

**Samuel H. Beer, Oral History Interview – 11/7/2002**  
Administrative Information

**Creator:** Samuel H. Beer  
**Interviewer:** Vicki Daitch  
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**Biographical Note**

Beer, a historian, educator, and Massachusetts political figure, was Massachusetts chairman (1955-1957) and later national chairman (1959-1962) of the Americans for Democratic Action. In this interview, he discusses John F. Kennedy's (JFK) place in the larger Democratic Party and relationship with other Democratic politicians, his stand on social issues and social programs, his extramarital affairs and those of other politicians, and various academics involved with the Kennedy administration, among other issues.

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Samuel H. Beer

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Oral History Interview

with

Samuel H. Beer

November 7, 2002  
Cambridge, Massachusetts

by Vicki Daitch

For the John F. Kennedy Library

DAITCH: What did you think of John F. Kennedy?

BEER: Here's a letter I wrote January 1, 1960. I'll read a bit from that. It's to a friend of mine in Wisconsin. That was on the eve of the Wisconsin primary that he was entering against Humphrey [Hubert H. Humphrey], which was the big problem out there. So I wrote this friend, Leon Epstein [Leon D. Epstein], a professor at Wisconsin, about him: "I still prefer Hubert, though I have to do it privately, you see, in Massachusetts. I happened to see both him,"—that's Humphrey—"and Jack Kennedy the weekend before last, and the preference stands. Yet Kennedy is an impressive guy. He is bright and he is tough, really tough. The notion that he is too much of a kid, that he is immature, is ridiculous. This is a real man of power. Changed a good deal in the last couple of years. Face fuller, rather like his pa [Joseph P. Kennedy, Sr.]. Face fuller, rather coarser, a broad, hard-boiled Irishman's face. Reminds me more of his pa. But what are his feelings, if any?" And so on.

DAITCH: That's wonderful.

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BEER: That's a good, frank assessment, isn't it?

DAITCH: Absolutely. And from that time it's wonderful. Do we have copies of any of these things at the library?

BEER: Well, if you want to you could borrow it. There's a file of some of my papers out there, which you might look at if you're interested. I looked at them two or three years ago, and there wasn't much there. Dan Fenn [Daniel H. Fenn Jr.], he was an archivist, said give us your ADA [Americans for Democratic Action] papers, and I did. But I've got a lot of other stuff, as you can see here in my office and at home.

DAITCH: Files and files.

BEER: It's sixty, seventy years of writing, lecturing, talking and whatnot. What are you trying to get at?

DAITCH: The oral history interviews are really a supplement to the archival materials, the manuscripts, papers, letters, that kind of thing. And of course memory is fallible, but....

BEER: Oh, boy, is it!

DAITCH: Well, it is, and it's fallible from yesterday, let alone from forty, fifty years ago. But all the same, the things that we hope to get out of the oral history interviews are more impressions, anecdotes, stories, things that may not have ever made it into the paper record. That kind of thing. Or maybe just a little.... I mean one of the things that I personally would like to get from you is sort of a broader assessment from this many years later, from someone who was both participant and analyst.

BEER: Yes. You see your mistakes a lot more clearly now. Some have said where your direction was right and where it wasn't. I was never an intimate of his. I'm much closer to Teddy [Edward M. Kennedy] because I came out for him in '62. He'd been a student of mine and so on, and I see him still. I just wrote him a long letter the other day about foreign policy and so on.

But I did know Jack; I was on the close margin. Well, the first time I saw him was in 1946 when he was running for Congress. I was in one of the old buildings down there near the square, Little Hall. Looking down at Mass Avenue, I saw a parade. It might have been Fourth of July or something like that before the election that year. I saw this skinny, gangly, red-headed kid wandering down the street, running against a very popular, able mayor for Congress, a fellow named Neville [Michael J. Neville]. And I said, how does

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this guy think he's ever going to beat Neville? Well, of course, that was just the first of my mistakes.

Then I got acquainted with him when he was on the visiting committee for the Department of Government. We always had some alumni who would come in, and were supposed to look over what you're doing. Actually, I remember when Governor Bradford [Robert Fiske Bradford] was the chairman of the visiting committee, he'd come in and he'd say, "Does the Government Department still have the biggest concentration?" I'd say, "Yes." He'd say, "Any problems?" I'd say, "No." He'd say, "Good. Let's go to dinner." They got more serious later.

But Jack was at our dinner, which was probably in the spring of 1951—was that right? Maybe it was later than that. After the dinner he came over, and took me aside, and sat down, and said, "Now, Sam I'm going to run for the Senate next year." We'd all heard that. And I said, "Look, Jack.... Johnny Powers [John E. Powers] and Governor Dever [Paul A. Dever], and all the wise guys have said, 'Don't be silly. You can't beat this war hero, the incumbent, Henry Cabot Lodge.'" So I said, "Why don't you stay in the House of Representatives and become a great man?" I may have mentioned Henry Clay.

And his answer was so typical of him. He didn't give me any big palaver, you know about the public interest. He just said, "No, Sam," in that flat-toned way he had, "No, Sam, I can't stand being bored to death another term by John McCormack." He was the leader of the Democrats in the House then and continued to be. And there was that tension between the McCormacks and the Kennedys, which went right on through to the big bust-up in 1962 with the Teddy-Eddy debates, when Ted first ran for the Senate. It was a hilarious time when this kid, Teddy, with no qualifications, so to speak, came and challenged Edward McCormack [Edward J. McCormack], who had had a really distinguished career as attorney general, and beat him. McCormack played it wrong. But I won't get into that.

So I knew Jack from that early time in a marginal way, at the national conventions, but especially in Massachusetts where I was trying to do something about the Democratic Party—a hopeless thing, this is one of my many mistakes—and he would help from time to time. So finally he asked me to be an ambassador. That was in 1963 in the spring. It was all through Schlesinger [Arthur J. Schlesinger, Jr.]. There had been some mention of Indonesia. But, oh, I don't want to go to the Pacific. I thought Latin America.

So when he asked me to come and said, "Would you like to go to Uruguay?" I said, "Uruguay, well, all right." Because what I thought of doing was going for two years, then coming back and branching out into studying Latin America because the department had no one in that field. So I was interested in public service, but equally, or more, in building up a genuine, firsthand experience with Latin American politics.

Finally I got word that my appointment was on his desk. I put my house up that morning down here in the square with a real estate agent, to rent for two years. And that afternoon I took it back because that was November 22, 1963. At lunch that day I was at MIT with the chairman of the Massachusetts Democratic Party, Gerry Doherty [Gerard F. Doherty],

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and Betty Taymor, who was the national committeewoman then, and we got the news.

So that's the ambit of my acquaintance with him. But of course it goes on through the screening committee. I had to listen to so many of those wonderful tapes. Extraordinary, you



know, the personality that comes out there. What a good listener he was, and what an inner-directed guy. He's a real self-made man. That's what I told Arthur when he was writing his biography. That's the thing to stress. You can't reduce him to his context. It really more and more impressed me, he made himself, as you can see in that letter I just quoted.

DAITCH: Right.

BEER: And the Cuban Missile Crisis, which you've gone through, no doubt, a hundred times. But his was the really determining voice. It makes a difference. This is why I'm slightly worried about our present incumbent [George W. Bush], who I think is a dunce. But I don't know. You can't be that successful and be a complete dunce. But Kennedy was in control of that whole incredible episode.... Boy, we skirted the abyss that time.

DAITCH: Yes.

BEER: I mean a blockade is an act of war.

DAITCH: Right. It's very impressive, isn't it, to listen to the way he...?

BEER: Hellishly impressive. And, you know, there were a bunch of Europeans and some Britons who were against us, you see. A.J.P. Taylor. He was a radical historian. "Oh, Americans are warlike," he said, "they shouldn't have a quarantine." And so on. But basically, we got support from the French right away, de Gaulle [Charles A. de Gaulle], and from the Brits, and all the rest. And he brought it off. That's, of course, the great study of Kennedy.

Then, of course listening to him talk to the Southerners as the crisis over segregation mounted, in Birmingham, and then Mississippi, and Meredith [James H. Meredith]. Particularly the conversation with Martin Luther King, Jr. Kennedy had been getting these telephone calls. And you can hear them today, [in a Southern accent] "Now, Mr. President, if you'd just get this outside agitator out of Birmingham, we wouldn't have any more trouble." And what King was saying to Kennedy is, "Mr. President, if they take me out of there, it'll blow up. I'm the one who's holding the lid on things." And Kennedy saw that. He had never been one of these red-hot champions of desegregating the South although he had been a steady supporter. But when he and Bobby [Robert F. Kennedy] saw the threat to public order, then they intervened, and they really did it up properly. But, again, he was listening to King, and he was listening to the people, and he made

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extremely good strategic decisions.

DAITCH: You said that he was not.... [You said] that in the fifties when he was in Congress, that you had urged him—I don't know, you personally, or the

party—had urged him to be a little more aggressive about his civil rights stand.

BEER: Yes. He would support.... When a bill would come up there, a couple of progressive acts, he would always say he was for equal employment, civil rights, those things, and against discrimination, and against segregation. But he never went out in front the way Humphrey did. Well, I don't know if his ambitions were different from Hubert's. Was his situation different? He was more cautious. He was surprised when people revealed to him that there were practically no blacks in the federal service. He didn't know that, but then he acted. And, of course, Washington's loaded with them now.

That came up after he became President, when I was national chairman of ADA. That's Americans for Democratic Action, if you've never heard of it. It still exists in a way. But then it was quite a big organization. At the convention in Los Angeles, we had 170 delegates. It was a significant body. Kennedy had us in shortly after his inauguration to the Oval Office. I brought along Joe Rauh [Joseph L. Rauh, Jr.] and Bob Nathan [Robert R. Nathan] and Marvin Rosenberg. Joe Rauh was Mr. Civil Rights and always was, to his dying day.

We had talked about what we were going to put up to him, two points: The first one, there was sort of an Eisenhower [Dwight D. Eisenhower] depression, and we wanted him to spend some more money because we had programs. And he said, "Good, good. I like to be criticized on that. I want to be pushed. Go ahead, criticize me for not spending." Then secondly, we said, "But really what we want is action on civil rights. During the campaign you said how by executive order, by the stroke of a pen, you could eliminate or cut back on segregation in housing." And he said, "Oh, don't bring that up. Don't bring that up. I ask you because I have already so much trouble with Judge Smith [Howard W. Smith, Chairman of the House Rules Committee] and getting anything out of the Rules Committee." Smith was a Southerner.

This was, of course, constantly in his mind. He had to bring the South along. But when he faced the challenge, he responded. And even before. If you look at what he did on the platform, in 1960—I was looking at my notes on that. Joe Rauh had drawn up eight points that he wanted and when Joe asked for something, he'd ask for everything. He'd been doing this for platform committees at convention after convention. This time he got everything he wanted, every point was in the platform and was Kennedy approved.

I remember a meeting with Governor Williams [G. Mennen Williams] of Michigan who was an important governor on civil rights because there are a lot of blacks in Detroit. He brought ten people from the NAACP to a two-hour session with Kennedy. It seemed a long time. Williams said, according to my notes, that these Negroes (his

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word) were completely satisfied with what Kennedy said. On the other hand, my notes say he somehow doesn't have the passion behind it that Humphrey communicates. He thought Humphrey was too intense. In fact, he once commented to Arthur Schlesinger, Jr, "Humphrey's too intense for people." Kennedy wasn't intense in that way.

DAITCH: Not passionate, you think, about...

BEER: Maybe that, yes. He didn't have—he was the least Irish. He was really much more of a Calvinist from Northern Ireland—I hadn't thought of that—than he was one of these poetic, rambunctious, fist-swinging Catholics.... He really didn't fit with that bunch. He fitted better with his sort of brainy Robert McNamara [Robert S. McNamara] types.

DAITCH: Yes. Now he overlapped with you at Harvard, but you never met him at Harvard?

BEER: I didn't go to Harvard.

DAITCH: Were you teaching, though, at that—thirty-eight, thirty-nine?

BEER: Yes. I came here in 1938.

DAITCH: Okay. Yes, because he graduated in forty.

BEER: He was not in one of my classes. Teddy was, but not Jack. I don't remember even seeing him. But of course he was so unimpressive as an undergraduate.

DAITCH: That's what I'm told.

