morning.

RFK: Will you?

Barnett: We'll be up there, uh, unless you ask us not to.

RFK: Yeah.

Barnett: Well, like, you see, we'll, we'll be up there and, uh, that's where the, all the people will be. Yeah. Yeah. I thought you and Watkins were going to talk about that kind of a situation, then what'd be the best thing to do under those conditions, you know.

RFK: Yeah. I think, uh, Governor, that, uh, the president had some, uh, questions that he, uh, wanted some answers to, uh, to . . .

Barnett: Well . . .

RFK: . . . make his own determination.

Barnett: . . . that's right. He wanted to know if I would, uh, obey the orders of the court, and I told him I, I'd have to do some, *[study?]* that over. That's a serious thing. I've taken an oath to abide by the laws of this state and our state constitution and the Constitution of the United States. *[Clears his throat.]* And, General, how can I violate my oath of office? How can I do that and live with the people of Mississippi? You know, they expecting me to keep my word. That's what I'm up against, and I don't . . .

JFK: Uh, oh, Governor, this . . .

Barnett: . . . understand why the court, why the court wouldn't understand that.

JFK: Governor, this is the president speaking.

Barnett: Yes, sir, Mr. President.

JFK: Uh, now, it's, I know that your feeling about the, uh, law of Mississippi and the fact that ya, you don't want to carry out that court order. What we really want to, uh, have from you, though, is some understanding about whether the state police will maintain law and order. We understand your feeling about the court order . . .

Barnett: Yes.

JFK: . . . and your disagreement with it. But what we're concerned about is, uh, how much violence is going to be and what kind of, uh, action we'll have to take to prevent it. And I'd like to get assurances from you about, that the state police down there will take positive action to maintain law and order.

Barnett: Oh, they'll do that.

JFK: Then we'll know what we have to do.

Barnett: They'll, they'll take positive action, Mr. President, to maintain law and order as best we can.

JFK: And now, how good is . . .

Barnett: We'll have two hundred and twenty highway patrolmen . . .

JFK: Right.

Barnett: . . . and they'll absolutely be unarmed.

JFK: I understa- . . .

Barnett: Not a one of 'em'll be armed.

JFK: Well, no, but the problem is, well, what can they do to maintain law and order and prevent the gathering of a mob and, uh, action taken by the mob? What can they do?

Barnett: [Well?] . . .

JFK: Can they stop that?

Barnett: Well, they'll do their best to. They'll do everything in their power to stop it.

JFK: Now, what about the suggestions made by the attorney general in regard to, uh, not permitting people to congregate and start a mob?

Barnett: Well, we'll do our best to, to keep 'em from congregating, but that's hard to do, you know.

JFK: Well, they just tell them to move along.

Barnett: When they start moving up on the sidewalks and . . .

JFK: [Well?] . . .

Barnett: . . . uh, different sides of the, uh, streets, what are you gonna do about it?

JFK: Well, now, as I understand it, uh, Governor, you would do everything you can to maintain, uh, law and order.

Barnett: I, I, I'll do everything in my power to maintain order . . .

JFK: Right. Now . . .

Barnett: . . . and peace. We don't want any shooting down here.

JFK: I understand. Now, Governor, what about . . .

Barnett: [Yes?].

JFK: . . . can you maintain this order?

Barnett: Well, I don't know.

JFK: Yeah.

Barnett: I, I, that's what I'm worried about . . .

JFK: That's . . .

Barnett: . . . you see. I don't know whether I can or not.

JFK: Right.

Barnett: I couldn't have the other afternoon.

JFK: You couldn't have?

Barnett: There was such a mob there, it would have been impossible.

JFK: I see.

Barnett: There were men in there with trucks and shotguns, and all such as that. Not, not a lot of 'em, but some we saw, and, uh, uh certain people were just, uh, they were just enraged.

JFK: Well, now, will you talk . . .

Barnett: You just don't understand the situation down here.

JFK: Well, the only thing is I got my responsibility.

Barnett: I know you do.

JFK: This is not my order, I just have to carry it out. So I want to get together and try to do it with you in a way which is the most satisfactory and causes the least chance of, uh, damage to, uh, people in, uh, Mississippi. That's my interest.

Barnett: That's right. Would you be willing to wait awhile and let the people cool off on the whole thing?

JFK: 'Til how long?

Barnett: Couldn't you make a statement to the effect, Mr. President, uh, Mr. General, that under the circumstances existing in Mississippi, that, uh, there'll be bloodshed; you want to protect the life of, of, of James Meredith and all other people? And under the circumstances at this time, it just wouldn't be fair to him or others, uh, to try to register him at this [time?].

JFK: Well, then at what time would it be fair?

Barnett: Well, we, we could wait a, I don't know.

JFK: Yeah.

Barnett: It might be in, uh, two or three weeks, it might cool off a [little?].

JFK: Well, would you undertake to register him in two weeks?

Barnett: Well, I, you know I can't undertake to register him myself . . .

JFK: I see.

Barnett: . . . but you all might make some progress that way, you know.

[JFK laughs.]

JFK: Yeah. Well, we'd be faced with, uh. . . . I'm, I, unless we had your support . . .

Barnett: You see . . .

JFK: . . . and assurance, we'd be . . .

Barnett: . . . I say I'm going to, I'm going to cooperate. Uh, I might not know, uh, when you're going to register him, you know.

JFK: I see. Well, now, Governor, why don't, uh. . . . Do you want to talk to Mr. Watkins?

Barnett: I might not know that, what, what your plans were, you see.

JFK: Do you want to, uh, do you want to talk to Mr. Watkins then . . .

Barnett: I'll be delighted to talk to him . . .

JFK: . . . the- . . .

Barnett: . . . and, uh, we'll call you back.

JFK: Okay, good.

Barnett: Uh, uh, Mr., uh, call the general back?

JFK: Yeah, call the general, and then I'll be around.

Barnett: All right.

JFK: Tha- . . .

Barnett: I appreciate it so much . . .

JFK: Thanks, Governor.

Barnett: . . . and I, I thank you for this call.

JFK: Thank you, Governor.

Barnett: All right.

JFK: Right.

Barnett: Bye.

[Phone hangs up.]

Voice 1: Waiting.

Voice 2: [Word unintelligible]