

William Barry, Oral History Interview – RFK#3, 10/22/1969
Administrative Information

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Biographical Note

Barry (1927-2018), Special Agent with the Federal Bureau of Investigation, security expert, and personal bodyguard to Robert F. Kennedy [RFK] in the 1968 Presidential campaign. In this interview Barry discusses RFK's relationship with the FBI among other issues.

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Oral History Interview

Of

William Barry

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William Barry – RFK #3

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Third Oral History Interview

with

WILLIAM BARRY

October 22, 1969
New York, New York

By Roberta W. Greene

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

GREENE: Okay, why don't you begin by telling what you and other FBI [Federal Bureau of Investigation] agents were expecting when Robert Kennedy was named as attorney general in 1960?

BARRY: A majority of agents were probably contemporaries, obviously, so it was rather odd having an attorney general the same age as a young agent. We expected, probably, more of an emphasis on organized crime, which did come about, because he was so interested in organized crime. Other than that he was an unknown party as far as a lawyer or a law enforcement official goes.

GREENE: How did your own relationship with him develop? How did you become his personal aide?

BARRY: I really don't know of the Bureau inception of it, but the office in Washington -- the seat of government -- called the New York office and asked the SAC [Special Agent in Charge] to appoint two agents out of the office of fifteen hundred and have those two agents meet the Attorney General when he arrived at La Guardia Airport and, in fact, probably thereafter if the attorney general so desired. My partner, Pat

Henry [Francis P. Henry], and I were picked for this assignment. The first time I met him was at the airport, in LaGuardia Airport.

GREENE: Was this early in '61, after he'd been...

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BARRY: Yes, quite early in '61. Later Pat dropped out of the assignment; it just didn't seem to make sense to have two FBI agents -- Pat was 6'2" and I am 6'2" and it kind of crowded the car. He liked to sit up front, and one agent would be in the back; it just didn't work out. Finally, later on, it was just myself.

GREENE: What was actually involved in this? Just being with him when he came to New York?

BARRY: Yes, and then sometimes we took him over to New Jersey or a surrounding area at his pleasure, of course. He traveled in those days with an assistant director, Courtney Evans, and Courtney Evans was the one who would call. Actually it evolved that he would ask for me and give me the assignment directly, then I would coordinate with Courtney on what the attorney general needed.

GREENE: What was that generally?

BARRY: Mostly transportation. Then later on as the relationship developed, phone calls and getting people, getting him out of bed, packing his bag, and getting him to the airport, mostly, on time. Assistance to his family later on. It just got to be an all-encompassing type thing.

GREENE: Was there much security and advance preparation involved?

BARRY: None at all. He just arrived, gave me an address, and we'd go. He'd make a speech or something like that.

GREENE: Can you think of any interesting, important occasions like this that stand out that would be worth discussing?

BARRY: From an anecdotal...

GREENE: Yes.

BARRY: I was thinking of one last night. Actually, I'm thinking of the political race in New York now. Charlie Buckley [Charles A. Buckley] was running for his life against Jonathan Bingham. The attorney general traveled to the Bronx, made a speech, and then endorsed Charlie Buckley. At the Grand Concourse Hotel he was introduced

by a rabbi -- the audience was mostly Jewish. Buckley got up and thanked him, and before went out Bobby said, "My father would be glad I went down the line for good old Charlie." [Laughter]

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His early speeches were desperate; they were really bad -- halting and slow, and loaded with statistics. He'd come out and ask me how he did. So rather than merely being crudely frank, I set up a rating system -- one bell, two bells, and four bells would be a good one. Mostly it was just "one bell" in those days, but he got pretty good at the end. In fact, at the end of the '64 campaign, when I joined him and I heard him after this great exposure that he had, this daily speaking, I was amazed how he had improved.

GREENE: Was he doing anything professionally to improve it? Was he taking elocution lessons?