BEER: Oh, I was just—night before last I was sitting beside one of his classmates. I said, "Kennedy?" He said, "I knew him. He was in the Spee Club. He didn't amount to anything. He was just, he was a party-goer, he was a lightweight." Many people report that. On the other hand, he.... Of course his dad was manipulating him, sent him to England where he listened to these radicals like Harold Laski, and he came back, and he wrote the book, *While England Slept*.

There was nothing very unusual in it, but he wrote it as a dissertation, an honors essay, and it was published. I don't know why. After all, he wasn't president yet. It doesn't say much. But he did it. He was a writer. I guess maybe that's it. He was reflective. He was very well informed, you know. He just read all the time. Read far too much, it seems to me. He just read everything, and he remembered things. So he was kind of a Clinton [Bill Clinton] in that way. He didn't have Clinton's wonderful

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emotion, the way that he could go out and capture an audience. It took Kennedy some time.

When he finally got the nomination in 1960, ADA had a board meeting afterwards, and as national chairman I was all for all out approval of the Kennedy-Johnson [Lyndon B. Johnson] ticket. And so were the other guys like Joe Rauh, Nathan and the rest. But the delegates to our board meeting, from our locals, were so cold to Kennedy. Some wanted us to say nothing. We didn't say anything about Johnson. I have some notes, and it's extraordinary

the number of places that people were against—that didn't identify with him. People didn't identify with him quickly.

Then by 1964, you see, it was just enormous, this identification. I think there's something in politics: it takes a while to crystallize on a leader. It's a kind of Freudian thing. You crystallize on somebody, it takes a while. And in 1960 at the convention in Los Angeles, it was that way about Stevenson [Adlai E. Stevenson]. Dave Share, who was managing his campaign, this Hollywood guy, he said to me, he said, "Oh, you wait, you wait 'til Thursday. You wait 'til Stevenson comes. He'll just sweep the convention." I said, "Look, Kennedy has this thing sewed up." "Oh, no, no," he said, "you just wait." And of course, Mrs. Roosevelt [Eleanor R. Roosevelt] and others were for Stevenson and against Kennedy.

And when Stevenson did show up, the whole convention exploded. He'd been their candidate, you see, for two previous elections. So they all recalled those days when they'd gone out and punched doorbells and got up petitions and given money, and they all reacted with this great emotion. And McCarthy [Eugene J. McCarthy] made his great speech nominating him. But when the votes came, it was Kennedy, Kennedy, Kennedy right down the way Kenny O'Donnell [Kenneth P. O'Donnell] had tabulated for us. I guess I told you, I stood on the floor...

DAITCH: You said you were standing next to him.

BEER: ...by O'Donnell, and he called the vote in every state before it came out.

DAITCH: That's so interesting.

BEER: Until California. It was one or two off. And I asked him, I said, "When did you know you had it?" He said, "We knew positively as soon as Dave Lawrence [David Leo Lawrence] got off the train from Pennsylvania." That was the one state we weren't sure of. And what Kennedy had done there represented a real turning point in American politics. He had begun to reduce the convention to an electoral college, something automatic. And today, of course, the conventions are meaningless. I haven't been to one for years. They're no fun. Totally different from what they were in the fifties.

This is one of *the* big changes of the Kennedy era: It's the extent direct voter participation wipes out the intermediation of different groups and centralizes decisions,

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actually, a lot more. The presidency becomes more and more powerful, even if you're like Reagan [Ronald Reagan] saying, "I'm going to decentralize everything." In the end, he strengthened the presidency.

DAITCH: How did Kennedy do that? I mean he's not a nobody, but he's....

BEER: A lot of this was unintended. Kennedy had all kinds of plans and he thought a lot ahead of time. He said, "This new era," the one that Robert Frost tried to

celebrate in his wonderful inaugural poem about the “New Augustan Age.” And he was right in his perception of the role of science and of people with professional and specialized knowledge. Teddy White [Theodore H. White] picks that up in his *Making of the President*, all these things. But they saw that now the advance of scientific knowledge.... And of course nuclear weapons were the greatest example. They totally changed policy, foreign policy, when each country has nuclear weapons. That was a change resulting from scientific advancement from old Einstein [Albert Einstein] and other inventions leading up to the bomb.

The development of science was an independent force in controlling what government did. It included things like mental health, the discovery of these new drugs. There was a doctor, Robert Felix [Robert H. Felix], who had long been campaigning for new methods of treatment. He saw how you could get people out of these big asylums—the warehouses as they called them—and stop warehousing mentally-disturbed people and put them back in ordinary life, because you kept them on drugs. And when you did do that, it worked very well. But, of course, the infrastructure wasn’t present in many places, and some people just became homeless.

But here in Cambridge it worked very well because we had a long-time, very good center of that kind in our private hospitals. So when people were let out of these big places in western Massachusetts and elsewhere, they went on drugs and were kept to their daily pill, and it was all right. But here's another case of science as a political force. The mentally disturbed people weren't a pressure group. To some extent their families were. And, of course, this was where Kennedy was brought in because of his sister [Rosemary Kennedy].

Economics is another example. Actually people began to think that economics is a science, you know. And you had Dave Bell [David E. Bell], the budget director under Kennedy, testing the PA system saying, “One billion, two billion,” and everybody laughing. They thought they could fine tune the economy. They really thought economics gave a government command over ups and downs, which enabled it to produce full employment without inflation, just by adjusting fiscal policy. But I must not run down my sister department of economics. After all, I have colleagues who think political science is a science.

Health, education, welfare were the basic fields. The War on Poverty came out of studies of juvenile delinquency in New York by sociologists. The point is none of these new policies came from the people who suffered. They came from people who had

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special knowledge. So this whole Kennedy kind of technocracy was ruled by professional types. And he saw this, and he pushed it as in going to the moon.

DAITCH: And he had faith in it.

BEER: Right. But he was not utopian about anything. He always was worried, I have a feeling. He didn't exaggerate. But there was this impact of science on public policy. It also meant that you spent a huge amount of money. That's when Big Government really began. The New Deal was not essentially a spending enterprise. It depended on the regulatory powers. The Wagner Act [National Labor Relations Act of

1935], for example, changed the balance of power in industry between workers and managers. But not by spending money. The War on Poverty, on the other hand, as in welfare, spent money on these programs, which, you hoped, would wipe out the reasons for poverty.

Now, Kennedy, in this scientific thing, was the real author of the Great Society programs. They made great use of grants in aid to states and cities, which increased literally from maybe a couple of dozen programs to 400 or more such programs. Once the programs had been established, their beneficiaries did act as pressure groups.

I remember asking John Gardner [John W. Gardner], who'd been secretary of HEW [Health, Education and Welfare], why he designed these narrow, categorical programs. He said, "Because if we have a specific interest group, a group of people that are interested in something, they will keep track of it, and they will tell you if it's being properly administered and what's happening. You don't know unless you have somebody out there actually in the field, telling you."

This new professionalization created a huge number of lobbies. In Washington you see them on K Street and in the phone book there are pages and pages of national this and that. A lot of that happened as a result of the Kennedy presidency.

DAITCH: You know what this reminds me of? It almost sounds like a second Progressive era.

BEER: Yes.

DAITCH: It sounds like the turn of the century.

BEER: He thought it was.

DAITCH: Did he?

BEER: He said, "The New Deal was economic." That's right, the pressures were economic. There was a lot of first-rate, straight, old-time pressure group activity, and people coming in with an interest.

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DAITCH: And a need.

BEER: Whereas this was cultural. Kennedy said, "The Progressives were spiritual." Why do you think it reminds you...?

DAITCH: Well, from what you're saying, the thing that I'm thinking is a professionalization, technocracy, top down approach to social change that relies on experts.

BEER: And it was nonpartisan.

DAITCH: Nonpartisan?

BEER: Very nonpartisan. I think this had a nonpartisan ring, yes, you know, climaxing with people like Dukakis [Michael S. Dukakis] saying, "Ideology is no longer the question," and so on. And there is a great deal of truth. But there was an enormous change, break, with the New Deal. I've written about this. And in a way, dating it from December 1962, when Kennedy called in Heller [Walter W. Heller] and said, "Now, let's do something different." Before that they'd been doing minimum wage, labor relations, Social Security, agricultural farm prices, agricultural subsidies. These are the old New Deal things only more of them. And he said, "Let's do something different. How about poverty?" Harrington [Michael Harrington] had written that book, *The Other America*.

DAITCH: Right. What year did that come out, do you remember?

BEER: Just before.

DAITCH: Just before he was elected?

BEER: Like '61 or sixty-something, I think. I don't know just when. But the use of the word "poverty" really inaugurated a whole new mental set. Because we never talked about poverty before. We talked about unemployment and how do you get people fully employed? And you talked about relief. But I never heard people talk about poverty. That takes you back to an earlier period. I think you're right about that. It had a different kind of basis. It was the poverty which had a cultural basis.

DAITCH: Right. And institutional.

BEER: It was really.... Why institutional?

DAITCH: Institutional in the sense that the shape of the economy, the types of jobs

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that are available to people at the lower end of the economic scale.

BEER: Yes. And really it was about black people. I remember Ed Banfield [Edward C. Banfield] said to me, "With all this talk about urban this and urban that, it's really about black people in cities. That's where the problem is." Plus you have the black problem in the South where legally and by norms, they are excluded. Apart from that, you also have in the North black people living in terrible ghettos of poverty. What are you going to do about that?

DAITCH: And Appalachia, though, and that's not black.

BEER: That's not. Right. Yes?

DAITCH: It's partially a class issue, partially a race issue. It's complicated stuff.

BEER: Well, that was very New Deal. I worked in the Resettlement Administration, and one of our things that we inherited was the cut-over areas, particularly in Pennsylvania, West Virginia. Is that what you're thinking of?

DAITCH: Yes.

BEER: These people would come in. In fact, I knew—my brother was married to a woman from West Virginia. Now, her father would boast with his own buddies about how many farms they'd worn out. They'd come into this hilly country, and they'd cut down the trees, and they'd plant tobacco and corn. And then, of course, the rain and snow would begin, and the soil would wash away. And after, well, it didn't take too many years, it wasn't growing anything, so they'd pack up and move. Go to another place. And this was one of the problems we had in the Resettlement Administration.

DAITCH: Sure. And the boom and bust nature of the coal mining industry and other industries.

BEER: Yes. So, at any rate, I don't know if I'm getting too general about this. But ADA didn't catch on to this any more than we caught on to feminism. And Kennedy didn't catch on to it. The women's movement, I think, really piggy-backed upon civil rights. And in some ways it's a bigger thing because it's worldwide. I don't know. Heck, the civil liberation of women in Iraq or in Iran or Saudi Arabia is really a millennial revolution. And I think the women are on our side there. Potentially. Once they get a taste of the life of American women through TV or visits, they like it. Don't you think?

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DAITCH: Absolutely.

BEER: Ninety percent do.

DAITCH: Absolutely. Yes.

BEER: But at any rate, that was, in a way, the other side of the technocratic movement; there was this attack upon the old taboos that supported segregation and other things like the oppression of women, the things that Betty Friedan brought out in 1965 in her *Feminine Mystique*. Then they put through these acts for blacks, and the women got in almost by accident when, whichever act it was, the opponents stuck in phrases saying, "...and women," thinking that would defeat it. It didn't defeat it. It went on to become law. And then people began to use it. And I mean, really, I can remember a woman from the Equal Opportunity Office coming over and bashing us about no women in the department of government. [REDACTED]



appointment was coming up, but she wasn't given tenure. And this woman from the government said, "Of course we don't have quotas, but you'd better hire her." Something like that. It was really very tough for a while.

But, again, this War on Poverty and the attempt to do something about the problem of blacks began with Kennedy. And Medicare, see. I remember this was one of the things we in ADA were trying to do for him, help him with Medicare. Because from the days of Truman [Harry S. Truman] we'd been trying to do something in healthcare. And we got improvements in the Institutes of Mental Health, but we didn't have anything distributive.

DAITCH: Right. Now was he really engaged with that?

BEER: Well, he was, yes. There was a bill before Congress, and, yes, he was pushing it. It wasn't his bill; I forget whose bill it was. Ultimately it became Medicare. And he wanted public support for it. So we asked the Democratic Party in Massachusetts to gather supporters for a meeting at the Donnelly Theater, and he sent somebody to speak. Well, it was only about half filled. We were trying to reform the party—I said, "With our kind of Democratic Party, we could always get out a big bunch of enthusiastic supporters for Medicare."

DAITCH: Tell me what your—if we're not going too much off the topic of what you wanted to talk about—tell me about this reform of the Democratic Party.

