Dan Rather Oral History Interview – JFK#1, 2/11/2003
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Biographical Note
Rather is an American journalist, former anchor of the *CBS Evening News* and contributor to *60 Minutes.* In this interview, he discusses his impressions of John F. Kennedy [JFK] and Robert F. Kennedy [RFK], the Kennedy-Nixon debate, RFK's relationship with Lyndon B. Johnson, JFK's assassination, and negotiations surrounding the Zapruder film among other issues.

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Oral History Interview

with

Dan Rather

February 11, 2003
New York, New York

by Vicki Daitch

For the John F. Kennedy Library

DAITCH: I'll just set up the tapes by saying that I'm Vicki Daitch, and I'm speaking with Dan Rather in New York City. And if you would like to just start. I think I read that you never met Kennedy [John F. Kennedy], that the first time that you had any contact was actually the assassination. Was that right?

RATHER: No, that's not true.

DAITCH: Oh, okay.

RATHER: I met him, I met President Kennedy, when he was a senator.

DAITCH: Oh, you did!

RATHER: In 1960 at the Democratic Convention in Los Angeles. I was a reporter then for the Corinthian Broadcasting System which was a system of television stations owned by a man named Jock Whitney [John Hay Whitney], and I worked for the station in Houston, KHOU Television. But I was sent to the national conventions that year to cover the nominating conventions for this small system of stations. I met President Kennedy--he was senator at that time, Senator Kennedy – in Los Angeles, just after he had been nominated. And I interviewed him briefly for the station. So that's when I met him.

DAITCH: Really! So how was that? That must have been interesting.

RATHER: Well, it was short. But the thing I remember is he had.... First of all, he looked you in the eye, which is very popular with politicians today. They all study it and do it very well. But at that time, well, certainly one judge of a person was whether they looked you in the eye or not. I don't remember politicians being as practiced at it as they are today, 2003. Things that struck me: one, he looked me right in the eye; two, he had a very firm handshake. He had that great smile.

There was the sense that he was there, that he wasn't somewhere else, he wasn't, as so often is the case, particularly when you meet people under those circumstances; and, let's face it, he was meeting everybody in the world at that time. But if you only had him for three seconds, he was there for those three seconds. And again, that's a very practiced thing with politicians today. But it was not my impression it was all that practiced in those days, and therefore it was genuine. I will say this: If he was faking it, and I don't think he was, then he faked it extremely well. But I don't think he was.

I remember the great smile, warm handshake, looking you in the eye, the sense that he was really paying attention, he was really interested in what I had to say. Not because I had any great wisdom; I didn't. Just, okay, this is the person in front of me. I'm talking to this person, and I'm concentrating on this person.

He had, and it struck me at the time, he had a confidence about him that just radiated. It was a hurried time and he was in a hurry, but he didn't give you a sense that he had to hurry on to the next thing. I did a short interview with him for the station in Houston. I wrote about this, I think, I'm not sure of it, I wrote a book in 1976 called *The Camera Never Blinks*, and I think there's a brief description in *The Camera Never Blinks* of the incident. That was the first time I met him.

I saw him one other time. I'm trying to remember where it was. It really was just a handshake and "hello." It wasn't an intimate conversation. I think it was in Washington at the inauguration, when he was inaugurated. I was in Washington for the inauguration. And it was at the Armory, they had a gala at the Armory – wherever it was that Marilyn Monroe sang, which is a helluva way to remember it, but nonetheless that's where it was. And as he was coming in there, I shook his hand. Those were the only times that I actually saw him.

DAITCH: You said that he radiated this confidence, and that seems to me to be true just from the film that I've seen of him. He's just incredibly charismatic. But at the same time I've heard that he was just; he was thin, a skinny, young.... Did you notice those things, or were they sort of overwhelmed by the...?

RATHER: I don't remember his being skinny. Did you say thin?

DAITCH: Yes.

RATHER: I don't remember that. But he certainly wasn't fat. I remember him being taller than I had thought that he was. If you ask me why I didn't think he was taller, I don't know why. But he was taller than I thought he was. I'm

six feet even, and I don't to this day know how tall he was. But we were roughly eye level. But somehow I had him pictured as having less height. I had the impression he was thin-shouldered. But if you ask me why, I don't know. But I didn't remark on his weight one way or the other. I don't remember registering it one way or the other.

DAITCH: The reason I ask, I talked to Sid Davis [Sidney Davis] yesterday, and he told me that, I think exactly the same moment, it was at the convention, that Kennedy was somehow rushing, and he happened to come through in his shorts. It's so ridiculous. He said it just struck him how thin he was.

RATHER: Well, I didn't see him in his shorts, so maybe that was the difference. But I tell you where.... Now it's coming back to me. I had seen him, I didn't meet him, I didn't talk to him, at the 1956 convention in Chicago.

DAITCH: Oh!

RATHER: I was working for a radio station in Houston, and I'd actually hitchhiked to Chicago. But I was below the platform in kind of a press pen, if you like. Now that I think about it, this was not 1960. I don't want to confuse you. In 1956 it was true that he was thin-faced, not in an Abe Lincoln [Abraham Lincoln] thin-faced way, but I remember the jaw line. The reason this is just coming back to me is that there are a lot of pictures of President Kennedy now, you know, 40 years later. Whenever you look back you'd say, gosh, during his presidency he put on some weight because his face filled out. We're dealing with very small increments here. It's just I remember in 1956 at the convention a strong jaw line. I would say at that time, yes, you might describe him as thin.

In 1960 I don't remember his being thin, but he certainly wasn't heavy. And it's just that in that respect sometimes I see pictures where I don't remember his being that heavy. Now ones where he's on television, sometimes camera angles make a difference, say. We also know now that he took some medication, and that could have done it.

But for whatever it might be worth, at the '56 convention he certainly was lean, if not thin. Nineteen sixty, I just don't remember. I do remember thinking that he was taller than I had been led to believe, and that this man does not particularly have broad shoulders, which is not.... There wasn't anything freakish. It's just that as a reporter you sort of looked click-click-click, just like the camera. And those were the things that I remember.

DAITCH: Anything else that you remember from maybe the atmosphere, or his staff members who were around, or anything that he said that struck you?

RATHER: Well, other than what I've told you, I don't remember much from '56. I just remember his coming out and making a speech. I remember remarking at the time it was a very good speech.

DAITCH: It was.

RATHER: But that's about all I remember from that time. We might come back to that later. Some people told me some things about him, but they weren't my first-hand knowledge. His staff, I don't remember, around him. His brother Robert [Robert F. Kennedy] was there. I saw him before I met and talked with President Kennedy at the '60 convention. My impression, perhaps unfairly, and time goes and corrodes one's memory, is that Bobby – and I mean no disrespect because he liked to be called "Bobby," and I didn't know him well enough – Bobby looked worried, even dour, the times I saw him. I probably saw him three, four, maybe five times up close. I mean of course he was in the convention hall. But he always looked worried and dour, facially, which contrasted with the senator. I never saw Senator Kennedy when he wasn't smiling.