BARRY: He did take a series of four or five, personal instructions from somebody -- I don't know who it was. Then there were a lot of FBI stories about him. One agent was assaulted by the Mafia in Brooklyn. The attorney general visited him in the hospital, chatted with him, sat on the bed with him, sent flowers to his family. An attorney general never even talked to an agent, let alone find the hospital he was at and visit him. He was interested in almost anything that went on in the FBI. He had visited every major FBI office, and at the same time visiting jails and marshals offices. That was the first time that was ever done -- an attorney general doing it. Director Hoover [J. Edgar Hoover] never visited the offices he [Robert F. Kennedy] visited.

GREENE: Did you ever get the feeling that this might have been because he wanted to get more of a grasp of the FBI than previous attorneys general had had, or was it mainly a sense of making them feel like they were appreciated?

BARRY: No, I don't think it was either of those things. I think he was basically an activist, and I don't think he was directing any of these visits at the FBI. I think he felt that people in the Justice Department, whom the attorney general was responsible for, should see him and he should see what they're doing. Whether it was just once in his whole term he felt that he should get around and let people know that the attorney general did exist, that they were part of the Justice Department. He never told me that, but that's the way I felt about it. He never asked any embarrassing questions or tried to find out things about the various organizations that would give him an insight into those. I think he had a good insight, but the purpose of the visit was not to improve on it; it was to "show the flag," I think.

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GREENE: Who else did he travel with? Was Ed Guthman [Edwin O. Guthman] ever

along?

BARRY: Ed Guthman was always with him. Initially, it was John Seigenthaler -- Ed Guthman was John's assistant -- and then John left. It was always Ed Guthman, Courtney Evans and John Reilly; it got to be pretty much of a fun group. Different people, all of them different, and they had some interesting trips to share.

GREENE: Did you ever notice any resentment among the other agents because you were in this position?

BARRY: No. Actually it wasn't a position that would.... I don't know what frame of reference you mean. This assignment was a big headache; in other words, it wasn't something that people would be jealous of, or want, or even desire. It was an assignment on top of all the other work I had, so many times on weekends or late nights I had to be at work in the next morning. So this wasn't something that people wanted. You just got involved with him and you just did it, but not many agents would have done it or really wanted to do it.

GREENE: Was there any reluctance to discuss things in front of you, with the thought that they might go back to the attorney general?

BARRY: Oh no, not at all. You have to understand that I was not a Kennedy man, identified as such, as I am today. I was an FBI agent, dedicated, and a career person. I was chosen for it because of my record, initially, and I had no intention of ever leaving the FBI; my loyalty was to the FBI and J. Edgar Hoover. There wouldn't be any reason that the FBI would think, "Well, Bill Barry...." In fact, one of the reasons I was picked was because that was my reputation. You certainly wouldn't put a quisling....

GREENE: Did he ever discuss FBI matters with you? Was he interested in your opinion on things?

BARRY: In several cases.

GREENE: Anything worth discussing?

BARRY: Well, he asked me once -- I'm sure this would be of interest -- what I thought would happen when J. Edgar Hoover resigned

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or left because of his age. It wasn't any hint -- and I want to make that clear -- that he was going to remove him. That wasn't the basis of the conversation. Who would I think would make an ideal director of the FBI, what kind of person? So we had quite a

discussion on the at. I expressed an opinion who I thought would be satisfactory. I said that a person like John Glenn or Maxwell Taylor or Byron White -- someone with an unassailable reputation known to the American people -- should be picked, someone from outside the FBI, not a man from the inside.

GREENE: How did he react to this?

BARRY: You know, "uh, huh." He always asked an opinion, but never discussed it.

GREENE: What do you know about his relationships over at the FBI? Who was he most likely to talk to?

BARRY: Well, Courtney Evans would be the one in Washington certainly, and in New York it would be me. There were other agents assigned to him in other offices -- Chicago, Fort Wayne -- but it never developed the way it did, in those other offices, probably because he didn't visit them the way he would visit us in New York.

GREENE: Who over at Justice would normally represent him at the FBI?

BARRY: I think probably Ed Guthman, in many cases; it would depend. Guthman and Courtney Evans had a very nice relationship, so I imagine that would be it. If there was a criminal matter he would probably call Bill Hundley [William G. Hundley], who would call over to the bureau and get the answer, but he would probably call Courtney Evans.