BEER: Well, this is how I got into it, which was to a great extent a separate professional experience of mine, being in political science, but that was never just an intellectual concern with me. There was a background to it. Part of it was family, I mean, which amused some people. See that corner thing? That's an article of mine in the *Economist* that they asked me to do a three years ago.

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DAITCH: Meeting with Warren Harding [Warren G. Harding]?

BEER: They claimed that is what got me interested in politics. I said, "That isn't quite true." They said, "Well, a little poetic license." It is true that in 1921 my father [William Cameron Beer] took me to Washington where we shook hands with the newly inaugurated President in the White House. A prominent Republican, my father knew Harding quite well. Fortunately he had not supported him for the nomination. Therefore did not [unclear] that bunch of thieves who came to porch with Harding. But more important was the fact that I went abroad as a Rhodes Scholar from 1932 to '35 and went to Germany in April of 1933, just after Hitler [Adolf Hitler] had tied up the dictatorship with the March 23rd, the law really giving him supreme power.

I went to Munich, and studied German with an elderly woman, a Jewish woman, who was upper class, a *Baronin*, but having fallen on hard times she did tutoring. She wasn't too much worried about the anti-Semitism. She was worried about war. Well, she'd been through World War I. Then that summer I went to Marburg and attended lectures in German

philosophy. Mainly I was interested in medieval history; that's what I was going to do, the Holy Roman Empire and all that.

I had these Nazi friends there, Heinz Kononenburg and Willi Sauermilch. They really were dense. On the other hand, when they got together.... I remember one night I'd taken a long hike with my later wife-to-be [Roberta Beer]. She was over there working in England, too. We traveled around together. And we were coming back over this hill near Marburg at night. And suddenly.... It was absolutely quiet, no traffic—we heard this sound of tramping feet behind us. So we stepped off the road and went back in the bushes, and heard this mass of marching men in step coming up through the woods in the dark. And just as they passed us, they burst out in the “Horst Wessel.” Like that. You know, singing. It was really great and it occurred to me that maybe this bunch of nitwits were dangerous.

And that enormous, wonderful, military spirit that the Krauts had. And then, of course, I was in the war and saw these people, how fabulous they were, the best soldiers anywhere ever. Just incredible. And Hitler had captured that and put it in the service of a godawful bunch of ideas! That's what really made a political scientist out of me. Before that I hadn't paid much attention to politics.

DAITCH: That must have given you chills. Of course in retrospect it's easy to see. At the moment it must have been something that was more visceral.

BEER: Yes. And I thought, what the hell, a dictator. I remember talking to a young German coming back to England on the boat, and I said, “Well, in Rome you had a dictator. That's where the word comes from.” He said, “This isn't that kind of a dictator. This is a dictator for good. The guy isn't going to leave after five years.”

So the cure for the problems of the depression was Franklin Roosevelt [Franklin D. Roosevelt].

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I mean there was a guy who responded to these things like, you know, unemployment which was *the* terrible thing. Terrible, not being able to get a job. See there was no social security in this country, almost none. But Roosevelt tackled it. The socialists were so asinine in Europe because they thought you had to nationalize everything. It didn't do any good at all, and certainly it was no help in the immediate face of unemployment. Nationalizing doesn't give you any jobs.

But Roosevelt really did something, pulled the people together, and convinced them that government could do something for them. It was a big idea and very hard to get across. I've spoken of that in that article, where the unemployed of Toledo just stood around doing nothing because they didn't think government had the obligation or capacity to do anything.

So those two things. The family background and the European experience got me into political science. I was much influenced by the British example of strong party government getting things through the legislature. My buddy Don Price [Don K. Price] had a similar idea. He wanted a civil service like the British. He came here and became the Moses of the JFK School. His whole professional life was devoted to an attempt to build up a cross-department

body of generalists who were like the administrative class of the British civil service, and who had their capacity for coming to agreement.

This is what he said: You didn't just come in and fight your corner, exercise your specialty as a forester or a chemist or whatnot. But you came in as an administrator. And this is what Don—do you know who I'm talking about, Don K. Price? You don't.

DAITCH: I don't.

BEER: He died just a few years ago. But he is the man who founded the Kennedy School later on. This is what he wanted to do, and he didn't succeed in doing it. Our civil service remains highly specialized. It can be very effective, but it isn't across the board the way the British is. I was interested in their political parties. So I thought, well, that's what we need: A political party which has a program that's been explained to voters who then choose this program rather than another.

So you get some kind of democratic control, and yet you get a basis for governing. How can 150,000 or 150 million govern themselves? How will you put them together? You put them together with a party and a program. This caught on with the American political scientists, and they had a report in the 1950s supporting this. It was called "Toward a More Responsible Two-Party System." And we tried to do that in Massachusetts. That was our object. I got into the ADA that way in the early 1950s.

DAITCH: So what existed in the forties?

BEER: The old system. The old system was a system of tongs, we used to say, or factions, based on candidates. And you'd have the McCormack faction, which would get a bunch of people together. The direct primary favored

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this, and this favored the direct primary. In Massachusetts you had a Democratic Party structure. There were elections every two years of the governor and both houses of the legislature. Moreover we had a direct primary to select the candidates for the different state offices, we also had presidential primaries.

In 1932 there were only eleven such states, I think. In 1960 there were only fourteen. Today there are thirty-five or so. That was one of the big changes which came after and, in a way, through the Kennedy regime. An enormous increase in participation, with something like thirty million people taking part in these presidential primaries to pick the candidates. Now ask how the candidate is picked in other countries. It's all done by small bodies.

DAITCH: Right.

BEER: I mean either just the members of the legislature or something like that. In Germany the party in the legislative does the choosing. In the U.S., you have all these millions of people. It's a ridiculous system, and it completely undermines the old convention.

At any rate, we have this kind of a structure in Massachusetts. In the Democratic Party, and to a lesser extent the Republican Party, it consisted of a set of these groups, groups that helped the office holders run in the primary and win election.

This kind of fragmentation promotes corruption because there's nobody in charge. And the system here was terribly corrupt. The Republicans were not as corrupt as the Democrats. The Democrats were the party of corruption. They were also were the party, to some extent, of social progress. One of my friends, Jock Saltonstall [John L. Saltonstall, Jr.], one of the Democratic Saltonstalls, invented the term "corruption tax." He said, "Well, these guys are corrupt, but that's what we pay to get social programs."

And they would steal. Sometimes office-holders would sell the public interest for so little. The underground garage from '58 to '60 was an unbelievable scandal. Or routinely by a business connection. Many legislators were in insurance, and they would get a bit of business for their vote or influence.

The fragmentation of the party was, in a way, a condition of the corruption. For instance, during the 1956 campaign, we liberals were trying to get support for Stevenson. Kennedy was running, and that wasn't a problem. And let's see. Oh, yes, Eisenhower was running against Stevenson. We'd go around, and there were Democrats who were for the Democratic candidate for governor, but they were for Eisenhower for president. We were trying to get them to support Stevenson. We looked at the survey figures. There'd be some for the Democratic governor, yes, and for Kennedy, and a much smaller number for Stevenson.

So I was going around with Frank Lyons, who was on the staff of the International Lady Garment Workers Union, a trade union man, and always very cynical about politicians. We would have to travel from town to town to set up these committees. We were completely defeated, but anyhow, we tried. Incidentally, while traveling we

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might be stopped by the state police for speeding. So John Fox, who was a judge by that time, he'd been secretary to Governor Dever, said, "I can fix that. Here's a number you telephone. If you're ever stopped, go ahead, let the cop write the ticket. Then you call this number and it'll be cut." So I don't know if we were stopped more than once or twice. But we were never fined because it wasn't sent on into the court system.

DAITCH: Right. So everything was fixed.

BEER: Later on I remember getting stopped in California for speeding, and I had a long discussion with the young state trooper as to whether you could fix a ticket. He was saying you couldn't do it in California. But you certainly could in Massachusetts. This was an aspect of the milder forms of corruption. It really was awful. And we thought what we'd do is try to establish a party system which required first a body of very active people who were dues paying and to get money in an honest way from those people rather than from your donors. And there were things like Dollars for Democrats, which was a hilarious failure, but it was tried. People put on a light, which meant they had a dollar, and you could pick it up.

But there was a real source of money that was called the Jefferson-Jackson Day Dinner, which was held every year or every two years. And the peak of my political career was when I was made a member of that committee. That was a very small committee, but they controlled the money. In 1961, once Kennedy had taken over, thanks to our request, he put in as chairman of the state party Pat Lynch [John "Pat" Lynch], throwing out a guy named Onions Burke [William "Onions" Burke].

DAITCH: "Onions"?

BEER: The one that I had the battle with, who was a McCormack man. And once Kennedy became senator he threw out Onions and put in Pat. But the money didn't go to the state committee. And I said to Paul Dever, the former governor, "Paul, why don't we give the money to the state committee?" He said, "Larceny. Larceny! Thievery." In his harsh Irish drawl. So the Jefferson-Jackson committee gave the state committee only \$9,000 out of about half a million or so.

DAITCH: So what happened to the money?

BEER: The money would then be in the hands of our committee. And there was a wonderful guy named Howard Fitzpatrick [Howard W. Fitzpatrick], who was a sheriff, who happened to be an honest man. And Dever was an honest man. All, or almost all, the people on the committee were honest people. And there was Judge Mellon who was an honest man. I was an honest person. And we would raise the money, directly and indirectly. Then it would be the real leaders, McCormack and Dever and Kennedy who would decide what the state committee and the candidates would get. That was all done

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honestly. Nobody pocketed any of that money. And we had raised it.

I raised money from academics, what a tight bunch! Oh, I'd go to the law school. These guys might well be thinking of being a federal judge, you know. A hundred dollars! That was lot more then that it is now, but really miserable considering what they might hope for.

Then where do we get the money? How do we know? There was something called "the lists." These lists were the lists of people who'd given money before. And they weren't easily found. There was a woman named Frances Smith; I knew her very well because she was the sister of one of my dearest friends at Brandeis, Frank Manuel. Good-looking, very hardworking, smart, tough woman. She had the lists. She would, of course, make them accessible to us.

And who were the people on the lists? Where'd you get them? Well, what people had gotten small business loans? Because, see, that was a big thing, to favor small business, you know, good for the common good. Also good for these little grocers and plumbers or whatever they were. And the federal government, "Uncle," had given them a loan at a very tiny interest rate. And they were not unmindful of who the source of their wherewithal was.

So they would give a couple thousand dollars to the dinner—at a hundred dollars a plate, which was a lot of money then. It was at least ten times what it is now.

That's where the money came from. It was administered by these people. All informally done, and that was the way you avoided the total chaos of corruption which prevailed elsewhere in the party. You couldn't stop it otherwise. It's very difficult. There was a Crime Commission that uncovered the scandals under Governor Furcolo [Foster Furcolo]. Although in my opinion he was not personally involved, I remember a friend of mine saying, “Why, at the Port Authority they're just shoveling it out.”

They stole so much. Even a very nice guy, whom I won't name, for \$500. I mean such a small amount of money, he gave somebody a franchise for setting up a bank, completely illegal. It was just terrible. The Crime Commission had this huge report. And there was a great letter to Kennedy in 1963 written by the *Globe* [*Boston Globe*] saying, “This is awful. We want you to act.” He was behind the reform of the party. This is what interested me, and is why I got into politics. This was my contribution as a political scientist.

With Jim Burns [James MacGregor Burns], who was a professor at Williams, a very good writer, a good scholar, wrote good biographies, who'd done his degrees here, and one or two others. Oh, Bob Wood [Robert Wood], who later became president of U-Mass [University of Massachusetts], and also previously had been in Johnson's cabinet. He's an expert on urban things. His wife Peggy [Margaret Wood] had been one of my best students. And then Dukakis was trying to reform the party through an organization called COD. We were all trying to do the same thing, and we all failed.

The state party doesn't amount to a damn now. I haven't seen much of it. And it certainly doesn't amount to much nationally. Often there are as great differences within the parties as between them, almost. Sometimes the parties will pick up and will be given

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a push, as the Democrats were by Kennedy, or by Roosevelt, and be given a dynamic feeling which gives the party cohesion, and a purpose and a program. That's what Kennedy did. He called it the New Frontier. But it was the same as the Great Society programs. I wrote an article for the *Herald* [*Boston Herald*] a year or so after, showing how the things that LBJ was doing came out of the various congressional committees where the Rules Committee had kept them stacked up. Kennedy hadn't been able to get them to the floor.

DAITCH: Right.