DAITCH: Really!

RATHER: No. I was a reporter, he was a politician. I didn't see him with his tie undone and his feet up. But the only reason for mentioning it is that it would've been hard to see the two of them in California at that time and not be struck by how confident and unhurried, while at the same time moving swiftly, the smiling confidence that Jack Kennedy had, and the worried, unsmiling, somewhat snappish Bobby Kennedy.

DAITCH: That's interesting.

RATHER: I hope no one will make that read that I'm passing judgment on their character. It's just their personality at the time, that's the way it struck me.

DAITCH: Sure. And it's an interesting observation because perhaps one of the reasons why John Kennedy could afford to be relaxed and smiling was because he had Bobby....

RATHER: That's what I was inferring.

DAITCH: Absolutely.

RATHER: And it's quite understandable.

DAITCH: Yes, it makes sense. So any other contacts between then and the assassination that you can think of?

RATHER: I'm thinking.... No, I don't think so.

DAITCH: So what were your impressions of.... I mean he's elected. You probably watched the debates. Any impressions of that from a media perspective?

RATHER: Well, there were two times when I did see him in Houston. He came to Houston. There was no other contact. You'd see him on television, but

you didn't see him on television as much as people might now imagine because, one, television had not penetrated into as many homes. It just was not as pervasive. But I saw him in Houston when he appeared before the Baptists in Houston. He came. I don't remember whether that was before or after the debate, but I think it was before. I can't remember.

But I do remember thinking, that is the.... I thought he could win from the very first, and that's not praising myself in retrospect. I'm wrong a lot of the time. But he was in my mind, as he was, he started out as an underdog. I thought he could win. His convention performance and the operation of his organization in the events leading up to the nominating convention and then at the convention were really first rate.

DAITCH: Really.

RATHER: Now, among the things you look for in any national candidate particularly is known-name people willing to fall on hand grenades for you, people who really believe in you and believe in your mission; an ability to raise money; and organization. Those are sort of the checklist that you look for. And he had aces in the first three, without question. By the time we got to the convention in '60, he was clearly ahead in organization. For those reasons, I thought he could win.

But, the point is when he appeared before the Baptists in Houston, I thought he was absolutely terrific. Now, this is not [Inaudible] as a person. I just meant he was prepared, he stayed right in point focus, said all the right things, although it didn't seem all that.... He had that ability to be well prepared and well studied without to appear so. I haven't said that right. Sometimes you just say, oh, this guy's memorized this. It wasn't that. Anyway, when he made that appearance before the Baptists in Houston, I remember thinking not only do I think he can win, but, you know, I think he will win.

Now, I cannot remember whether that was before or after the debates. I just don't remember. I think it was before. I can't be certain. But the debate was, I thought it was clear.... I can't say, because I didn't think it at the time, well, there's the election. But I did say, that combined with the appearance before the Baptists – I grew up in Houston; I am a Baptist. I've strayed since then. But nonetheless, I mean I knew these people, and they would've took to him – if not win them over, at least get them thinking that he wasn't such a bad candidate. But the combination of those two....

I always thought he could win, but he was the underdog. When he made the Baptist thing I thought that. After the debate I thought that I'm not sure which one might have fueled the other. I can't remember the sequence. But he was so clearly superior in the debate. I'll tell you something else. It isn't true.... Well, I'll say I did not believe it to be true at the time, and I don't believe it to be true now, that if you listened to the debate on radio that Vice President Nixon [Richard M. Nixon] won.

The reason I say that is I was working at the television station in Houston, and, you know, I had work to do that night. I had worked in radio before, worked in radio for ten years before I came into television, certainly eight, which doesn't make me an expert on radio. But, on the other hand, I was accustomed to listening to radio really quite carefully. I saw most of the debate, but I heard some of it on radio, and I've listened to it since. But my impression at the time that it was – it wasn't a wipe-out. But I thought he prevailed on both radio and television. I know there's a rather popular theory, which is

believed not only by people who like President Nixon, but I just don't think it's true. I do think that his appearance and demeanor were superior. But also in the cut and thrust of the debate, insofar as there was any, I thought he prevailed.

And I remember having a discussion at the station, the television station.... Television stations had far fewer employees in those days than they now. And there were three people at the station that night: myself as the news director, there was a director, and a technician. And we watched it together. And then I went back to the [Inaudible] and heard some of it on the radio. And the technician, whose name I can't recall right at the moment – if I had a minute, I would – was a big Nixon supporter. The director, he was not a very politically aware person. But when we talked afterwards, the technician almost immediately said, "I think my guy's in trouble."

DAITCH: Really.

RATHER: Now beware of anecdotal evidence, but for whatever it may be worth that struck me. Because he was a rabid diehard, and clearly Richard Nixon was his candidate. When he said that, "I think my guy's in trouble," the director, as directors are prone to be, looked at the appearance of things, and he said, "Well, I didn't follow all that much of it." But he said, "The Yankee looked best." There were still some people who talked that way then. [Laughter]

DAITCH: Oh, yes. I'm from West Virginia, so we have a whole different.... But I wondered whether people sort of expected.... How you evaluated those debates was somewhat affected by your expectations.

RATHER: That's true.

DAITCH: People expected Nixon to wipe out....

RATHER: John Kennedy definitely benefited from low expectations. I wouldn't say low. Lower than President Nixon because of President Nixon's experience. He definitely benefited. He exceeded expectations, and Vice President Nixon did not live up to expectations, and he did benefit from that. I've maintained about this, and I may be wrong, but my thoughts were at the time, my thoughts were since then, and I think now – and before the last presidential campaign I went back and looked – and a lot of people who talk about the debates either didn't see them or haven't seen them recently. But John Kennedy was very good in the debates. Perfect he was not, but he was very good.

And you could say put the lie to it, but I think if there had been no television, he would have been judged to have been very good if there'd only been radio. If there had been neither radio nor television, if they'd been in some era where they were just standing in front of a crowd, I think he still would have been judged very good. And for whatever reason, I think--honest minds can differ about this--but President Nixon was nowhere near at his best. Why that was, I don't know. What I'm trying to say, and I've over-talked it already, I don't think it was his beard line or the fact that he did makeup or even the fact that he perspired. That certainly didn't help him because that's just not a plus. But I

think those things in some ways have been over-emphasized.

DAITCH: So you would emphasize the content more and the substance?