GREENE: Did he ever express any feelings about Hoover with you, other than asking...

BARRY: He did, as a matter of fact. Early, when he was attorney general -- and I assume that's the frame of reference you have.

GREENE: Right.

BARRY: He said his father really respected Hoover, and that since he was attorney general he saw no reason to disagree with

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his father, it was the best organization he had, and he felt the best organization in government in point of efficiency and personnel. So initially, he had no -- that's not the way to put it. I think he was rather positive towards Hoover, initially.

GREENE: How did this change over the period he was attorney general?

BARRY: I think it changed because he was an activist and Hoover wasn't used to

dealing with a brother of a president. He tried to initiate Justice Department control over the FBI -- never quite successful, but he did change quite a few things. This conflict of Hoover protecting what he had built up, and the attorney general trying to push him into areas like civil rights and organized crime; naturally there was some friction. I'm not qualified, really, to talk about that relationship. I knew it existed, but I never discussed it.

GREENE: What about after the assassination? Were you aware of a strain then?

BARRY: I sure was. As a matter of fact, I was told by an individual in Washington that my relationship with Robert Kennedy wouldn't do me any good; in fact, it would hurt me in the bureau. This specific occasion was the morning of the Frank Sinatra Jr., kidnapping. The attorney general wanted to talk to Frank Sinatra, and I had no way of knowing how to reach Frank Sinatra. So I called the bureau in Washington and related my problems to the supervisor in charge. He told me that didn't I know that the days were over when the attorney general could get anything he wanted out of the FBI?

GREENE: What level was this person?

BARRY: He was pretty high.

GREENE: You don't want to mention names?

BARRY: No. And that it would be well for me to get away from this relationship. So it was very apparent. In fact, there was some talk -- I don't know whether this is true; I can't even remember where I heard it -- the day of the assassination J. Edgar Hoover ripped out the direct line between Robert Kennedy's and his office. Now, it's probably apocryphal, but it was widely accepted.

GREENE: Well, what did you do at that point when it was clear that the relationship was not going to help you any?

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BARRY: It wasn't that it would not help me -- there was never any way that that could help me within the organization -- but that it would hurt me. Nothing. But in the months ensuing, he had a conversation with me about what he should do -- and the conversation ended in a way that he would talk to anybody, not that he was asking my specific advice -- well, what should he do, become vice president or run for the Senate? I expressed my opinion that if he became vice president he'd be in the receipt of power, he'd be near, he'd be esteemed, but I think that he'd be on a string. If he became senator from New York he could more or less be like what Winston Churchill was in England, in that he could really speak out and not be anybody's man but his own. Shortly after that conversation he still hadn't made up his mind -- of course, he was eliminated along with other cabinet

officers from consideration for vice president -- but he went to the 1964 Convention [Democratic National Convention]. I drove him out to the airport, and he said, "Bill, why don't you come to Atlantic City?" I said, "Well, I can't. It's out of my division." We went out to the *Caroline*; it was a plane. He said, "I really need you." I said, "Well, I think it would really be improper." He said, "Well, Ethel's [Ethel Skakel Kennedy] pregnant and I have nobody in Atlantic City, and I really want you to go." So I said, "Well, on that basis I'll go." There was another agent who had been taking care of Ethel that day, so I explained to him what had happened and asked him to tell the office, and flew to Atlantic City. It was rather good that I did because the...

GREENE: Crowds were very...

BARRY: It was just fantastic. Were you there?

GREENE: No, but I read about it. It was phenomenal.

BARRY: Well, she was pregnant. It as really one of the toughest things I've been through. That was only going to be for a couple of hours, but it stretched and stretched. I was sitting in Averell Harriman's suite with Averell Harriman -- I just happened to be sitting there with them. Bobby was sitting next to me; Adlai Stevenson and somebody else was sitting there.