BEER: But the dam burst. Like Medicare which came in under LBJ, and Medicaid and mental health, oh, countless things. But that all went back to Kennedy's initiative and was inspired by Kennedy's spirit. In the long run this flood of legislation led to those terrible deficits in the seventies. And nobody knew how to get out of it. It just seemed we would never recover a coherent purpose in government. I called it “growth without purpose.”

Nixon [Richard M. Nixon] came in and then Reagan, and a political swing to the right. Finally Clinton balanced the budget for the first time. Really Clinton came in and

clinched this big switch from those terrible disasters of the Great Society programs. This is not anything that Kennedy foresaw or perhaps could have foreseen.

DAITCH: You know, it's interesting, a lot of these big shifts in what you're talking about, creating a cohesive sort of purpose within the party, I wonder if it was almost as much a result of his assassination as it was of his life. Because those things couldn't have been pushed through by Johnson or maybe by him had he lived. And so maybe in Roosevelt's case the emergency was the Depression. In the sixties the—I wouldn't call it an emergency—but the shock to the national system was the assassination. And so that's what gives the initiative or the impulse for that type of reforming, that kind of thing.

BEER: I've often wondered to what extent that was true. I think that might well have given people a shock. But the point is the needs had built up. In a way, this was foreseen by [unclear]; I remember reviewing a book by him. I didn't foresee that it would happen. But he did. He saw all these needs that had built up. He said, "This has got to come out sooner or later." And that's what Kennedy said: "We've got to get the country moving again." We want to get rid of the passivity of Eisenhower.

Well, Eisenhower wasn't that passive. His first good deed was to solidify the New Deal against a lot of people in his party. He expressed that, for instance, in the appointment of a committee to look at state-federal relations. Those old reactionaries were against the Feds doing things because they can control it a lot better if it's at the state level. He put them on this commission, the Kestenbaum Commission, but not too

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many. He tuned this thing. But they had their footnotes in the report. They were against Social Security. I mean they were really against the New Deal. And Eisenhower put that all in the past. He believed in government. After all, that's what he was. He was a soldier. That's the first thing. Then secondly, he really started spending money. But he spent it in the name of defense, including that huge expansion of the road system.

DAITCH: Right. The highways.

BEER: And he built things like these airports at Orange. You don't know where that is, do you? Orange. That's where the sky-diving is. That's how I know because I did a lot of sky-diving in the 1960s.

DAITCH: Really! Neat!

BEER: I have 199 recorded jumps, a dozen from 15,000 feet.

DAITCH: Wow!

BEER: This is how I got through my male menopause, restoring my youth.

DAITCH: A little casual fun.

BEER: Yes. But they built this huge airport—why?—up there in this deserted countryside. Because there was this theory that if we had an atomic war, the cities would have to be evacuated for which you needed airports. Of course this gave a lot of jobs to people. Eisenhower put a lot of money into the Institutes of Health, coming out of one institute and then dividing them into several. So you'll see that spending impulse reflected, at least in part, by the new science and medicine coming under him.

But the big thing came under Kennedy, the real “big government” surge. And it was happening elsewhere, as in England, at the same time for different reasons. The Labour Party gave up socialism and thought they'd achieve equality by redistributing money, which is quite different. Keep capitalism, but redistribute. But that didn't work either. They had the same problem we did, so they had to give the big spending up. And that's what Tony Blair—he's like Clinton. He picked up the necessary parts of Thatcherism just the way Clinton picked up the necessary parts of Reaganism and put them into effect in a more modest, but social, program.

But to the question would it have happened if Kennedy hadn't been killed? Yes, it would have happened. I've thought about that, and I think I have a better answer, but I can't think of it right now. [Laughter]

DAITCH: Well, there's the other question about—and I don't know if you even have a

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thought about it. I am not terribly interested in doing what-if history all the time, but this has certainly been something that people have batted around a lot, and it's the Vietnam question. What if Kennedy hadn't been assassinated? Would we have been as aggressive about escalating it?

BEER: Well, of course, the big anti-Vietnam people like Arthur [Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr.] and Ken Galbraith [John Kenneth Galbraith] say he would never have done it. But he would have. These were all his people.

DAITCH: Well, he already was doing it. Then the questions is, is there...?

BEER: He was doing it. I was reading the other day where Eisenhower—he was asking Eisenhower's advice. And I think Eisenhower said, “You must keep Laos. Can't let the Communists get that. And if they tend to fall, we will have to intervene.” So I think it was an item which was generally accepted in the overall context of the Cold War and wasn't as specific. It wasn't so much a domino theory as it was a strategic point of making the other side see that you're serious. That if therefore you had beaten down the Communists in Vietnam, we would never have the trouble we had later in other countries. But our defeat in Vietnam gave them hope that they could defy us, and sometimes they could.



Before that our power had been so impressive, a psychological thing, that when Eisenhower sent those Marines to Beirut, they trotted off the boat and that just stopped the whole thing. When Reagan sent them, they were blown up. Because people had suddenly had their eyes opened to the possibility that maybe the U.S. giant could be beaten and would give up. So I don't think we should have given up in Vietnam. But we were afraid to bomb Haiphong Harbor. And therefore the Soviets went on supplying these people. But if we had started really to bomb Haiphong Harbor, they wouldn't have had their munitions. What else? I mean is that the point?

DAITCH: Yes.

BEER: What would Kennedy have done? I think he would have gone on. He was too tough. He wouldn't have retreated from anything.

DAITCH: He was tough. But this gets back to something else I wanted to ask you about. I just find it very fascinating, his development as an individual. We talked about that a little bit on the phone, how he was sort of just a scrawny kid, and then boom. Certainly not overnight. But he's still a young man when he's President.

BEER: Yes, forty-something. Well, what's the question? So was Clinton, pretty young, and there've been English prime ministers who were even younger,

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like William Pitt; Blair's very young. In some ways it seems easier there for a young man. I'm not sure about that. Are you asking the question of age, or not?

DAITCH: No, not so much. I mean that's certainly something to talk about at some point. But I think the thing that interests me most about Kennedy, having looked at a lot of these videotapes of him, he's a very charismatic man as president.

BEER: What do you mean by charismatic?

DAITCH: I found him very well-informed, intelligent, positive in his comments and what he understood and what he thought about what he understood. And very relaxed also in most of the video that I've seen. But just absolutely a man of power. You can see people deferring to him.

BEER: And intelligence, yes. My late wife and I, when his press conferences—he used press conferences all the time—when his press conferences were on, we'd take our dinner in to the television. Never did it for anybody else.

DAITCH: He was so good. Yes.

BEER: Clinton could do it, too. And this poor dunc Bush avoids press conferences

because he can't answer questions.

DAITCH: Smart move.

BEER: As for the dunce, he exposes himself in his list in a piece in the *Times* [*New York Times*] on whom he has to the White House. You'd think he'd have a bunch of CEOs and big oil. He doesn't. He has old friends that don't challenge him. Nobody of any talent. No intellectuals, no billionaires. Just ordinary guys like himself. He's an ordinary guy with good impulses trying to do something. But anyhow, Kennedy was not like that, and yet he wasn't like Stevenson. Stevenson was not a man of power at all. He would have been a poor president, I think.

DAITCH: But gifted intellectually.

BEER: Gifted, oh, the intellectuals loved him. Especially the females. They all broke down in tears. He had more women. If you laid all the women he'd laid, it would run from San Francisco to Los Angeles.

DAITCH: Stevenson?

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BEER: Oh! Kennedy. Yes, he would beat Kennedy.

DAITCH: No kidding! I didn't know that.

BEER: Oh, yes. Well, so I'm told. I never find these things out. I didn't know about Kennedy either until much later. Kennedy liked really lower-class, vulgar women, I think. He had this one love affair with Cord Meyer's [Cord Meyer, Jr.] beautiful wife [Mary Pinchot Meyer]. But other gorgeous women I know said he never made a pass at them. Like Betty Taymor, who was a really transatlantic beauty. She knew him very well. She was one of his "secretaries." There wasn't the slightest touch.

DAITCH: It could have been something.... I don't know. Who knows why a man makes a pass at a woman or whatever? But I wonder if there.... I don't know who all he was even involved with because that's not the principal part of my interest.

BEER: Well, he had a terrible relationship with this Mafia woman [Judith Campbell Exner].

DAITCH: Right.

BEER: Who then wrote about it; it was true. It was an awful chance that he took.

DAITCH: Oh, terrible! Bad judgment.

BEER: See, talk about Clinton. So stupid! How could Clinton be so stupid as to get tied up with a girl [Monica Lewinsky]? A young girl, whom you must know would talk. Why else? But Kennedy did even more dangerous things, but the press would never tell that.

DAITCH: What's the difference? I mean this....

BEER: Well, that's very different. That's another difference, the way the so-called investigative press becomes more like a private. In Boston we had all this stuff on the Hill. For instance, Speaker Thompson [John Thompson] a very bright, tough guy from Chicopee [Massachusetts], big, had red hair, ran the show. And he ran the House the only way it can be run.

DAITCH: The State House?

BEER: The House of Representatives as the speaker. They've all been very tough guys. And Thompson was a drunk. He'd go on a binge. So, Mossy Donahue [Maurice A. Donahue],

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a very sweet man who was senate president at that time, would take him over to the Hotel Manger—I guess it doesn't exist anymore—and dry him out. And he'd say, “Well, he's in Miami.” Or, “He's somewhere visiting his aunt.” And the press knew perfectly well, but they wouldn't report it. And I said, “Why don't you guys report this? This guy's a famous drunk.” And they said, “Only if it gets on the police blotter. If he's arrested while driving under the influence, we will report it.” But it's worse than that. The Crime Commission reports were lost. I don't think they were ever found.

DAITCH: What do you mean, lost?

BEER: They were used for the indictments, but then somehow they disappeared. Nobody knows where they are. I don't think to this day they know. There was another case. What was it? A big state official went around the State House with an axe; I remember the guy started breaking windows and doors. Everybody knew it. Never reported.

DAITCH: It was a politician?

BEER: Sex and drink they would not report. Now, when Gary Hart defied them to catch him, all they had to do was wait outside the house, and they saw the girl coming out, you know. The idiot! I think that was almost the beginning of when they started reporting this stuff. But before that, I mean.... For example, when

Roosevelt was running—let's see, he had Wallace [Henry A. Wallace] was his vice presidential candidate. That was before he dumped Wallace in '44. This would be in 1940—must have been—and Wilkie [Wendell L. Wilkie] was running against him.

Now Wilkie had been separated from his wife [Edith Wilkie] and was living with some other woman [Irita Van Doren], which in those days would about kill a guy politically. And some Democratic people got a hold of that and was going to write about it. But then the Republican press got hold of some letters that a woman had written to Wallace. Wallace would write to her about members of the Cabinet using colors to identify them. Red did this, and Blue did this, and so on. There wasn't anything about sex in them, but he had this relationship. And Roosevelt is reported to have said, "Didn't Henry do anything manly with that woman?" At any rate, it was enough to counterbalance the other thing so that neither came out during the campaign.

Or like Harding. Harding came from Marion, Ohio, which is 18 miles from my hometown in Bueyrus, Ohio. He had a sweetheart named Carrie Phillips, who was an absolutely gorgeous blonde. And during the campaign of 1920, the Republican National Committee gave Carrie Phillips and her husband [James Phillips] \$25,000 to take a trip around the world. I think they probably knew already. But Harding was absolutely mad about this woman. And he wrote these awful, sloppy letters. I've seen them. They were on blue paper written in blue ink, and for a long time they were kept in shoeboxes which were in the custody of

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a friend of mine who was a judge.

DAITCH: Is that right?

BEER: Beanie Myers [Charlton Myers]. He's dead now. But Beanie showed me these letters. He just kept them. He lived in a nice tiny little town called Morrall. He was a judge, a very, very smart guy. He was as smart as anybody, but he never got out of Ohio. Beanie had those letters. So there was that dynamite. And the Harding family obviously, didn't want that stuff to get out. It somehow got in the hands of a man from Brighton. I've met him. He's a good scholarly journalist, and he wrote a book called *The Shadow of Blooming Grove*.

Now, Blooming Grove, another one of these little pin-point towns, is on a railroad near Marion. That's where Harding came from. And this rumor that he had a black ancestor had hovered over his family for generations. And it could well be because I met him, and he could have been. You know, he was very sweet, had a nice soft—I can feel his soft hands—beautiful kind of brown eyes, a duskiness in appearance. He could well have been partly black.