RATHER: I would. The content and such things as posture, voice timbre. But I thought President Kennedy was certainly superior on content. They were both good. What comes to mind is you'd trade straight up right now to have either one of them in terms of being steeped in subject matter and not trying to regurgitate something they have memorized. That's my thought right now.

DAITCH: Absolutely. As Kennedy, as his presidency moved along, I've seen some of the press conferences. You weren't in Washington? Did you ever have any....

RATHER: I'm trying to think. No, no. I'd been to some during the campaign, not during Washington. But he was very good at press conferences. And in his use of humor, he was at or near his best in press conferences. I think it helped him. But the fact that he – for future historians, I suppose – that President Kennedy brought a freshness to the presidency that was, one, badly needed, overdue, because the country had moved on after World War II.

But also contrasted with the Eisenhower [Dwight D. Eisenhower] Administration, and let me say I think that President Eisenhower was sometimes underestimated as a president; but, you know, Eisenhower was older, father figure, general of the Army, president of a great university, president of the country – it stood out all the more in contrast. But it would be almost impossible to overstate the sense of a fresh start, a new generation, first president born in the 20th century. I think that's right. You know, all of that. We talk about the aura of the Kennedy presidency. I think that is a very, very large part of it.

Now, such things as having open press conferences, and having regular, open, take-on-all-comers press conferences, in which the president was clearly enjoying himself and engaged, was something, and televised, all of those things made something new. You say, well, President Roosevelt [Franklin Delano Roosevelt] had frequent press conferences, and he was clearly engaged and sort of liked them, but they weren't on television. So, you know, it added to this sense of a new generation, the torch being passed, a whole new start, freshness, open the windows and doors and let a lot of clean, fresh air in. Now, I know there were those who think it was calculated to convey that, and maybe it was. But it worked.

DAITCH: Sure. And it would have been hard to do if he were a different person.

RATHER: Oh, yes.

DAITCH: It was part of who he was.

RATHER: That's true. But in answer to your question, no, I was not at any of the Washington news conferences. I began covering civil rights. The civil

rights movement was beginning to stir and beginning to pick up momentum, beginning to move, by the time I came into television in the sixties, 1960. By the time I got to CBS in 1962, and was assigned to cover Dr. Martin Luther King [Martin Luther King, Jr.] on a daily basis and chronicle the movement, I became aware early on – and I thought I'd mention this to you because the thought is neither original nor profound, but it's worth marking – that both with those within the civil rights movement, including Dr. King and people close, and those outside the group, both friend and foe, that even as late as early 1962, the Kennedys, and that included President Kennedy, did not have the reputation of being civil rights champions. If anything, it gave them a lot of trouble.

The best, I think.... Well, the view from within the civil rights movement was the best they got was they got fence-sitters. That they didn't quite get it. They certainly weren't on the train, weren't on board. And rightly or wrongly, I think Robert Kennedy got blamed for that. Some of that was just sort of in the spirit of, well, you know, nobody wants to blame the president, so somebody's got to be blamed, so Bobby took the heat.

But for whatever it may be worth, certainly early in '62, until James Meredith [James H. Meredith] entered the University of Mississippi, and they had the great difficulty there, it appeared to a lot of people, and it appeared to me, that they didn't quite know what to do with or about Dr. King and the movement. Perhaps too harsh a judgment, but a classic case of trying to have it all ways. To be honest, I thought they had their eye clearly on the '64 elections, which would not have been an indictable offense.

DAITCH: No.

RATHER: And things changed after the Meredith, in the fall of '62, when Meredith entered the University of Mississippi. I remember the President made one of his better speeches trying to, you know, exert some leadership. I remember seeing that speech only on television. I thought that was really smart. He referred to the fact, and it was a fact, that at least by a percentage of population basis, and I think maybe just straight out, that Mississippians had been given more Congressional Medals of Honor than any other state. I remember saying to myself, now, that's really smart because it speaks to the, you know, that gets through.

DAITCH: Mmmm hmmm. Absolutely.

RATHER: I watched it in Oxford, Mississippi, I think. Maybe Jackson. But anyway, I was saying to myself, you know, these people don't want to hear any lectures from a Harvard guy from Massachusetts whose father has tons of money. But I thought to myself, that would crack through.

DAITCH: Did it seem to – I don't know who you were with when you watched the speech....

RATHER: I was with Mississippians. But I knew Mississippi, and knew Mississippians pretty well. That cut through, and all the more so because it was credible coming from Kennedy, who'd seen a lot of the war himself. And also he said it in a way that convinced me and them that he was sincere about it. But

that's just a small point that I just remember saying that really cuts through some. But my major point here is to say, if I haven't taken too long, is that through '60, '61, I thought they were handling the whole business of race with the proverbial kid gloves. When I came to CBS in '62 and it got to be my job to cover the civil rights movement, they certainly were not champions of the civil rights movement. More of a fence-sitter, can't we find a way to sort of finesse this attitude. And they tried to deal with Ross Barnett [Ross R. Barnett], who was the governor of Mississippi. And whatever else he was – if you liked him, I guess you'd say he was a staunch segregationist. If you didn't, he was a deeply rooted bigot.

There were people around who said to President Kennedy, "You can't do business with this guy. You can't do business with these people." But they tried to do business with them. They tried to build back-room deals, backdoor. But when the Meredith entry resulted in violence, and he called in the Army, I think that was the cross-over point. You could almost feel it day by day after that, a different attitude, that you can't do business with Barnetts and Wallaces [George C. Wallace] and the Leander Perezes [Leander H. Perez] of the world. Those were the three big segregation leaders of the time. Part of it was real politics. They said: Listen, we tried to do business. We tried to make deals. We tried to do it the way politicians do. Okay, let's get in the back room and let's work out something here.

DAITCH: And they shared a party.

RATHER: Yes. And it was critical to the party. But after the thing at Ole Miss with Meredith, you could feel it changing. That, by the way, is not the history written by most of the members of the administration at the time.

DAITCH: How do you think that your thoughts, the things that you saw, and the people you talked to, how does it differ, aside from what you already told me? Any specific instances of when somebody said something or did something that seemed like a turning point to you?

RATHER: You mean with the President?

DAITCH: The President or even staff members, people that you perceived to be representatives of the administration.

RATHER: Well, I didn't have much contact with staff members, certainly not the upper reaches. What I do remember in being.... What I found repulsive is that the FBI did – they were intertwined. [ASIDE CONVERSATION] But I was at Rice Stadium in Houston when President Kennedy committed us to the moon. And I remember what the grass felt like, as a matter of fact, it was a grass stadium. And it was, without apologizing, a thrilling moment. And he deliberately addressed it very well. "We'll have a man on the moon before the decade is out."