I had been trying to call the New York office all day by trying to call the Atlantic City resident agency to let them know that I was in their territory. The phone rang, and somebody said, "It's for you. It's from Washington." So somebody got on the phone from the bureau and said he had a message for me. So I said, "What is the message?" "You must immediately call the New York office." I said,

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"There's no way that I can do it. I've been trying to, and there are no telephone lines out of Atlantic City. I don't know.... How did you get through?" We've been trying for hours," so he said, "Wait, we'll set up a conference call."

The message I got from New York City was, "If you value your job, you'd better be on your way back to New York within the next hour, and incidentally call Assistant Director DeLoach [Cartha D. DeLoach] at the Atlantic City resident agency." So I called.... In fact, I couldn't call; I couldn't get any line out of the hotel, so I went out on the boardwalk and got a public phone and called him. He was there, and he said, "What are you doing in Atlantic City?" I explained the situation. He said, "I don't know if this has got to Director Hoover as yet. Of course, for your sake I hope it hasn't." He said, "What are your plans?" I said, "Well, I've been kind of ordered out of Atlantic City." He said, "I would take that advice if I were you." So I said, "Why is this such an important thing. I'm with him in New York." I didn't really understand the panic.

He said, "Well," he said, "there's some thought that Attorney General Kennedy might try to stampede the convention by walking into the delegates assembled and stampede them

away from LBJ [Lyndon Baines Johnson]. Do you know anything about that plan?"

GREENE: Away from the President or...

BARRY: Yes, in other words...

GREENE: ...or for the vice presidency?

BARRY: No, no, no, for presidency; it's not so far-fetched. And, "Do you know anything about that plan?" Of course I said I didn't know anything about such a plan. He said, "The concern here is that if he does that and he's got an FBI organization, so you're to immediately leave Atlantic City." I said, "Well, is it a question of my loyalty to the FBI or Hoover? Is there any of that in this?" He said, "No, none at this time, but you got that message from New York, and I think you'd better go." He wasn't being mean or anything; it was really a conversation. So I explained it to Bobby, and he said, "Fine." He said, "We'll have the *Caroline* take you right back."

GREENE: Did he have any other reaction at that point?

BARRY: Really sorry that he had placed me in that kind of a spot.

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He took it on himself that he hadn't thought that I would be placed in that kind of a spot.

GREENE: Had you explained to him at that point what he said about the possibility of a stampede at the convention?

BARRY: No.

GREENE: Did you ever tell him about that?

BARRY: No, I don't think I did; I might have; I really don't remember. Well, actually it was being discussed at the time in the hotel room whether he should to that.

GREENE: No kidding!

BARRY: He was not for it. So it didn't seem to me to be...

GREENE: See, I had heard a question of stampeding the convention to get the vice presidency from Humphrey [Hubert H. Humphrey], which is why Johnson apparently scheduled his appearance, or the film on the President, later than it had originally been scheduled. I hadn't heard that about the presidency.

BARRY: I think that this was something talked about, as it always is. I'm sure Lindsay [John V. Lindsay] talks about being president and Procaccino [Mario A. Procaccino] might even talk about being governor. But at this point it was something that was being urged on him. Whether he seriously considered it, I doubt.

GREENE: Do you remember who was urging it in the time that you were in the hotel room?

BARRY: Gee, there were so many people. I couldn't tell you really who, but it was being discussed. There were pros and cons, and I don't know who was pro and who was con.

GREENE: Excuse me for interrupting your story, so continue...

BARRY: So I went back.

GREENE: Yes, and it was as simple as that. Did you get any flack about it afterwards?

BARRY: No, not until much later, until after he resigned as attorney general.

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GREENE: How did that affect you?