But I didn't know when I was a kid in 1920 when I was in the fifth grade. Let's see. Yes. 1920, nine years old. He was running for president, and all these nasty little Democrats were running around saying, "Warren Harding has colored blood." I didn't know what the hell they were talking about. But what we replied was, "Yes, it's good, red American blood."

But really they were saying that he had a black ancestor. So it might have been. And this Carrie Phillips I knew because she was the daughter of my great-aunt.

DAITCH: Oh, really!

BEER: Right, right. I had a grandmother who had two sisters; all three of them were gorgeous and all ultimately widowed. And Kate Fulton—her name would have been Kate Swingley; they're all daughters of one of my great grandfathers named Swingley, who was a doctor in this little town, in Ohio, descended from the brother of the great Swiss reformer, Huldrych Swingley. But Dr. Swingley was an atheist. A very tough guy. And he had these three beautiful daughters. And my grandmother had married a Civil War veteran, William Beer, who got her with three children. He bought land in Iowa, and was going to take them there. But he fell off a train in Valparaiso, Indiana, and was killed. My father said he was probably drunk. They all had a terrible habit of drinking, these Civil War vets.

So she raised three children with no social security. Needless to say they all went barefoot. But she was a school teacher. She was smart. So she raised them. Then she said, "I married for love the first time and for money the second." And she married Colonel Fisher [Cyrus Fisher], who came from Ohio and had also been in the Civil War. He'd lost his wife, but he had a pile of money he'd made in Denver. And built his new wife the

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most magnificent, gorgeous castle in this little town. It was ugly, but it was magnificent for a little boy to run around in.

So, Carrie Phillips I met because she was married to a man who owned a big department store, an insignificant little guy. He had a big yellow Cadillac. And I can see it now pulling up in front of our house. I ran out, and she put her arms around me. I can still feel her warmth. She was just a great gal.

The affair with Harding was never reported at the time. Whether it would have been, if the press had known, I don't know. But they certainly didn't look very hard. And Harding was exposed only when he got mixed up with and had a child by a rather cheap secretary [Nan Britton] who then wrote a book about him, *The President's Daughter*.

But the presidency was different then. I think that respect for authority was greatly weakened in the 1960's. The whole attack on authority which was part of this cultural revolution of the sixties had a lot to do with this pitiless, rudderless, use of the press today. Right? Or no?

DAITCH: Could be.

BEER: And the drunkenness on the Hill, here. The intrinsic disease of politics is drinking because, you know, it's a crazy life. You know, when there is a roll call, when there is not, when the members are just stalling. What do you do during a filibuster? You go out and drink. It's true in England, and in the Houses of Parliament there are eleven places you can get alcohol.

DAITCH: Wow!

BEER: Eleven places you can get alcohol. And they do. They get drunk a lot of the time. I've had Dick Crossman [Richard Crossman], who was a wonderful informal speaker. He was an MP, a marvelous guy, a brilliant man. He once said to me, "You know, I was so goddamned drunk last night. I'm told that I got up and I made a ten-minute address, and it went over very well, and I haven't the faintest idea of what I said." The party conventions here used to be so drunken. Mencken [Henry L. Mencken] mentioned that when women got the vote, and there were some women present, that changed quite a bit. But I'm looking at the names of the delegates to the Massachusetts; there were thirty-six in 1952. At least thirty of them were Irish. There were two women, two Italians, and, I think, two Jews, and that's it. But at least thirty of the thirty-six were Irish, and they all drank, as far as I know.

DAITCH: Were Kennedy, John Kennedy, and his brother Bob...?

BEER: They didn't drink.

DAITCH: They didn't?

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BEER: Not that I know, no.

DAITCH: Because, you know, I never heard that about them, and I wondered.

BEER: Yes. His energies went otherwise.

DAITCH: The other thing that I wondered about him was with regard to the party and the disorganization and drinking and all that stuff, was what kind of a... I mean when you're senator and, of course, when you're president, you're the nominal head of your party. You're the head of your state party, you're the head of the national party. What kind of a party leader was Kennedy?

BEER: Well, he put his people in. Larry O'Brien [Lawrence F. O'Brien] was his key man, and Kenny O'Donnell. Let's see, what kind of a party leader? I'm sure I've thought of this. He supported our reforms, but not to excess. Yes, and, well, was it he? Well, he put in Gerry Doherty instead of Pat Lynch, but that was Teddy who did that for me. We made a bargain with Teddy when we supported him. We said, "Will you support us in party reform and give us a voice in the appointment of the new chairman?" And he said, "Yes." So then I got these two or three other guys to support Teddy, because there were very few, and we were regarded as scoundrels for supporting Teddy.

DAITCH: Why?

BEER: Well he was a young squirt with no qualifications compared to McCormack. But I just felt—I really did—I felt he was the better man. I admired him. And he has been a superb senator, a wonderful senator. He's the shadow president. He's the head of the Democratic Party if it has any head at all. What was I saying? I was telling you about....

DAITCH: You were saying John as head of the party.

BEER: Well, see, people thought of Teddy, I mean he barely made the age. He had to wait two years until he made the age. And people here just thought it was scandalous. So Mark Howe [Marcus A. Howe]—did you ever hear of him? He was a great professor at the law school, a wonderful scholar and a great liberal from a great family. Marcus Aurelius Howe is his father, editor of the *Atlantic*. Mark was called the “conscience of New England,” and he was. And he just thought it was terrible.

So he wrote this fierce letter to all the faculty denouncing the people who were supporting Teddy, this scandalous upstart. And he got Bob Wood over in a corner in the Faculty Club. He was really banging away at him, you know, verbally. And Bob said,

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“Mark! Mark! Hold off! We're only trying to make him a U.S. senator, not a Harvard professor!” I've told that story at fundraisers, Teddy loves it.

DAITCH: It's a great story. Nothing really important.

BEER: As we all know, JFK had difficulty appointing a cabinet. He didn't know many people. He'd never seen Rusk [Dean Rusk], for example. Arthur discusses this; frankly, he didn't have much of an acquaintance. Compared with countries with a continuous governing class from which you take your cabinets, and you have to, I mean, pretty well dictated by the leaders of factions in your party. Our cabinets used to be like that. Wilson [Woodrow Wilson] had to take William Jennings Bryan even though he was a difficult person to have in your cabinet. Nowadays the president is so much more important than his cabinet.

How did JFK raise his money? I remember talking to a great money-raiser for good causes, Stevens [Roger Stevens], a very rich man.

DAITCH: Oh, Roger!

BEER: Roger Stevens raised money for Kennedy and for the Democrats. I said, “How do you do it?” I mean he raised *big* money. He said, “Well, first of all, I give a lot myself. Then I go to somebody, and I say to some New York billionaire or millionaire, I say, ‘Well, are you interested in the government of the country? Do you want it to be run well? Do you want this guy Nixon?’ Or whoever it is. ‘All right, if you want a good man, we have to have money.’ And you can ask, being very rich yourself,

you can ask him for \$10,000 and not choke.” Kennedy had the benefit of that kind of support from both the educated elite and the merely wealthy.

What else? I have to think. I knew the party chairmen from the days when the party had to borrow money from Raskob [John J. Raskob]. That was in the New Deal days. Much later I mentioned this as a joke when introducing Paul Kirk, then party chairman. What kind of party leader was Kennedy? I don't think he didn't identified with the party very strongly.

DAITCH: You told me on the phone—you actually used the word that he “disdained.”

BEER: He disdained the party in Massachusetts.

DAITCH: The Massachusetts party, yes.

BEER: Well, they were such drunks. I guess I told you how when Mike Mansfield came here to get out a crowd for Stevenson he found first of all you had to do some heavy drinking. Then the time when we met with John Fox, Paul Dever and others to raise money for Stevenson. We were trying to

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figure how much money we needed to send out several thousand postcards, but we had been drinking and we got the decimal point in the wrong place. Finally a Harvard student, of mine, pulling my jacket said, “Look, Professor Beer, you've got the decimal point wrong. It isn't going to cost that much, just a tenth that much.”

BEER: While Eisenhower was still president, Paul Butler [Paul M. Butler], chairman of the National Democratic Party, set up something called the Democratic Advisory Committee. That was a body of people who would think of proposals, to be put through Congress. Well the Democratic congressmen didn't care one bit for this body. Rayburn [Sam Rayburn] and Johnson would not join it, and would not listen to it. Humphrey did. But professors, nevertheless, went on sending this stuff in. This is where the Great Society began.

DAITCH: And who was this committee? Was it mostly....

BEER: It was modeled on one in Michigan which was enormously successful because there you had a triumvirate: you had Neil Staebler, the state party chairman, a well-to-do businessman from Ann Arbor. He had organized committees in all the counties. Then there was Soapy Williams, the governor and Walter Reuther, the head of the big union.

Those three people worked together and had really something like a Labour Party government there for six terms. Or was it three? It was a long time. Williams had aspirations. But Kennedy put him in charge of African Affairs in the State Department, which was no job at all. But he had been a very effective governor. He had used this Democratic Advisory Committee. So Staebler said to me, “Why don't you get one for Massachusetts?”



So when we made our deal with Teddy, we said, "Will you set up an advisory committee?" and he said, yes. So my friends and I got some really good people. General Galvin [James Galvin], who was head of Arthur Little. Do you know what that is?

DAITCH: Yes. The accounting firm?

BEER: That's the think tank.

DAITCH: Oh, the think tank.

BEER: Arthur D. Little. He had commanded the 82nd Airborne. Eli Goldston, who was the head of Commonwealth Gas, a very sophisticated, liberal Jew, and wealthy. And I also was going to put on people from the legislature, which was the thing to do, as the DAC had Humphrey on it. Ken Galbraith said, "No, don't put those legislators on it. They'll just spoil the soup. Go in and get guys who know what's wrong." And I followed his advice!

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Well, Teddy set it up, and we had a big meeting at his house here off Storrow Drive. We did produce some very good reports, some of which were later used. But the legislators! Our contact was Al Cella. Alfred Cella was a former of student of mine and who was working for the Speaker. When the Democratic legislators heard about the committee they were furious. Oh, they hated Harvard "coming in and trying to tell us what to do!" And the fact that this guy or that guy was a famous general or a businessman didn't impress them. They saw Harvard and nothing else but Harvard. We tried to make it work, but it just did not. Nobody would pay any attention to it. And finally it had to be dissolved.

But the national DAC properly constituted with at least some legislators on it. It became a Kennedy institution. You look at what Arthur Schlesinger says about it. It fed masses of stuff into those committees which ultimately came out as the Great Society.

As Arthur said, "The party was not a first priority with Kennedy." He wasn't much of a party man, but he did a lot for the party, attracting people to it. And within the Democratic Party he bridged the gap between the intellectual elite and the meat-and-potatoes working class. Recently another person who has done that is Romney [Governor Mitt Romney]. Romney carried Everett, which is a solidly Democratic working-class town, against Shannon O'Brien. I voted for her on the instructions of Betty Taymor and all my female friends. They would never speak to me if I hadn't voted for her.

DAITCH: Absolutely!

BEER: Right. But I think there was a lot of anti-feminism all over the country.

DAITCH: Oh, you bet!

BEER: Elizabeth Dole [is] one of those Southern Steel Magnolias. But where else did

women win?

DAITCH: Oh, yes.

BEER: Actually Kathleen Kennedy Townsend was a student of mine, and lost in Maryland. Democratic, that's really hard to do.

DAITCH: Yes, it is.

BEER: Carnehan [Jean Carnehan], in Missouri.

DAITCH: Shaheen [Jeanne Shaheen].

BEER: Shaheen in New Hampshire. Betty has written a book called *Running Against the Wind* about Massachusetts politics.

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DAITCH: How do you spell her last name?

BEER: T-A-Y-M-O-R. Everybody at the Kennedy Library knows her. You ought to read that book. It's about her experiences. She pulls some of her punches. She doesn't tell you how revolting those guys in the Democratic chairman's office were when a really gorgeous woman came in. Oh! They couldn't believe, you know, that she was interested in politics.

DAITCH: And a product of their times, too, in fairness to them.

BEER: Oh, yes. Oh, yes.

DAITCH: So you think that Kennedy, his influence on the party wasn't so much that he was involved as that he was...

BEER: He didn't work his way up through the party. He used a series of Kennedy groups.

DAITCH: What do you mean "Kennedy groups"?

BEER: Well, he set up his "secretaries," as he called them. See, this is the whole system of factions or tongs, each candidate had a separate set of groups.

DAITCH: Oh, I see. So he had his own....