What I remember about that is that – and I have a very vivid memory of it. I was already kind of a space buff. Once Sputnik got up, I was quite interested in space. I never was an expert on it, but anyway, it was a thrill to me to be there and hear him say it. As a

reporter, I often fault myself because I missed the significance of that at the time. But at least with that, you know, you had to be pretty dumb, and at least I wasn't that, for saying, you know, this is really....

Now, it was met with so much skepticism. And what I remember about the staff that day, and I could be very wrong about this, I couldn't name a single person from the staff who was there, with the possible exception of Pierre [Pierre E.G. Salinger], but I'm not even positive he was. I just remember that with his staff it wasn't that big a deal. Because this was really major. And I had the sense that they.... My impression at this time is that they weren't aware of what a historic moment it was. To them it was, okay, it's a speech, it's a good speech. Yeah, that's good stuff. And rightly or wrongly, and I may be wrong about this, that I thought that it was something that Vice President Johnson [Lyndon Baines Johnson] was really interested in and had really pushed, after all it was coming to Houston. Johnson had something to do with it.

And there were a couple of Johnson people around, and they didn't say that: They didn't say, hey, this is our guy's idea. But the dynamic at the time was that President Kennedy delivered his speech very well, thrilling speech. It was really.... He convinced you that he was determined to do it. And what his thoughts were and what his involvement, I still don't exactly know. But my impression at the time was this is not something his staff is into. They didn't hang out among the reporters and say, "Listen, dummy, this is a historic moment. We're going to do it."

Subsequently, I tried to do some reporting of it. And I think, without taking anything away from President Kennedy, that probably Vice President Johnson didn't get as much credit for pushing it, keeping it up on the agenda, as perhaps he deserves. I recognize that people discount that because I'm a Texan. But I would stand on my record: I never was a Johnson person. I had my troubles with him.

But in fairness, and for whatever it may be worth, that was my impression that day. It was my impression sometime after that. Not that President Kennedy wasn't committed; he was committed, fully, completely, totally. But I just remember that day the staff was not all that up on it. It may be as simple as they were just looking to move on, as staff people do. "Okay, we've got this done. Let's go to the next thing." But for whatever that might be worth.

DAITCH: That's interesting. Because I think you're right. I think Kennedy himself was committed. I think that he – my impression is that he was careful to learn from his science advisors whether it was a reasonable thing to say.

RATHER: Right.

DAITCH: And to try to commit to, and that he wanted to do it. But it's interesting that the staff maybe had other emphasis themselves.

RATHER: Well, they had other things, you know. The Test Ban Treaty was in the works. It may have already been announced by that time. I'd have to go back. But, you know, they had that. They had that whole thing with the Cubans. So they had a lot on their plate.

DAITCH: Sure they did, yes.

RATHER: Again, I don't think there's anything major there, I'm just footnoting it. On the civil rights thing, also. In the end they came around. Without the support of them, it wouldn't have been possible to achieve what was achieved. Sending the troops in was a very big thing. And we know now from papers and historical documents that it was, you know, President Kennedy.... One of the reasons he had the reputation in the movement of being on the fence and being slow, was he was very cautious. And I think, from my view, it's understandable. We're not the kind of country that likes to send troops in the streets. Troops are for overseas stuff.

But I had mentioned the FBI at the time to you. Somebody could make a big study of it sometime. Because the FBI was, to a much larger degree than people knew, they were so intertwined with local sheriffs and local law enforcement. To me, on the scene [Inaudible], they would stand aside while terrible crimes were being committed, and watch people get the hell beat out of them, buildings burn, and did nothing. And the defense always was, well, it's a local issue, it's a state issue.

And the reality, at least part of it was, that they depended on the local law enforcement people, many of whom were committing these crimes, sad to say but it's true, or at the very least acquiescent, were the bureau's main sources. I found that that increasingly bothered me. I said, "Look, you know, under whose command or whose jurisdiction...?" J. Edgar Hoover was still alive at that time, but Robert Kennedy was the attorney-general of the United States, and John Kennedy was the president. At least in theory, they either did know or should have known. Again, that may be too hard. Certainly, you know, he didn't discuss it, that Hoover had his own rule over there. But I did, by myself, think on any number of occasions, how can we let this happen?

DAITCH: Right.

RATHER: Not in my name. I mean in the name of the United States of America, this is terrible. I didn't understand it at the time. It may be, as you say, that they just didn't want to deal with Hoover, didn't want to touch Hoover. It's hard for me to believe that they didn't know it was happening. At least Bobby Kennedy knew what was happening.

DAITCH: Maybe didn't care to see.... I suspect that some of these things happened, and they're things that are small in the big world.

RATHER: Well, we're going into the past with it, and that's true, that one must allow for light and shade and the political dynamic of needing the South, needing these states where a number of these terrible things were happening. Also recognizing how explosive race is – was then and remains now – all over the country. One needs a well-rounded view. My only point here is that so often, and I say this and admire both John and Robert Kennedy, that they're pictured in all of this as tremendous civil rights champions which they deserve in many important ways. They didn't start out that way and developed slower than is generally perceived. And then there were these gaps. I would say the FBI was one.

DAITCH: Sure. That's interesting. One of the things about the FBI story is it seems to me that the Cold War was such a pervasive thing in that era. And if you consider the stories of civil rights separately from the Cold War....

RATHER: Absolutely.

DAITCH: That you don't really get the big picture of why the FBI ran amuck in so many different ways. And some of these things were done in the name of the Cold War.

RATHER: I think that's true. That it's easy to say now, as I do say, well, you know, "holy" national unity, there's nothing more important in the Cold War than unity. And these difficulties over race that threaten to split us apart, that I say this in no self-serving way, I think it's a little off topic anyway. I've interviewed Fidel Castro, I think, 11 or 12 times. And the first time I interviewed him in 1975 or '76, he went on a whole rant about how he didn't understand why every black person in the United States wasn't going to come to his speech. And he didn't say it directly, but his implication was, you know, "I spent a lot of money and a lot of effort, and now the Russians are paying it, in trying to foment. And none of its worked. And I don't understand these people."

But now back to the point, and I think you're right. I think the Cold War just was so over-arching that the civil rights movement was seen as something that could be apart. And the FBI was given tremendous leeway to deal with spies and Soviet penetration. And so all of that had to be wrapped up. And about the widely rumored but, as far as I know, never nailed down, fear of J. Edgar Hoover by the Kennedys.... They had something, their father [Joseph P. Kennedy] had something to be hidden. That was true of every politician in the country. It certainly was true of Johnson. I don't mean that he had something on him. I don't know that. But they certainly feared he either had something on them, or if he didn't, he would get something.

DAITCH: Right.