BARRY: Let's see now, there's another incident between then.... He ran for the Senate, and, of course, I.... Oh, there's another story in there. With this on my mind, this Atlantic City deal, the Attorney General had decided now to run for the Senate, to become a candidate for the Senate. But he was still attorney general, and he was still calling Bill Barry. As a matter of fact, I was on another assignment and they called and said they didn't want the agent who was handling it in my absence, that I must return from where I was upstate and handle the attorney general during this period. The Justice Department insisted through the bureau that I be reassigned from my assignment upstate, so I came back. In fact, I think I arrived -- I forget the day I arrived. At any rate, I became involved in picking him up. He was making more and more political speeches rather than law enforcement speeches, and more and more political appearances at dinners and things like that. So I went to the bureau, my superior in the bureau, and explained to him that there is a question here whether it's the attorney general, or whether this is political or not, and that I felt that the bureau should make some kind of a decision before I'm in another Atlantic City situation again. They said, "Continue on your assignment as long as he is attorney general," so I did. It wasn't that I wanted to quite the assignment; quite the contrary. It was just that I wanted the bureau to have to go on record one way or the other, and not have it both ways -- after he left the attorney general job that he had.

At any rate, the campaign started. He was nominated; he resigned. That was my last official -- but there were many occasions when he called me. Then there was an occasion when Ethel, who was having trouble out in the house they rented in Long Island...

GREENE: Glen Cove.

BARRY: Yes. No, it wasn't. Was it Glen Cove?

GREENE: I think so.

BARRY: Yes, that's right. Would I come out and give her a hand? So I went out and handled it. Dean Markham left for Alaska, so he really needed some help, and I... [Interruption]

I became involved in the campaign; I took my vacation and traveled with him, I guess, the last two or three weeks of the

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campaign -- I'm not really sure. Then I went back to the bureau; that was in the fall of '64. In April of '65 the bureau had an inspection of the New York office, and they found that one of my files was not administratively correct. They suspended me for thirty days, and transferred me to Mobile, Alabama -- thirty days without pay I might add.

GREENE: Administratively "correct," an oversight?

BARRY: "Incorrect," I'm sorry, "incorrect."

GREENE: An oversight?

BARRY: Well, incorrect dates in contacting and informing. It was a matter of a day or so. Files have to be perfect, but this was the first time that informant files had ever been checked. There was some talk that this was a result of my association; I don't know whether that's true or not, but it was rather a harsh answer to a file problem. And it was well-known -- in fact it was the excitement of the bureau all over the country -- that I was in trouble because of my association with Robert Kennedy, and the betting in Washington was that I'd get just what I got. Although, at the very last minute, the recommendation from the inspection staff was that nothing be done, just maybe a letter saying, "Be a good boy in the future."

GREENE: It was overruled?

BARRY: Overruled by Clyde Tolson, who was Hoover's assistant. I think what it was, to be quite fair about it, was that it was an error in a file, and I think that

because of my name in the bureau it got a lot of publicity that you would not have ordinarily accrued to this type of an inspection find. Whether it was because of that or whether the bureau just wanted to show that FBI agents should remain completely loyal to the bureau, I really don't know. I don't think anyone knows.

GREENE: What happened at that point? [Interruption] At that point what happened?

BARRY: As a matter of fact, while this case was being decided, Bobby returned from London. I met him for a cup of coffee, and he said, "How are things going?" I said, "Well, there's some little problem." He said, "What do you mean?" I explained to him, and he said, "Do you think they'll do anything?" I said,

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"No, I really don't think they'll do a thing because my record is excellent and I don't have the least kind of..." [Interruption] So I explained to him that I didn't think at all that anything would happen because my record in the bureau was excellent and I'd just been commended rather glowingly, and that I had never had any letter of censure or any criticism at all in my entire career, which was rather unusual. He said, "That's good." So I left and called the office from downstairs in the Carlyle, and there was a message for me that I had been suspended, so my analysis of the situation was inaccurate.

GREENE: What was his reaction to that?

BARRY: Oh, he was furious. Another interesting thing happened. When I arrived home that night there was a call from Ethel, "Anything they could do, they wanted to do." Then there was a call from the then Attorney General, Nick Katzenbach [Nicholas deB. Katzenbach], who said he'd like to be able to help me but he couldn't.

GREENE: Where do you think he got the word?

BARRY: It was all over the country. It was kind of a well-known thing. It was as though the other shoe had finally dropped.

GREENE: He didn't even wait for you to ask for help. He just told you in advance he couldn't do anything.