BEER: You're running for a legislative district, say, Middlesex. And you have some group of people there who support you. They'll always come out for you every

two years and raise some money for you. Alice Wolf is my rep and somebody gives a party for her every year, and I donate some money. Kennedy had them all over the state, and they were very effective, and they were very special, and they were very elitist. They were women. Very important. And ladies having their teas. The Kennedy teas were famous, and if you read *The Last Hurrah*, the teas there which Ed O'Connor [Edward O'Connor] attributes to his candidate are really the Kennedys' teas.

But Kennedy didn't neglect the platform. Was he worried about the fate of Stevenson? He would pick somebody he thought could win; he'd want that person to win but what he was thinking of was, I think, how it would help him move up the ladder of success. Tell me some politician who didn't think that way.

DAITCH: Right.

BEER: I don't know a single one who didn't cut a lot of corners, pretty sharp. All,

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every one, at some point had to make some big concession which made him a little bit embarrassed to look in the mirror.

DAITCH: Who were his constituents among John Q. Voting Public?

BEER: Well, he had a hard time winning over these liberals, the ADA types. In 1960, after he got the nomination, the reports from our locals showed he had trouble. There was a Catholic-Jewish thing going on. I remember talking with one member about Kennedy. I said, "Why in the hell are you so against Kennedy?" He said, "Because I think at heart he's a fascist." Later on he went to Washington and took a good job under Kennedy. But people say things like that under stress.

I've got notes here about the Harriman [W. Averell Harriman] people who were attacking Stevenson at the National Democratic Convention in '52, saying, "Oh, he's indecisive." Which was true. "He's a fairy, he's homosexual." Absolutely absurd. Some Stevenson people, they were saying that Harriman, he had some AF of L thugs beating up on Stevenson supporters. It wasn't true. I mean people get so tired and so drunk sometimes that they'll say crazy things. But there was a Catholic-Jewish problem. Some Jews had a problem with Catholics, and that was one of his difficulties.

DAITCH: Do you think he surmounted that?

BEER: Oh, pretty much, I think, sure. I don't know how to prove it, but I'm sure he had.

DAITCH: I have a list of questions that I had carefully prepared.

BEER: Okay. Fine.

DAITCH: And usually I end up just chatting with somebody. But let me run through some of these and just see where we are. His voting record in Congress was apparently not particularly outstanding or—I used the word “courageous” in my notes.

BEER: Yes.

DAITCH: For the person who wrote *Profiles in Courage*, it wasn't....

BEER: First he wrote.... He wrote *While England Slept*. Then he wrote the other one.

DAITCH: Later. And, you know, he had this sort of—he was almost conservative in Congress, and he didn't.... You told me on the phone how you had hoped

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that, and many other people had hoped, that he would stand up against McCarthyism, in fact.

BEER: Right. And civil rights. But I've told you the Robert Frost story, too.

DAITCH: Yes. Say it again for the tape because that's something that....

BEER: At his Jefferson-Jackson Day dinner in May 1961 at the Commonwealth Armory, Kennedy wanted Robert Frost to come. Since he was a neighbor of mine, I was asked to bring him. I knew him; I'd introduced them. And so I picked him up and took him over. My late wife's job that night was to prevent him from drinking, but she couldn't do it. And he had a wonderful time.

Ran up against Sonny McDonough [Patrick J. McDonough], who was this real thief, scoundrel, a member of the Executive Council. A very, very witty, wicked Irishman. So he immediately saw Frost, and he said, “Ooohhh, what a pleasure to meet you, sir. You're the man who couldn't remember his poem.” Something like that. And Frost thought that was marvelous. So he had a great time with McDonough, and he recited one of his poems. He loved the dinner. He adored Kennedy. And after the dinner, it was raining, and I took him back in a cab to Brewster Street. He was eighty-five. I thought that was pretty old. I asked, “Mr. Frost, would you like to go back to Brewster Street, or come into my house for a while? Some of my friends are going to come and talk.” “Oh, yes,” he said, “let's go to your house and talk heresy.”

So he came to the house, and he stayed 'til three a.m. Everybody else had left. My wife scrambled some eggs. I took him back home to Brewster Street, and went up to this darkened door. They've got a panel on that house now. He had his key. He was living by himself. He went in and closed the door. Then opened it a bit and looking out at me, he said “You all right?” During the evening, of course, he dominated the conversation. He's a Vermonter.

There were two great Vermonters. One was Powell [Thomas Reed Powell], a brilliant law professor; I thought he had the best analytic mind in Cambridge and I attended his lectures in constitutional law, that were just marvelous. He never lectured, he always questioned. He did everything by questioning. He was a Vermonter with the analytical mind, and the Vermonter with the narrative, metaphorical, soaring mind was Frost. You saw his mind constantly moving in these wonderful, soaring associations, but with no analysis.

He'd been to Israel, and he said, "Oh, yes, I went to Israel. Went to a big classroom," he said, "in one of these kibbutz places." He said, "I must say the children were very well behaved for a while. Then they got acting up just as badly as if they'd been raised by their parents."

Then he got on to Truman. He couldn't stand Truman. He thought Truman was awful. He said, "Truman thinks he's the greatest man who was ever President." Finally a young woman, Dan Fenn's then wife [Nancy R. Fenn], nice girl with braids, said,

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"Well, Mr. Frost, don't you think you're a great poet?" He looked at her, his eyes blazed, he became fierce, and he said, "I've never been so insulted in my life! How dare you say that!" He went on like that. I thought, the evening is in shambles. And poor thing, she was just destroyed. But he finally quieted down.

The next day I was at the Faculty Club, and I talked to Ted Morrison [Theodore Morrison], whose wife [Kathleen Morrison] worked for Frost as his amanuensis. I said, "What do you make of that?" Ted said, "Doesn't surprise me one bit. Perfect Frost." He said, "Do you realize that every day that man gets up, looks in the mirror, and says, 'Is that the greatest poet in the world?'" At the time I thought, well, if you're really a poet or a writer, you don't want to be a great writer, you want to be able to write well. In fact, do you want reputation, fame is the spur, the last infirmity of noble mind. And it's very strong, even in Frost. Why the hell I started talking about this, I don't know, but I responded....

DAITCH: You did. And he made that comment that Kennedy was not a liberal.

BEER: Oh, and he made the comment, yes, as I was taking him over to the dinner. And knowing that Frost was a hidebound conservative, I asked, "Mr. Frost, how did you ever happen to like Kennedy?" He said, "Ohhh, that speech of his in California." He said, "I knew he was no liberal. You know my definition of a liberal? A liberal is a man who can't take his own side in an argument." I hadn't heard that one. Of course, it became famous. So Kennedy was not a liberal, and he himself said, "I'm not what's usually called a liberal."

But when he was running in '52, a man named Gardner Jackson—you've never heard of him. He was a wealthy guy, who founded what he called the "Poor Man's Lobby." So he'd go down and lobby for all kinds of good causes. He was for Kennedy, so he rounded up a bunch of professors to run an ad in the *New Republic*. And he was going to get them to pay for it. He sent me a copy of the ad which he and Arthur Schlesinger, Sr. [Arthur M. Schlesinger, Sr.] had drawn up. So it looked all right to me. Oh, this is it. [Looking at a copy]

Joe Kennedy heard what these professors were doing, and he killed the whole thing. Said, "We don't want a bunch of professors. This won't do Jack any good at all." So Joe killed it. This is the ad, I'm pretty sure. But what efforts, what did we pick out of his record? Well, I quoted Congressman Kennedy's campaign and record to show him to be independent, intelligent, forthright. Nothing about liberal.

"He's neither doctrinaire nor guided by shallow political expediency.... Fundamental to his thinking on international problems is the commitment he made to the Point-4 Program." There's a big problem of funds. "—with the understanding that communism destroys all individual human values, he is unremitting in his fight against communism.... Along with the national leader of his party, Adlai Stevenson, he sees clearly that methods used in this fight must be so designed and applied that they themselves do not undermine the very civil liberties our nation has taken leadership in defending." Maybe that's what made Joe mad. See, this was when McCarthyism was at its height.

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DAITCH: Right.

BEER: Kennedy said, "Why don't I attack McCarthy [Joseph R. McCarthy]? Half of my supporters in Massachusetts think he's a hero." McCarthy did have a lot of support.

DAITCH: John Kennedy said that?

BEER: John Kennedy said that. That's in Arthur's book. Arthur spends a lot of time trying to explain that away, but it was just part of his political caution. He had nothing to gain from attacking McCarthy. Finally, of course, it was that wonderful senator from Vermont who delivered the death blow. But back to the ad: "His concern for the working men and women of his state and nation has been unwavering. He has consistently supported price stabilization, rent control, and other measures to check and control inflation. His stand on taxation and other economic legislation shows a mind seeking to help achieve a balanced economy established on the principle of the greatest good for the greatest number."

DAITCH: There's progressivism.

BEER: "A veteran of World War II, he is a dedicated worker for peace.... He's a firm advocate of the UN." Well that sounds to me like a run-of-the-mill liberal of 1952. He doesn't say anything about minimum—well, I'm sure Kennedy voted for minimum wage.

But what I do remember is that when he became a senator, he made a maiden speech. I think it took two days, or two opportunities in the Senate. And it was the most boring speech. It was all about the New England economy, full of statistics of what had happened to the textile industry and the shoe industry and the working class. A huge amount of economic

material that didn't add up to anything. So I don't have any more on him. As he grew, you know, if he did, he grew up in the Senate.

DAITCH: Yes. Well, he was so young when he was first elected.

BEER: He was so young.

DAITCH: And, you know, I have this impression that he was kind of a skinny kid in Congress.

BEER: I think a lot of guys do that. Others, most of us, sort of acquire an ideological bent in our teens, as Eric Erickson observes. If you're academically inclined, like me, you get it bad. You're left-wing and you're right-wing and you're one thing, and you're saying, well, what do I stand for? You try to

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think it out. But Kennedy, I think didn't have this problem. Arthur describes his search for identity. I don't know whether it's true but it's very detailed. I don't think it answers your question.

I think the truth is Arthur won't say anything bad about him, ever. If anything there may have been something between 1952 and 1960 that made a man of him as that 1960 letter shows. I was very impressed, and I had not been before. And I said the last couple of years. What the hell it was, I don't know. Hungary? Or another event? It was much more personal, I think. Difference in age? Late forties? Your guess is as good as mine. I think that—why are you interested?

DAITCH: It's just a personal interest of mine. Actually, I talked to Kenneth Galbraith.

BEER: Yes? What did he say?

DAITCH: He said the same kind of thing. He was very specific about, you know, Kennedy going through these stages where, you know, he was a kid; he would go seek advice, and he would sort of do what he was told because he respected the advice of people. And maybe he went through another stage—I don't remember exactly how the stages went—but there was another stage where he sought advice from a lot of different people, and he would make up his own mind. Then the third stage where he knew more than just anybody else about the issues anyway, and he made up his own mind.

BEER: That's a good point, I think. I think that maybe Roosevelt may have been like that, too, because he didn't impress people.

DAITCH: Really?

BEER: No. And he couldn't write. He tried to write, and he couldn't write. But

Kennedy could write.

DAITCH: Well, that was the other thing that I asked Galbraith because he knew him slightly as an undergraduate, and he said the same thing you said, that he just was not known for his academic...

BEER: But he wrote that book. And people have said Jim Burns wrote *Profiles in Courage*. I don't think it's true, but Jim helped him, admits he did. But I think his honors essay, Payson Wilde and Bruce Hopper helped him, but he had to write it.

DAITCH: And apparently he grew as a writer, too. I mean it was always my understanding that he worked hard on his own speeches.

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BEER: Yes. He worked on his inaugural very hard. Ted Sorensen [Theodore C. Sorensen] gave him a lot of that balanced grammar. "What you can do for your country," I think that's him. I'd like to know because I knew that piles of people had sent drafts and suggestions. But that was all gone from the federal archives when I looked for sources of his inaugural address.

DAITCH: Really?

BEER: But the Kennedy Library doesn't have anything. Somebody took all those papers. So you don't know where those things in the inaugural speech came from.

DAITCH: Not a whole lot. We know some. In fact I asked Galbraith because he participated in that. And he said, you know, it was such a famous speech, and it's a beautiful speech, he said, "The thing you have to be really careful about is that everybody wants to take credit for all that stuff."

BEER: Sure.

DAITCH: The one thing he said that he was proud of was, "Let us begin..." where he's talking we're not going to do all this stuff in X numbers of years, but "let us begin." And it's a beautiful line. It's wonderful.