RATHER: But anyway, for whatever reason, I felt the FBI handled themselves really…. It was disturbing at the time. And it was very disturbing to people in the movement, Dr. King and the people around him. Of course they had no idea of such things as taping. Well, I say they had no idea. To my knowledge, they had no idea. I think maybe a little later – we're talking now '62, '63 was my basic time covering the movement. I just don't think they imagined some of the things that it turns out the bureau did that they would actually do.

DAITCH: But they certainly knew that they weren't getting the support from them.

RATHER: No, no. It was more than that. It was the bureau.... It's a very complicated thing. But what they knew, it wasn't just a matter of staying neutral, which would have been terrible.

DAITCH: Bad enough.

RATHER: They thought the bureau was in some ways helping. At the very least helping by not even stepping in and enforcing the law. You'd say, well, what federal law would they.... [CHANGE TO SIDE B OF TAPE]

DAITCH: Exact things that I'm looking for, and want to know what you saw. These are important....

RATHER: One thing I saw – I never saw an indication that President Kennedy, John Kennedy, didn't get along with Lyndon Johnson. Now I was not privy to those. I never saw any animosity, hostility, in body language, language.... I'm not an authority on it, but I just don't think it was there with John Kennedy. I don't think Lyndon Johnson was his favorite person, but I think it wasn't there. What I did see is I don't think Robert Kennedy could stand him in any way, shape, or form. Now, that would make some sense if he just didn't even – you could just read.

John Kennedy had served with Lyndon Johnson in the Senate. They knew each other, knew each other pretty well, had taken each other's measure. But again, just from what you could see, I think that John Kennedy and Lyndon Johnson, neither was the other's favorite person, but they did have respect for one another, they understood one another, understood how regional differences affected politics. But Robert Kennedy, you could just see it. Any time he was in Lyndon Johnson's presence, it just radiated out from him: I can't stand this sonofabitch.

DAITCH: No kidding!

RATHER: Oh, yes. You don't have to be a mind reader or a body reader. It just radiated off him.

DAITCH: Wow!

RATHER: It's also true that with some members of Johnson's inner circle, namely John Connally [John B. Connally, Jr.], Connally, he didn't like John Kennedy, but he really abhorred Robert Kennedy. So any time the two of them would be together, They didn't get along; you could see it. But again, for whatever it's worth, John Kennedy and Lyndon Johnson, it seemed to me, had an understanding. If they had to pick somebody to go fishing with all day, they weren't going to pick the other guy. But Robert Kennedy just couldn't stand Johnson. For that matter, anybody around him, he just whew! And Connally, perhaps a little less so, but the same. I always had the impression that Connally would think of John Kennedy and say, you know, he's only about three quarters as good as I am. So why is he there, and I'm here?

DAITCH: Right, right. Well, you would've seen these guys together occasionally, from the Texas perspective.

RATHER: Yes, yes, yes. And when President Kennedy came to Texas, on the ill-fated trip on which he was assassinated, there was some of that. Bobby was not along on the trip, of course. There was some of that when the President was in San Antonio, Fort Worth, Houston. I was not in Fort Worth. But anyway, for whatever it's worth, that was my perception. It sometimes gets written now, "The Kennedys." Different personalities. Different relationships with Johnson.

DAITCH: It's an important distinction, I think. It's funny that you say that it was so obvious that Bobby just....

RATHER: Oh, Bobby might as well have been wearing a sandwich board that said, "I hate this guy."

DAITCH: Wow! So just bristling.

RATHER: Yes, he was bristling, and a school child could have recognized it.

DAITCH: That's funny. I can't imagine why he would have.

RATHER: Well, it's only worth mentioning because, again, people who were close to Senator Kennedy, Bobby Kennedy, would want to soften that. And even some of the Johnson people have softened it. But I assure you, during that period, if you'd been in the room, that would have been your impression.

DAITCH: So tell me about.... I almost don't even like talking about that day in Dallas because it's moving even to me. It must have been an incredible experience for you and pretty terrible.

RATHER: Well, it was. And I've written about this. But what happened with me – and I think this happened to a lot of journalists, but I can only speak for myself – the jolt of realizing he was dead.... First it was the jolt that he'd been shot at. Then it was a jolt that not only had he been shot at but he'd been hit. And, you know, Texas is a gun culture. If you look at the culture, you're hit with a high-powered rifle, it's going to be serious. Then the ultimate jolt of he's dead. It certainly was an emotional shock.

But very quickly after that, I was so totally focused on trying to record it that my emotions were at bay. And it didn't hit me until I guess about seven or eight days later. It was a delayed reaction because I was so focused on trying to find out what had happened, what [Inaudible]. What the tennis players call "getting zoned." Getting in the zone. If there is such a thing as a reportorial zone, I got there pretty quickly. It was certainly never to be forgotten. The experience that we had, that CBS News had, the added experience of we knew he was dead before the rest of the news people.

DAITCH: How did that happen?

RATHER: Well, some of it was serendipity. And just things that happened. It's a

fairly long story. But we had.... I was past the school book depository waiting for a film drop along there, and I didn't know what had happened. I knew something terrible had happened. So I rushed back to our local station for a feed, which was fairly close by. And the news director of that station was at the Trademark where he [JFK] was to speak. So I got through to the hospital, and it wasn't very clear what was happening at the hospital: First it was something serious. And then people had told me, a priest and a doctor there, said, "He just had last rites." And then the guy at the Trademark said that – I think it was the president of the university there – somebody had told him he was dead. So we put that together. Just like if you're working a police beat in Houston, Texas, where we have the advantage. And there wasn't a doubt in my mind that he was dead. We reported it on the radio and held back on television.

Anyway, in the great scheme of things, it's not much. My recollection is that they announced his death around one o'clock. But before that, he was dead. And I remember on the radio they played the national anthem when they announced it. That sort of cracked through the zone. Then it got right back. It quickly followed that incredible sequence of events. Oswald [Lee Harvey Oswald] was arrested, you know. Sunday morning, transporting him, he got assassinated. It began to be, certainly by Sunday, after Oswald was shot, there was this fantasy world of why he did it. Literally, you see, is this really happening? Is this really happening? Of course reporters are trying to say, well, this is what appears to be happening. But what's really happening?

And there was not much, but there was some thought that even after the official announcement of President Kennedy's death, it was, well, can this be real? Is this something you do with the Cold War? Maybe he's not really dead. Maybe for some reason we don't understand they've announced that he's dead. I don't want to overstate that. It was just such a bizarre, incredible few days. Those days, those four days, Friday, Saturday, Sunday, and Monday, had an other-world quality to them. One, there were some questions, well, you know, okay, they've announced he's dead, but is he really dead? And you'd say, well, of course, why would they announce it if he wasn't dead. But it was just so....