BARRY: Well, no, he commiserated with me. "It was too bad," et cetera, et cetera, and that he wished there was something he could do. Something like that; I forget, but it was really.... I just hung up the phone on the attorney general, went outside and got sick, because he was the attorney general and for him to say there was nothing he could do in a situation like this was crazy.

During the summer I decided to leave the bureau -- I decided to leave the bureau immediately. This is getting more into what happened to me, away from the attorney general.

GREENE: But it relates to the association with him.

BARRY: Well, I can brief it up. My wife, actually, four days after this suspension had a baby, so I couldn't tell her what had happened. She had the baby, and I explained it to her that we were transferred to Alabama with six kids and a new

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baby. She volunteered to do whatever we wanted to do. At that time -- I don't remember that he upset her -- I think Bobby wanted me to just get up and resign, but I didn't think that was the right thing to do. He said, "You can immediately go to work in Steve Smith's [Stephen E. Smith] office. Don't worry about not being paid for thirty days."

So what happened was the agents in the New York office took a collection up and replaced my pay, exactly, for the month, so that was pretty good. I thanked Bobby for the offer, and never went to Steve Smith. Although, later on, when I made my decision that Alabama wasn't where I wanted my children to grow up -- and that was really the basis for leaving the bureau. I did not want to leave the FBI, I always felt it would get better. After all, I did make the error; it wasn't as though the error wasn't there. So I tried to stay in the bureau within that context. I asked for a delay of the transfer because of the new baby, and they granted that. Then on July 19 I formally resigned from the bureau.

A boss in the New York office -- as a matter of fact he was a new boss -- received my file and read my letter, and he said, "I can't believe that you're resigning from the bureau." He said, "As a matter of fact, I can't believe the transfer. I'm going to make every effort to have you reconsider your resignation." I said, "You really don't know what the story is here," and I explained it to him. He said, "Well, I think you ought to give the bureau the benefit of the doubt. We'll leave your letter exactly the way it is except for your last paragraph, which is the resignation, and we'll ask for the transfer to be canceled. I'll sign it out," and he did. I thought it was pretty brave, because I was supposed to be in Mobile that morning. [Laughter] The bureau was rather upset, "Where is Bill Barry?" I said, "Okay, I'll go along with it." He sent that letter down, and the letter came back from the bureau after quite a bit of delay, which indicated that it was the first time they had been faced with this situation: an agent not reporting, but writing a letter to them the day he was reporting with a recommendation that I be listened to. So they didn't kill the transfer, but they gave me another thirty-day extension, which brought me up to Labor Day.

Meanwhile, I did look around New York and followed some leads that the Kennedy office and the Senator were kind enough to get me, and there were no jobs, nobody was interested in me. I remember the Burns [International] Detective Agency was talking to me about hiring me for \$10,000 a year. There just weren't any jobs; nobody wanted to touch me because of the conflict with Hoover. It seemed as though everyone knew about it and nobody wanted to take a chance.

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Then it got down to whether I should go to Alabama at all or not. I felt that I had so many people who had been trying to help me within the bureau, if I didn't go I'd be in open defiance to Hoover, and those people would be upset. I really didn't want to leave the bureau with that kind of a thing because I really loved the organization, and actually I had no real problem with J. Edgar Hoover. He ran his organization the way he saw fit, and this is the way he felt other agents would learn discipline. So I understood his problem, but I felt that I couldn't continue. I went to Mobile. It was rather funny there. They said they had a pool to see whether I'd ever show up because I had missed three planes; three times I was supposed to be there I didn't show up.

I went there, and strangely enough the first case they assigned me was a case of a pardon for Congressman Boykin [Frank W. Boykin]. Congressman Boykin was convicted of perjury and, I think, conflict of interest. I really don't remember, but the case I investigated was a pardon case. The man instrumental in sentencing Congressman Boykin, and in fact testified against him, was Attorney General Robert Kennedy. And the man very interested in getting the pardon was J. Edgar Hoover -- he's a close friend of LBJ's and J. Edgar Hoover's -- so it was rather an interesting assignment for me in Alabama.

GREENE: Did you have any contact with Senator Kennedy about that?