BEER: It's a marvelous line. I thought that was Ted's, but I don't know. Maybe Arthur.... Arthur wrote very fast. He could just like that write a good speech, just like that. [Interruption; telephone ]

DAITCH: Let me just very quickly go through a handful of questions.



BEER: Yes, go ahead. That's right. Go ahead.

DAITCH: I'll buzz through because I don't want to keep you too late.

BEER: No, I'm in no rush. I'd rather talk about it now.

DAITCH: I have to say these...

BEER: I can get a copy of this from you?

DAITCH: Absolutely, you will get a copy of this.

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BEER: Okay.

DAITCH: I'll do some light editing, you know, just anything that the transcriber got wrong or if you....

BEER: Oh, you're going to transcribe this, too?

DAITCH: Oh, absolutely.

BEER: God, it'll cost you a million dollars, won't it? Well, I guess....

DAITCH: No, it's a good thing for us to do. I don't think it'll be a million dollars, but maybe half a million.

BEER: I remember transcribing those Kennedy tapes was very expensive. Of course they weren't very audible.

DAITCH: No, it's going to be less expensive now. And these, with any luck, these should be wonderful tapes and easy to transcribe.

BEER: Well, fine. Because I'm writing some autobiographical stuff and this will probably help me.

DAITCH: Oh, good, great. Yes, absolutely. Yes, you'll get a copy, and we'll want you to approve it and add anything that you want to add.

BEER: Okay.

DAITCH: But one of the questions I had was, you may not—obviously you have a very good memory for names and stuff, but I was going to ask you who were

maybe some of Kennedy's particular allies in the Democratic Party in Massachusetts?

BEER: Well, his enemies, if you want—"adversary" is a better word—were the McCormacks. And McCormack really did him in in 1956 when he was running for vice.... Well, when he was running for vice president but was supporting Stevenson. And Ted had asked me to do a survey of opinion for Stevenson.

DAITCH: Ted Sorensen?

BEER: Sorensen. Well, actually, it was Kennedy who came to me. I was staying in the Willard Hotel, and he came to my room there and asked, "Will you do

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this?" That reminds me how he would do something rather than delegate. He was very much a doer himself. So he came to me, and I was flattered to have a senator come and say.... He said, "You can get the Young Democrats to do it." Well, I did this survey, or we did it, as well as we could by getting samples from ethnically different and economically different wards and so on. We asked, "Who do you support?" And we gave them these names. And they put Stevenson way ahead, and they had some others, including Kennedy, lower down. But a very large portion undecided. And then in the last few weeks McCormack came in and ran as a "favorite son." So he just swept Stevenson out of the way. The old ladies from South Boston wouldn't have a divorced man, as I guess I said before.

DAITCH: Yes.

BEER: I'm not really answering your question. McCormack was his adversary, and he supported this guy Onions Burke. They belonged to that old gang to whom the Democratic Party was nothing more than jobs. And in talking to the Democratic women, you couldn't even get a rise out of them by talking about Social Security. It was the only thing a Democratic governor meant to them was that there'd be spending. Because Massachusetts in the fifties was not a well-off, affluent state. The Depression lasted especially long here because the textiles had gone, and we didn't have the electronic revolution yet. Then in the sixties when Route 128 suddenly came alive, to everybody's surprise, and suddenly became the hub covered with these places carrying all this electronic stuff like Arthur D. Little.

DAITCH: Right. And 128, you mean Route 128.

BEER: Route 128, yes, the 128 thing. But that was in the sixties. When the economy began to revive in the state. So therefore a job was terribly important. A job with the government was very helpful. Schoolteachers were well off in the Depression. That's what the Democratic Party meant to them: public works. John McCormack would say "I remember people standing in line on Atlantic Avenue for miles

waiting for a job.” So if there was enmity, it had that base. And then there was a difference of class, if you like, Eddy McCormack talked with a South Boston accent. So did Cardinal Cushing [Richard C. Cushing].

Let me see. Now who were his friends? Obviously, people like Bill Blair [William M. Blair, Jr.] Who was his classmate who was always pimping for him? [unclear]. Wonder who were his friends who helped him in different states?

DAITCH: Yes. Or academics, were they....

BEER: Oh, academics, yes. Well, I had a.... Well, the academics loved Stevenson in 1952. Who did I get? Well, obviously, I think I had Jim, I must have had

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Jim Burns then from Williams. But I don't want to mix it up with Teddy. You can tell from Arthur much better. Archie Cox [Archibald Cox], of course, was crucial. There were a lot of people like the obvious people in economics and law from around here. I got money from Paul Freund [Paul A. Freund] of the law school for the Jefferson-Jackson Dinner. I remember I got \$100 out of him. I thought that damn small considering his chance of going to the Supreme Court. Who else? Well, obviously people like Betty Taymor. You really ought to look at her book.

DAITCH: Yes. I will take a look.

BEER: You're doing more than oral history, aren't you?

DAITCH: Mostly oral history for the library.

BEER: Just that?

DAITCH: Right.

BEER: But mostly about Kennedy.

DAITCH: Yes. I'll see if anything else comes of it.

BEER: Well, she's a person you ought to talk to. She's awfully smart. She has a long experience here.

DAITCH: And she knew him?

BEER: Oh, she was one of his “secretaries.” And that's all. I mean good heavens! But she was his friend. He asked her to the White House before he asked me.

DAITCH: I want to say something....

BEER: I wanted to get invited to the White House. I wasn't, she was, when I was head of ADA he wouldn't invite me. He had her in.

DAITCH: He wouldn't invite you? Why not?

BEER: He did have me to the Oval Office as representing ADA. Then at a later time I wanted to see him because there was an ADA conference and I wanted to say, "I've just seen the President." That was about it. I hung around the West Wing in Kenny O'Donnell's office and couldn't get an appointment. He

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would sponsor the ADA annual dinner in Boston, but a lot of people would do that. McCormack, anybody. But he wouldn't come and speak, although he would attend the ADA dinner in Philadelphia.

DAITCH: Why?

BEER: Because he wasn't so sure of support there. He figured that, in Massachusetts, he had everything sewed up. He didn't have to talk to us for the sake of votes. The only thing that we could help him with would be some technical thing, conceivably with the party, but more likely with policy. That's what he looked to us for help. He was obviously a hard-boiled, calculating guy.

In 1956 I tried to get him to come to Massachusetts for Stevenson. The situation was desperate. We knew Stevenson was doing badly. I'd been around the state. And knew how these people over in City Hall said they were voting for Ike. I have a copy of the letter here. So I wrote to him in October saying, do come. I'd asked him before. He never came.

DAITCH: Wouldn't it have benefited him to come, too?

BEER: No, he had nothing to gain. That was 1956. He didn't worry about his own support. If he came, it was for five minutes.

DAITCH: And that would have been after the convention already.

BEER: This is the letter: "Dear Jack, I'm writing to urge you as strongly as I can, to urge you to come to Massachusetts and make a plea for Stevenson as soon as possible. The last ten days of the campaign will be too late. The difficulty is with a certain segment of Irish Democrats whom we want to win over to Stevenson. By the end of the campaign, many of them will have definitely become committed to Eisenhower. Besides, we can use their help in the next four weeks. I have been traveling around the state getting groups of ADA people and independents to work with the local chairmen of the Stevenson committees, usually chosen from your contacts. Your men are very good, and the plan has worked well for an integrated campaign.

“There are still, however, a good many Democrats, often connected with the local organizations, who are cool to Stevenson. At City Hall in Cambridge, for example, you will hear regular Democrats saying that while they will vote straight ticket for state candidates, they have not yet made up their minds about the presidential contest.” This is 1956.

“I have met with similar attitudes in other cities and towns, even met one Democrat, an organization man, who said that he did not believe that Dever was for Stevenson. But that was before Paul's excellent statement last week. Maybe they know you are for Stevenson, but they do not feel it. You must meet them, so to speak, on TV,

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and make them feel that Stevenson is your candidate and theirs. I have urged Paul to do the same thing and think he will next week in one or more of the five-minute spots on TV which are being arranged. If you cannot come in person, perhaps a five-minute kinescope of you making a warm and urgent plea would do. But I think a speech would be better.” So that's it. He didn't come.

DAITCH: I'm trying to put this together because I'm thinking, okay, it's not going to benefit him to push for Stevenson. He's already thinking about running in 1960.

BEER: He's thinking about running for president all the time, for a long while. Maybe that's when he started to change. He got bored being in the House of Representatives, and then maybe he started to look up. He wasn't ambitious for public office, you know, it took time to convince him. He didn't start as soon as Joe [Joseph P. Kennedy, Jr.], his brother, was killed. He didn't sort of automatically become number one. He continued to think he was going into journalism. He went as a reporter to the UN or something.

DAITCH: He wanted to be a writer originally.

BEER: Right, he wanted to be a writer. And in a way he had the making of one: he had that coolness and detachment and ability to write. And then I think the bug got him to be president.

DAITCH: Right. And, well, then the coolness and detachment probably served him well as president, too.

BEER: Yes.

DAITCH: Okay. Let me run through some of these other things. Let's see. What haven't we already talked about? Most of this we've already talked about, but.... We've talked quite a bit about his, you know, who in Massachusetts politics, among the politicians.... The voters, did he have a good relationship? Or do you have any

knowledge of how he campaigned like on the street, pressing flesh, and doing those types of things?

BEER: No, I never went out with him, house to house or anything like that. He was very effective in a big crowd. I remember his Boston Garden speech at the end of the campaign in 1960 was a tremendous success. He'd just had—there were a lot of voters there. It wasn't just people who were activists, there were a lot of pols [politicians]. A friend said, “Look at these pols. They're mystified. They think he has some special little thing, you know. They don't understand how this guy really appeals to

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people.” And when I think of some of the really terrible, second-rate types that we had, and still have, it's an awful job being a state representative.

DAITCH: Oh, yes.

BEER: Who the hell wants that?

DAITCH: Oh, yes. Absolutely miserable.

BEER: That's what he didn't want to do. He did not want to run for governor.

DAITCH: Oh, yes, yes. Did you try to convince him to do that?

BEER: Oh, they tried right away.... Well, I didn't, I think it was Paul Douglas tried to persuade him. And he said, “I can't imagine being up there in the statehouse deciding what to do about sewers.”

DAITCH: Right. He's an interesting guy. About what year was that, do you remember?

BEER: Well, yes. This was before '56. I think I may have picked this up out of Schlesinger's book. So it would be in there somewhere.

[CHANGE TO SIDE B OF TAPE]

DAITCH: ....every day.

BEER: Oh, and just being elected. Just being elected and doing something with it. I never had that impulse myself, which is why I never ran for public office. But I think you have to accomplish something. I'm not sure I can imagine what it's like.

DAITCH: He seemed quite driven to accomplish things.

BEER: I think a lot of politicians are. They really want to be remembered in history. They want, so to speak.... I think this is why I used to have arguments with Lyons [Frank Lyons]. He claimed politicians don't believe in anything except getting elected, getting some money. I said, "No, they are committed to their purposes. And their purposes depend a lot on what they've done. Here's John McCormack or Dever. When they came in, they didn't have anything particular in mind. But then they got in there with Roosevelt, and they passed a bill to set up public works or WPA or the Wagner Act. They voted for that, and they fought for that, so they begin to believe in it." In other words, you do something, and then you come to believe in it. And I think that's very important.

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But with Kennedy, he could generate his own purposes. You ask about purpose, which is, of course, crucial. I think his purposes came out probably from having some taste of it. This is what people mean by a taste for power. It's not just power. It's actually doing; it's changing the world. I did that, so I know what it's like. When you fix something in the house or lay a sidewalk, you have a wonderful feeling you did it, you walk on it. You make a pie or something, it's a good feeling.

DAITCH: Absolutely.

BEER: I never had the feeling about reorganizing the government department or the organization of the ADA. I always wanted to do my work down here in my office or the library. The fewer meetings we can have in academic life, the better.

DAITCH: Right. A lot of things are just duty, but you have to do them.

BEER: Administration I regarded as a waste of time. That's a great difference. Two conceptions of truth. Kennedy had a good speech he made about that. Truth is something that enables you to get things done. A functional view of truth. But for the academic the truth tells you what it's all about. A very different thing.

DAITCH: Right. Absolutely. What's real.

BEER: Yes.

DAITCH: Yes, his impulse to change things is an interesting thing. And he's a guy—like Clinton, I think, too, he's widely read, broad view of history, understanding of history, understanding of historical movement. And that seems to me to be critical.