Oh, another thing was, when Oswald was arrested, well, it happened pretty quickly. Too quick. And we know that frequently in a crisis the first thing you do turns out to be wrong. So there were all these questions about they picked up this guy. He doesn't look like anybody who'd kill anybody. I started to say a lot of that. There was some of that. Then he was shot. Somebody obviously shot him, but is he really dead or is there a cover-up? Those sorts of questions were, say, in the deep background. But the over-arching reaction was one of aching sadness and shock. You know, the shock, it certainly reverberated through the weekend and well beyond. The initial shock, the announcement of the death that afternoon sort of went through that afternoon. By Saturday this shock became.... Initially it was more shock. Then by Saturday it became more sadness than shock. Sunday shock came back in as the dominant feeling with the shooting of Oswald.

The funeral, which.... I've never thought Mrs. Kennedy [Jacqueline Bouvier Kennedy] got enough credit for understanding the importance the ritual would have to the country, of being able to put herself into everything she had to do, perform. And I don't mean that in a derogatory way. But to do what she had to do, the children do what they had to do, that whatever else anybody thought of her before, then, or later, I never felt she

got as much credit as she deserved. I was not at the funeral. I was in Dallas continuing to get the story there. But I was just mesmerized by the funeral. I know she had a lot of help with things like the riderless horse and that. But ever since that moment, nothing she could do, marrying Onassis [Aristotle Onassis] or anything else, could take away the fact that she did, really, the country a tremendous service.

DAITCH: And she was very involved in it.

RATHER: Yes, I know she was. Which I didn't know at the time, but at least I.... What we know about death in the family, we know how hard it is to have your wits about you. Much less do what this lady's done. And things like the children and all they had to do. And things that she did, as only she could do it. Somebody might suggest you do this or that but we know enough about it to know it was her. And I wondered right from the beginning, there wasn't much time to wonder over those four dark days! But pretty quickly it seemed President Johnson and Robert Kennedy were going to be at each other's throats, as indeed they were. It was covered pretty well throughout the fall. Of course President Johnson had the upper hand.

But I do remember thinking Tuesday or Wednesday of the week following the assassination it was very interesting. Because I never believed for a moment that Robert Kennedy would become a part of the Johnson Administration as such. I remember there was some talk in '64 that maybe President Johnson would have Kennedy be his vice president, one he may have had for a second. I never believed he'd offer it to him, and I never believed he'd take it.

DAITCH: Right. You'd better tell me about the Zapruder [Abraham Zapruder] tape before we run out of time. Don Hewitt told me a story about that. We need to get your....

RATHER: Well, I don't know. Don has written three or four different versions.

DAITCH: We need to get yours.

RATHER: Yes. Well, we started.... First of all, hand-held, home movie cameras were out at that time, but were not nearly as pervasive as they became later. But in the confusion, the melee of coverage, trying to find anybody who had a camera of any kind that was preferably a home movie camera, that I'm not sure whether Zapruder himself called. But we got a call – I didn't take the call – that Zapruder had home movie stuff, and that he had "captured the whole thing." Now remember this is film, not tape. It had to be processed.

DAITCH: Oh, right.

RATHER: And so we quickly said, well, we'd make the local arrangements to get it processed. Which we did. I don't remember every detail about that. We got the film. We called some people. First of all, it was a weekend. Second, it was the night of the assassination. So we stayed up a lot to get this film

processed, and we had to get it processed quickly.

Certainly by the time the film got finished, I think poorly, but he had this attorney. And the attorney called and said – I didn't talk to the attorney directly – he said, "We have the film. Meet me in my office." And I told him right away, you know, that we must get this receipt for it. He said, "We can talk about it at the office." When I got to his office, he explained what the procedure would be. He'd take us in and show the film one time, we could see it one time and one time only. Then he did entertain bids. Dick Stahle, Richard Stahle, who's now retired, a friend of mine, was there for *Time Magazine*. And I had hoped that he would . . . I had hoped that, because we had known about and had it processed and so forth, that maybe we would get a show of our own.

But how Stahle even knew about the film, I'm not sure, but I think they took it to other reporters. Stahle was there, and I was sorry to see Stahle there because he's a very tough competitor, and he's a very smart guy. Also, Time-Life in those days had very deep pockets. Anyway, he set up his projector. It came up how short it was, but everything was there. So as soon as the film was over, we had discussed it. I got up and left the meeting. It was near our studios, from where we were broadcasting from our local station. And I basically said, "I'll be back." I went over to describe what I had seen. I told Hewitt that Zapruder footage was very clear. They said, "Well, get on. You describe what you've seen." Which I did. I first described it to them. Frankly, I thought they ought to dump the thing now. There were others we could have used with other views. Given the fact that I hadn't seen it for much time, the description I'd given on the air was very accurate, that those with other views were how could you have not picked up on this? How could you use this and not the other? Only saying that as they smile. By the way, this was news.

There was a lot of discussion, not just with.... Actually a guy named Ernie Mizer was the most important man. Mizer was the guy with CBS coverage, and he wanted to know how did we get our hands on it? There was a discussion about, well, why don't you just grab the film and run with it? But mythology has sort of taken hold of that whole thing. First of all, it wasn't really practical to do, even if we'd wanted to do it. It was on a projector; it was their projector. So, you know, the story gets better as each person tells it over time. The fact is that we saw the film, saw – we were seeing the assassination. That was news. And we were only the on the air constantly. I went right back to describe what I saw as best I could.

Before I went back over to the attorney's office, they put somebody from Business Affairs, I can't remember who it was. I think it was a guy named Cleveland Clem or something. Anyway, he said, "Well, you know, you offer him...." I think it was like $3,000. We were paying $10,000 top. These are 1963 dollars. And I told him. I said, "Well, I don't know if we can get it for that." When I got back over, the attorney said, "We sold it to Time-Life."

DAITCH: Oh. Already done!

RATHER: And I was really stunned by that. I said, "Well, wait a minute. We haven't even...." He said, "Well, they made a preemptive bid." Now, the story has always been that what they did was they said $50,000 and you can have it now." for an exclusive. And $50,000 in '63 would be, I think, about a half million dollars now. Remember I had $10,000 top. But while Stahle has never admitted it, I think, they

gave $100,000 for it. That's what I think they gave. But nonetheless, all I know is that the publisher said $50,000, and that the attorney said a million $99, and I really tried to argue with him and saying, well, you haven't even heard what we were going to offer. Tried to confuse him to let us play it one time.

But it was over. Not only was I disappointed by the results and angry about it; I'm a biased witness, it's true. But I thought it was really important that people see the footage then. That it was a way of keeping it off the air. I had my thoughts then: Is this something the government had done? Is this connected with the government? I don't think so. I don't think so mainly because I know Stahle, and he's a journalist through and through. But I have often wondered what would have happened if we'd made the show at the time. I think for one thing there would be a whole lot fewer conspiracy theories. But that was that story. I know Don is a good storyteller in a dramatic fashion.