BARRY: No, I never really called Senator Kennedy at all during this period -- mostly he'd contact me -- and never from Alabama. But I worked in Alabama for almost a month on various cases -- civil rights investigations, election laws, and a bank robbery -- and they were terrific to me. The boss of the office knew me from my old bank robbery investigating days and felt he was giving me the best cases he could. Just everybody was terrific. He tried to talk me into bringing the family down. I just didn't think that that was my future, so I resigned.

Senator Kennedy called me. I was in the hospital; I had an operation on my foot the day after I resigned. He called me there and said, "Congratulations. Don't worry about a thing. You can work for us; I need you in the New York office." He said, "You can take your time and get any job you want." So that's exactly what happened; I returned to New York. That took an awful lot of pressure off me because I actually resigned without a job.

So I got home. The day I got home was a Saturday; on Sunday the phone rang and it was a friend of mine who left the FBI, and said,

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"You're going to get a call from Bankers' Trust. I recommended you as a security officer," and I did. I was interviewed and they offered me a job, and I got to work with.... Meanwhile I worked in the New York office for Senator Kennedy.

GREENE: On security?

BARRY: No, actually there's a little story connected with that. They gave me letters to answer. He almost had a fit when he found out...

GREENE: Why?

BARRY: Well, it's kind of a waste of...

GREENE: Manpower.

BARRY: ...manpower to have me sitting in the office answering letters. But most of the letters that I had to answer were letters from prisons. One of the letters complained, a convict complained that he had been arrested by the FBI, falsely accused, the agent had committed perjury, and not only that, had physically beaten him on the arrest, and would Senator Kennedy in his kindness and all powerful being see what he could do about getting this miscarriage of justice changed? So I wrote a letter back to him, "Dear Convict: I'm amazed and astounded at these charges leveled against the greatest organization in the world. To think that J. Edgar Hoover would ever permit any of his agents to do this is unthinkable. In the future I don't expect to hear any complaints like that about the FBI. Signed, Robert Kennedy.

GREENE: Oh, God. [Laughter]

BARRY: I gave him that letter, and he almost died laughing.

GREENE: Did you do it in a serious vein?

BARRY: Oh no, no. I did it as a gag. "To think an FBI agent might ever be brutal discredits you." So he really laughed at that one.

GREENE: That's a good story. Did anybody else who was closely associated with him -- Courtney Evans or any of these other people -- suffer because of the relationship?

BARRY: Well, they didn't suffer, Courtney didn't suffer. I think what happened to Courtney was that he was placed in limbo.

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I don't think Hoover talked to him for months; whereas they had conversations daily, it's my understanding that there was no conversation at all between the two until Courtney finally resigned. He had, of course, his time in for a pension. I don't think anyone else really was identified as much as I, and I'm not really implying that that was the

reason for my problems. I think it might have contributed to it. There was an error in that file, and there's no way of getting around it.

GREENE: Let me turn this thing over very quickly.

BARRY: Sure. [Interruption]

GREENE: For one thing, you said, in the beginning, that the agents didn't seem to have too much of an opinion on Robert Kennedy since he was an unknown quantity. What was the feeling about him as his attorney generalship moved along?

BARRY: Of course, in the FBI, as in many organizations, there are various political shadings and interests so that people who didn't like him initially didn't like him as the thing went on. He changed, in emphasis, the major case squad -- as a matter of fact, it was a source of some fun between the senator and I. I was on the major case squad -- bank robberies, kidnappings, extortions; those were the important cases in the bureau -- and we were situated right outside the boss' office. Upon the advent of the Kennedy years, organized crime became the most important violation, so we were shunted way off to the corner, and the organized crime section grew from ten people to about a hundred. He really pushed us into that organized crime thing and, of course, was instrumental in getting some good laws passed -- Kennedy laws.

GREENE: Was this looked upon favorably in general?

BARRY: Oh, yes. Oh, sure. We were hoping that the bureau would change some of the things that every organization has that the people working in it don't agree with, because of his stewardship. But it didn't; that didn't happen. He didn't change the internal workings of the bureau at all, except their emphasis on various investigations.