BEER: He was very close to the facts. He was not a speculative person. He didn't start from some religious or philosophical premise, the way I would, or probably

political philosophers. He would start from some kind of problem, something that he recognized he'd have to change. But he'd look at it in a quite big way. I wonder whether he applied this very much to foreign affairs. I don't know much about his feeling, because he really goofed at first. He didn't handle Khrushchev [Nikita Sergeyevich Khrushchev] very well at Vienna. And he certainly didn't handle the Bay of Pigs. Arthur says they were just conned by the military. But I think when he came into his own was in the Cuban Missile Crisis. He learned by doing.

DAITCH: Right. Because if he learned anything from the Bay of Pigs, it was that which he applied to the Cuban Missile Crisis.

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BEER: To be sure. After that, see, he would have Maxwell Taylor [Maxwell D. Taylor] in his staff, I think so the military couldn't fool him. Because as Arthur described it, the military came in with their maps and everything, and they said, "We'll go in here, and then these people will join us here." It had been all worked out under Eisenhower, who had started it. Now, presumably, Eisenhower would have had enough sense to do it right, although frankly, having been at Omaha Beach in 1944, I think that was the most so-and-so thing. Oh! Awful! Terrible! Ike should have buried his head in the sand, it was so screwed up. But I won't go into that. Anyhow, I assume Eisenhower would have handled the Bay of Pigs better.

DAITCH: Well, apparently one of the crucial failures of understanding was this notion that, oh, yes, the Cubans are going to rise up and join us.

BEER: Yes.

DAITCH: Likewise in Vietnam. Oh, yes, the Vietnamese, you know.... These things are so blatantly untrue, I've never quite understood what's the failure of understanding.

BEER: Well, I think there were a lot more people in Cuba who would have helped him. Anyhow, there was a Cuban leader whom I knew quite well, who came from Havana, and he said, "Castro [Fidel Castro] did not really have the organization that we think he had." But all that, that's a long story.

DAITCH: Yes. Well, maybe not enough organization on either side. But it's just an interesting kind of question.

BEER: But I think your question, where Kennedy got his purpose, is terribly important. It's probably best that he got them from actual contact with a problem because when you start in the deductive way, you get into ideological fights or quarrels over trivia. The way policy should develop is policy breeds policy. You do something, you succeed, and then you do something similar somewhere else.



DAITCH: Or expand on it maybe a little bit. You know, I spoke with Roger Wilkins [Roger C. Wilkins] the other day. He was very honest about—he didn't particularly like Bob Kennedy or John Kennedy particularly at the time because they weren't doing anything aggressively in civil rights. The other thing that he said is that—the same thing you're talking about. He thought they, both of them, were masters of learning from experience, actually seeing and developing an understanding of the situation, developing the understanding of civil rights through integration of Ole Miss

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and all these other situations that were evolving. Understanding poverty because of that, urban poverty; running in the West Virginia primary, apparently witnessing some of the poverty there, was a huge influence on Kennedy. So then what you're saying about experience strikes me as maybe the same.

BEER: Right. It struck me, I remember when I was reading, listening to the tapes. The Kennedys didn't espouse civil rights because they believed that all men are created equal, and Lincoln [Abraham Lincoln] said, "We will have a new birth of freedom, and slavery is evil and so is the deposit of slavery." And so on. That isn't the way it was. JFK looked at the situation and he saw that this conflict was going to cause great disorder and trouble, and everybody's going to be hurt—or not everybody, somebody, a lot of people, and we have to prevent this. Therefore to prevent this harm, we have to get Meredith into the university. And we have to make the buses in Birmingham work.

DAITCH: Right. And if we hadn't gone down there....

BEER: He got a kind of purpose in this, very closely linked to the facts. But it's big; it isn't little.

DAITCH: Right. Exactly. And how do we go about creating this with the least amount of harm or trouble or disorder?

BEER: Right.

DAITCH: I think that's a useful way to look at him. Anyway, let me see.... We could talk all day because this is so much fun. But I know you're probably needing to go home. One of the things that we've started to look at a little bit that we're not looking at, you know, thinking about Mrs. Taymor, we might need to talk to her again. But I think probably she was interviewed in the sixties; that would be my guess. I should look at the interview maybe and just make sure that it's adequately done. But one of the other things we've been doing.... I talked to Frank Stanton and Don Hewitt [Don S. Hewitt] at CBS a little bit about the role of television in this. Do you see that as a big shift in political campaigns?

BEER: Yes. We thought TV was a big element in changing the character of the convention. That Kennedy was able to go out and reach a far bigger public than he could have any other way. And therefore he had this great support in these different states. He became nationally known.

DAITCH: Right. And he wasn't before that.

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BEER: Television and long-distance phone and the jet airplane. He actually went places. But, I think his campaign technique and just the fact of technology of television had gotten pretty far then. It was still a bit primitive. I mean Stevenson's method was to make these long speeches, half-hour speeches. Well, of course, you don't do it anymore. Unfortunately, they ought to have some speeches. But Stevenson would talk. The station would cut him off after half an hour; that's all he'd paid for. But he wouldn't cut his speech. When he saw time running out, he'd still go on talking to the audience. He hadn't really been talking to that 3,000 people. He had been talking to maybe half a million. But he didn't consider that. He followed his text. So his television performance wasn't all that great. But I think television made a great difference. There must be some people who have studied this.

DAITCH: Absolutely. Yes. I think there are some books about it.

BEER: TV also helped to change the convention from a place where they really made decisions to just a kind of an electoral college and a PR event. This also has happened in England. Blair's changed the Labour Party conference so he really doesn't have to fear much from it. I recall Hugh Gaitskell [Hugh Todd Gaitskell] still saying to me, he'd been head of the party, he said, "It's awful. You get to August. You're thinking of September, October, and then, my God, here comes the party conference. What awful things are the left-wingers going to throw at me this time?"

DAITCH: There's something that you told me on the phone that I wanted to follow up with you. I love this notion of—I like this notion of Kennedy the man, I guess. And one of the things you told me was that he was not bound by tradition. And I was wondering if maybe you could give me an example of something he did or decided not to do that a more traditional person would have done differently.

BEER: Well, I don't think it would be hard. Yes, yes, yes. I think one of the great things was when he opened up the convention to the vice president.... No, that was Stevenson. That was a good example of breaking with tradition, yes. And Rayburn and people like that were very angry with Stevenson for that. Of course this had nothing to do with Kennedy. He accepted it as everybody else did. Well, I think the way he used women, I mean as his secretaries, was very unusual. Because women had always had the secondary role of licking stamps. The National Committee always included a woman from each state, but usually she was politically negligible. The two members from

Massachusetts were James Michael Curley and Mrs. O'Riordan [Margaret M. O'Riordan]. And Mrs. O'Riordan came right out of the *New Yorker* cartoons, you know. She was like that. She never had anything to say. She never did anything. She was just a great big, buxom Irish woman.

But Kennedy really got these very intelligent women, like Betty Taymor, to work for him. He was traditional in the sense that he built up a candidacy-based machine. But

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he was very untraditional in his use of women. See what Betty says about it.

DAITCH: Yes, that's an interesting idea, and I'd like to....

BEER: She founded a school for women, you know, a big program at U-Mass. She's created people who've gone on and gotten elected to office.

DAITCH: That's fabulous!

BEER: It was quite a job. Boy, it was tough! Anything that I could think, of other nontraditional things that he did.

DAITCH: What was her first name? Betty?

BEER: Well, everybody calls her Betty. I'll give you her telephone number. She lives in the Cambridge area.

DAITCH: I'm pretty sure there's an interview done with her, but I'd like to look at it and see if it's....

BEER: Her telephone number's [redacted].

DAITCH: Great.

BEER: But get a hold of her book in the library. Skim through that and find questions you might want to ask.

DAITCH: Yes, I'd like that. Because it could be that the older interview didn't—they don't always pick up on things that you think about years later.

BEER: That's right.

DAITCH: But I'll ask you a little bit about your involvement in the Kennedy School of Government and the library in the post-assassination.

BEER: Well, that was quite a big thing. Almost as soon as he died, we began thinking

of what we could do to institutionalize this person. That was exactly the way we thought of it. Since he won't be there, how can we create an institution which will tend to do the things that he did? So we thought about bringing the intellectual and the political worlds together, which is now repeated a great deal. But I know it was almost original with us then, this idea, and it was Kennedy who'd done this.

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He would have intellectuals, of course, as Clinton did. Clinton had me to one of his Thinkers' Dinners. I was on his right hand because my age was at least twice that of the average age of other people there. Roosevelt, [unclear] had been intellectuals, but back to the Kennedy School. For our first meeting Schlesinger, Galbraith, and others went down to New York.

DAITCH: Really? Not here.

BEER: No, but what place?

DAITCH: Oh, in New York.

BEER: The Twenty-one Club.

DAITCH: The Twenty-one Club!

BEER: It was so Kennedy-like. This sort of jazzy, upper-elite place for our conversations about a memorial. Some of us wanted to do something like the Niemann Fellows. That was such an immense success at bringing together the common room and the city room which were very much apart at that time.

DAITCH: Why?

BEER: The people in the newspaper game thought very poorly of professors like Ichabod Crane. And in the world of professors, if you say of their work, "That's just journalism," you kill their scholarly reputation.

I wrote some memos, but Dick Neustadt [Richard E. Neustadt] was the most creative guy. The main thing we created was the Institute of Politics, which was attached to the Graduate School of Public Administration. I think Don Price managed to get some money out of the Kennedys, and therefore the name was changed to the John F. Kennedy School of Government.

What we were doing was the Institute of Politics. Dick had this fertile idea of the "in and outers." Because the problem was, how do you bring in the politicians? Well, I thought, could we do it like the Rhodes Scholarships? Could we do it like Niemanns? We wanted to interest undergraduates in elective politics. Not just preparing them for the civil service, but preparing them for elective politics. What do we do?

DAITCH: In the real world?

BEER: I asked, "What have we done in the past? The Young Democrats Club has always had politicians come in." I'd get Joe Clark [Joseph S. Clark Jr.] to come from Philadelphia and talk to the youngsters about how you organize

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a precinct, and how you get votes, and what you actually do in politics.

So, in a way, that's what we set up. But the problem, of course, was to get politicians. If you have a successful politician, he doesn't have time to come and talk to academics. I started thinking of having a week or two when some governor or some senator or a congressman or whatever would come and spend a time. But that lacked substantial personal contact. Dick's idea was still like that, but it was to have these people who had been in elective office, preferably, but who were out and could stick around for awhile. So it really becomes kind of a government in exile.

DAITCH: Oh, yes....

BEER: Or if you look at the people, they will usually be defeated candidates.

DAITCH: At least they have time.

BEER: And then they go back and presumably are successful. We produced a lot of papers on these proposals. Very easy to find, I'm sure.

DAITCH: Yes.

BEER: In the end they set up this Institute of Politics, and Dick was made the head of it. The founders thought of putting me in. But it was not my cup of tea, and I wouldn't have been good at it. Dick was very good at running it because he'd had this marvelous experience from having been in the White House as a kid under Truman. And he wrote the book which is still *the* book on presidential power, just by writing what he saw. And I've quoted him, plagiarized him, whenever possible, and told him so.

DAITCH: That's excellent stuff. And what about the Screening Committee work?

BEER: Well, you know, we just had our last episode.... Professor Robert Dallek wanted to see the medical records but Ted Sorenson objected. Finally he changed Ted's mind by going and seeing him. Burke Marshall and I had said, okay, looked into Dallek's record. He looked all right, and I called Arthur Schlesinger, who said, "He's a responsible person."

DAITCH: Right. What about.... I can't imagine.... At the time you know Kennedy, you've watched him grow up as a politician and a person and all that stuff.

And you've probably got your impressions of him as a president that you've had for years maybe. But did listening to the tapes change the way that you viewed him?

BEER: Oh, it enhanced my admiration, filled it out and gave it substance. To

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actually see something happening under his administration. Two things in particular come to mind: Martin Luther King and then, of course, the missile crisis. I don't want to go through that. That's the most impressive. That's about the only thing they've got at the Kennedy School that's really worth perpetuating. There isn't much else.

DAITCH: What do you mean there's not?

BEER: Well, what do you go there for? I mean he only was in office a thousand days.

DAITCH: Yes. Right. That's true. Yes. It's an interesting period, though. What an eventful thousand days. I mean if you think about the civil rights activities that were going on, the Cold War episodes, very eventful presidency. We could close on that note, I think....

BEER: All right. All right. Right.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

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