DAITCH: Right.

RATHER: [Inaudible]. I thought I remembered about Don at the time, just sort of jumping up and down. One of the few times I've known him when he was almost out of control. But Mizer is now deceased. He was the guy who kept a steady hand on us. And also he thought carefully about giving the change. The first time I described it, I described it as Mrs. Kennedy was trying to get out of the limousine. After the first time, Mizer.... I think Hewitt first must have said, "Take that part out because people are complaining." And I remember saying, "That's what I remember seeing," and it was sort of, well, "I know you've seen that, but you didn't see that."

And this has gotten to be a minor controversy. I had thought it was no disservice to her. She would not have been trying to get out of something, probably, without instructions from the Secret Service agents when it happened. But it all got caught up in, and everybody's trying to legend it that she was trying to help the Secret Service men that were there. I don't know that she ever spoke to it. But I do remember the first time I described it to them that, you know, Mrs. Kennedy tried to help the President. Then she crawled in the back of the limo trying to get out. It was Hewitt who first said, "You can't say that." I said, "Well, what are you telling me? This is what I saw."

DAITCH: That's what it looked like.

RATHER: He said, "Well, you just didn't see that." Then Mizer came in. He was a steadier hand. He said, "Well, here's the thing, that you've only seen it once. You can't rule out the possibility. And it really takes away from the overall…. It strikes an emotional chord with people." And so I left it out of subsequent descriptions. Even now, you know, I laugh about it. God, we really [Inaudible]. I mean we're not victims of anything. It's just so much was happening so quickly. The Zapruder film negotiation alone was full-time work.

DAITCH: Oh, yes, yes. It was crazy. And I heard Bob Schaefer [Robert Schaefer] on the radio just yesterday or the day before. I guess he has a book out in which he's describing bringing.... Lee Harvey Oswald's mother just happened to call, and he just happened to bring her.

RATHER: I mean I called Scheefer; that's where I met him because he had this thing [Inaudible]. But I said something to Mr. Zapruder in the Office of Public Service, in a desperate effort to get – to be assured, once I came back, that the deal was closed. You know, I thought in my head, maybe I'd made a mistake, you know, what if? What if I had stayed and all these thing? But things go that way.

DAITCH: Sure.

RATHER: To pay that kind of money in those days was virtually unheard of. I mean these days people do it all the time.

DAITCH: It's amazing.

RATHER: But that's journalism. What did Don tell you? He told you that I should have grabbed it?

DAITCH: Yes, hit the guy, run off with the tape, and then take the tape back.

RATHER: Yes, yes. Well, it makes a nice story.

DAITCH: It does. It's very dramatic. He said he would have done it.

RATHER: And there's always somebody around to tell you what you should have done.

DAITCH: Exactly. But it does make a good story. We'll keep you for the historical record, but we'll tell his story from now until Doomsday.

RATHER: Sure.

DAITCH: So afterwards, you continued to cover Texas? Or you moved pretty quickly to the White House?

RATHER: No, I was moved to the White House pretty quickly after it happened. The assassination was in November, and I came to be a White House correspondent the end of January.

DAITCH: I'm told.... I actually spoke with Mr. Stanton [Frank Stanton] the other day, and he says that your work in Dallas really brought you to people's attention, I guess.

RATHER: Well, he would know. You know, I was a junior correspondent in those days. I had been on television quite a lot because of the civil rights movement. Clearly when you have something like this, you're centered, and our coverage was good. I've always been proud of our coverage. Of course it may be

that all the coverage was good. Finding the Zapruder tape and getting it, you say, well, you got lucky. But it was no small thing.

DAITCH: Sure.

RATHER: Also we got it processed. That, by the way, is a good story. If we were going to do anything, that would have been the place to do it.

DAITCH: Getting it processed.

RATHER: Well, mighta, coulda, shoulda. Tell them you're in the process of trying to make a copy. That's going to slow down the process. It's also a crime. It didn't belong to us. But that's something could have been done. We also could have, I think, there would have been an opportunity when it came off the processor to take it and show it, and then give it to him. I don't remember his attorney being there when the film was processed. But again, mighta, coulda, shoulda.

DAITCH: Yes. And as you say, it would have been illegal – some of that, at least.

RATHER: Well, it not only would have been illegal, but it would have been unethical.

DAITCH: Yes.

RATHER: I'm sure of the front-page sort of thing. And if we'd have done it they could sue you or something. But I remember seeing it, and I think my eyes literally bulged. Being in that small room in the throes about my case to report. My eyes bulged and I thought "people have to know about this." You see, nobody knew anything before we saw the film. We had wildly conflicting eyewitness reports as to where the shots had come from, from what direction. Once even the description was told, the story came much sharper into focus, and my only thought was to get out and tell people what I'd seen.

DAITCH: Yes. I can't imagine what.... I mean even now you see that, and it's just so.... Even after all the years of much more graphic things that you see on television and perhaps even since then, there's still something about that that is just horrifying.

RATHER: True. But, you know, it told you so much. I remember thinking.... I don't know what I was thinking at the time. But very quickly anyone that was shown the film knew that this shot didn't come from far away, you know. He wasn't shot at 500 yards or something like that. It was pretty much up close.

DAITCH: Well, and you're familiar with guns.

RATHER: Yes. You saw how much the Secret Service was taken by surprise. All of

it. It's only a few frames of film that really told a great deal of the story.

DAITCH: It's important stuff.

RATHER: What else can I help you with?

DAITCH: The only thing is maybe a little follow-up. We talked a little bit about Robert Kennedy, which of course the library also has great interest in his life. Tell me what you.... My understanding has been that he really sort of changed, especially on the civil rights issue. What was your...?

RATHER: I think he did change on the civil rights issue. I don't think it was a sudden vision, but I think he changed. And I agree that the best thing about Robert Kennedy, among the best things, is that he continued to grow. The nature of who he was was that at times you could see him growing. I'm not a believer that he changed in this way, that there was in his life.... There was always about Bobby a certain coldness about him in dealing with outsiders. How he was with his family and his friends and such people, I don't know. The contrast with Jack when he was still alive – as I mentioned before – he stood out in contrast, but long after John Kennedy was gone. That in things like this, at Washington cocktail parties and social things, as I said, you know, President Kennedy gave you the sense he was always right there. Bobby never gave me that feeling. Maybe it was something personal, but I don't think so. It was pretty much the way he was. I'm saying the period 1960 to '66, even as late as '68, that he was one of those people. He wasn't dodgey-eyed, he [Inaudible].... He was always looking over your shoulder, scanning the room, who was there, who was important, who were the most important people here. And I never had a sense that he was with you. I would say others who worked with him had the same impression, but they liked him. He had a cold handshake. Cold is too strong. He didn't have a warm handshake. Didn't give you that sense he was with you, instead he was kind of looking over your shoulder, as I said.