GREENE: Did you get the feeling that he would have liked to, but that the way things were set up it was impossible?

BARRY: No, I didn't get that feeling. I think he realized that it was a good organization and that sometimes administering a

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good organization creates inequities and hardships. If some injustices are done, it's really part of the game, I think. Oh, you'd have to realize that discipline played a big part in the bureau in making it a good organization, but also making it an organization that people would like to change a little bit; but it's the discipline that made it. I can't think of anything that he'd want to change in it, except possibly the complete bureaucratic control,

but I think that that again was the bureau's strength: the fact that bureau people are bureau people and not to be confused with.... For instance, as a bureau agent assigned to Senator Kennedy I was always a bureau agent first, and there wasn't any conflict of interest at all. He knew that and respected it, so I don't really think he'd want to change any of that kind of thing. If he changed the causes, I guess he'd have to change the effects of it, and I don't think that would have been good.

GREENE: What about his emphasis on civil rights? How did this go over among the agents?

BARRY: In Alabama the agents weren't too happy about it. And I could agree with them. They didn't object to investigating violations of law, that wasn't it. It was the fact that for the first time Justice Department attorneys were having a direct say in the operations of the bureau in the field. An attorney fresh out of law school, let's say, without any experience, could have ten experienced agents working in some small town that they didn't think they should be working in, so that caused a little conflict.

Also, the theory of officer preference in the bureau was such that you waited ten years to get back to your city, wherever you wanted to go. So Martin Luther King had a point when he said civil rights investigations were being investigated by southern agents -- because they had waited all those years to get back to their office.

There was pressure put on by the attorney general to assign northern agents to the South, which didn't please the southern agents and certainly didn't please the northern agents. But I think it was the answer to the civil rights problem; an entirely different concept which brought in an entirely different outlook. So that was the change in civil rights and then, of course, there were some laws passed that helped.

GREENE: I don't know if this would have been something that you would have known, but what about Hoover's feelings about this, the emphasis on civil rights? What was his general attitude towards blacks?

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BARRY: I have no idea.

GREENE: There was no discussion of this?

BARRY: Not in my presence.

GREENE: Is there anything else on the Justice period, his period at Justice?

BARRY: Just that I thought Bobby Kennedy brought a great spirit to law enforcement, one that was, "Let's get the job done. Let's make America a little safer; let's not worry so much about the way your tie looks and whether your pants are creased. Let's get it done; do the job."

What he did was revitalize a lot of people in the Justice Department who were used to very political attorneys general, like James McGranery or Herbert Brownell, who really let the bureau operate completely on its own. Robert Kennedy brought this idea that he was an attorney general and he was going to prosecute these violations, and he wanted to have a say in how they were investigated. Not in the -- I don't know how to phrase it -- everyday investigations but more or less the impetus behind investigations. I think that Hoover, on the other hand, had a traditionalist viewpoint that you investigated laws that were passed by Congress, and you investigated them impartially, without any preconceived notions, and all laws equally, not... For instance, an attorney general like John Mitchell, who possibly is not -- I don't know this; it's just a guess -- as aggressive in civil rights. But it seems to me a political emphasis in the Justice Department, if it's transmitted to the bureau, can have ebbs and flows in various violations.

On the other hand, I think the bureau needed a push in organized crime, and they got it. I think Robert Kennedy will rank as, if not the greatest attorney general, certainly close to the greatest attorney general. History will answer that; I think he was the greatest attorney general that I ever served under.

GREENE: That's how many now?

BARRY: Oh, gee, how many? My gosh, I couldn't guess. Six, maybe six attorneys general.

GREENE: Did you see any de-emphasis of organized crime after the assassination, in the short period thereafter?

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BARRY: I thought there would be, but it hasn't been. No, there's been actually -- and I think it's to the bureau's credit -- a lot of accomplishments in investigations of organized crime. Statistics are really good, and I think that they're on the run. I think, also, that it was started by Robert Kennedy. The bureau has carried it out and done a marvelous job.

GREENE: Very interesting. Anything else?

BARRY: No. It's quite enough.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

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