He had a restlessness about him. It was said that John Kennedy had, at least conveyed this thing, terrific confidence. With Bobby it wasn't that he lacked confidence; he didn't have that aura of confidence his brother had. But it wasn't lacking confidence. It was just a kind of nervousness, jumpiness, energy. None of this [Inaudible]. But when he, sometime in the period – I didn't see that much of him during the period '66, '67; I was in Vietnam for a year then. But when he started running in '68, there was a changed quality to him. It was hard to put your finger on it – that he was definitely calmer. And he seemed, I don't want to say he seemed surer of himself, but he seemed a little more at peace with himself.

What else? On things like civil rights, he definitely changed. On the war, I hesitate to say this for the Kennedy Library. I never could be absolutely certain whether he changed on the war because he really deeply believed that the war was wrong or had gone wrong; or whether it was just a combination of detesting Johnson and catching the wave of anti-war feeling which was definitely building, and seeing that Gene McCarthy [Eugene J. McCarthy] was hooking onto young people and sort of catching that wave. This may be unfair to him. But, on the other hand, this is what the voters do.

DAITCH: Absolutely.

RATHER: On civil rights, absolutely. He was never opposed and he really grew and that was deep and abiding. About the war, I'm just not sure. I wasn't sure at the time. What I was sure of is that he wanted to beat Johnson and was pretty sure he could. And I think he would have. But he had around him a very good organization. And you can say, "Well, of course, his brother had that." His brother ran in 1960, and this was '68. There were some of the same people around many of the same people, which told me a lot about him. He was very aware of the and organized.

What I should mention, what had changed about Bobby is that he became a really good speaker. [Inaudible]. And that was the way in which he really improved. If you had heard him make a speech, a talk, a speech in '63, '64, '65, and then heard him in '68, now, those who admired him would say that came as he sort of stood by his convictions; he was speaking from conviction. And while I didn't know him or what was inside him, I'm prepared to believe that. I was thinking he used to say this I believe, these things I believe, including, I think, that he thought – setting aside Johnson as the interloper, Johnson whom his brother never should have chosen for vice president, all of those feelings which I think he had – I think he really became convinced that Johnson was not best for the country, and that he might not win in '68 if he ran. That is, Johnson might not.

The play that's always interested me is that Johnson got out in large measure because he didn't want to lose to Bobby Kennedy. Cut it eight ways from center, that was a major factor in his getting out. There were a lot of other reasons, but that was right up there. Now, after Robert Kennedy was assassinated, there was no question in my mind that Lyndon Johnson wanted to get back in and intended to get back in. And he was, oh, Connally was a leader and sort of marshaling things together. This is well known, but sometimes I think the emphasis is not given to it, that he really wanted to get back in and thought he could get back in. He was going to have a summit with the Russians just before the Democratic Convention. The plan was he'd have the summit with the Russians, he'd strike some big new peace deal with the Russians, and then he would walk into the Democratic Convention like Caesar, and the convention would move to nominate him.

A funny thing happened. The Russians pulled the rug out from underneath him. Now whether they did so to insure that he wouldn't get the nomination, we'll never know. I'm quite sure that's a remote theory, but I wouldn't leave it out. But what we do know is they moved into Czechoslovakia to secure the so-called Czech Spring ["Prague Spring"]. They did that at the very moment the Johnson was supposed to go; just about ready to take off. And of course then he couldn't go to the summit because the Russians had attacked Czechoslovakia, and the whole thing collapsed.

Now, I know I'm not the only one, but it may be a minority view, I actually think there's a pretty good chance that would have happened. I believed then and believe now that what Johnson had in mind was proposing a coalition ticket of himself and Nelson Rockefeller [Nelson A. Rockefeller]. Rockefeller's move to the Republican party had collapsed. What Johnson had in mind was to propose a Johnson-Rockefeller ticket. By the way, slip this at the bottom of the page. Johnson long believed that Nixon would be the Republican nominee, before anyone else that I know of actually talked about Nixon as

being the nominee.

DAITCH: He was such an astute man.

RATHER: Once Bobby Kennedy got in. I do think that one of the reasons he got in was people told Bobby, "This Gene McCarthy, he's on to something here. If you don't get it and get in pretty quickly, you can wait your turn once he got in. If Johnson had chosen to fight him on his terms, well, listen, it's not as if we don't have some things that are at our disposal here as an incumbent president.

DAITCH: Sure.

RATHER: But there were those who said you can beat this back in the Northern primaries. They'll be tough, but once things turn to the South and West. But Johnson didn't believe it, that it would get better. Johnson really, truly hated that Bobby's campaign was doing as well as it was doing. This was pretty hard for him to get down. But then after the assassination of Bobby Kennedy, then he definitely wanted to come back. I think it was one reason Humphrey [Hubert H. Humphrey] had such a hard time.

DAITCH: Did you talk to the Johnson Library?

RATHER: To...?

DAITCH: The Johnson Library?

RATHER: No. I know the library, and I have appeared at the library, but not in years.

DAITCH: They have an oral history program, too, and I'm thinking that....

RATHER: You know, I think a long time ago once I may have spoken to them. It's been so long ago. But theirs is a very good library.

DAITCH: Yes, it is.

RATHER: But later they had a lot more money.

DAITCH: Absolutely. Well, [Inaudible].

RATHER: It isn't just money, though. I do give them credit. I don't know who is really responsible for that library. The Nixon Library has tremendous funds; it's never been short of money. It may be my bias, but I don't think it's as good as the Johnson.

DAITCH: I've never been down there, but I've heard really good things about it.

RATHER: You should go. One of the best things I know about it is that they really dealt with the Vietnam War. I was surprised.

DAITCH: Absolutely.

RATHER: That they put it up and how they dealt with it, very straightforwardly.

DAITCH: Yes. I understand Johnson told them specifically, "We will not hide anything. This is all going to be exactly as it was."

RATHER: Well, you have to respect that.

DAITCH: Absolutely.

RATHER: Whereas I think the Nixon Library is sort of the history of the Nixon Administration as told by Hans Christian Anderson. Richardborough.

DAITCH: It's not what the rest of us know.

RATHER: I probably need to go fairly soon. Is there anything else I can help you with?

DAITCH: Not that I can think of.

RATHER: [Inaudible].

DAITCH: I appreciate your time so much.

RATHER: What's my old friend Sid Davis doing these days? I haven't spoken to him for a long time.

DAITCH: He's lecturing some. He's just having a good time. He likes doing the lecturing, and he was wonderful. He's such a nice man.

RATHER: He is indeed a nice man. He's a nice man, and he's a very good reporter.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

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Name List