

John Kenneth Galbraith Oral History Interview – JFK#2, 09/12/2002
Administrative Information

Creator: John Kenneth Galbraith

Interviewer: Vicki Daitch

Date of Interview: September 12, 2002

Place of Interview: Cambridge, Massachusetts

Length: 20 pages

Biographical Note

Galbraith was an economist, educator, author, and diplomat. During his career, he was a Professor of Economics at Harvard University (1949-1975), and served as Ambassador to India (1961-1963). In this interview, he and his wife (Catherine “Kitty” Galbraith) discuss President Kennedy’s leadership during the Cuban Missile Crisis and the Bay of Pigs, the selection of Lyndon B. Johnson for vice president, and Johnson’s political strengths, among other issues.

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John Kenneth Galbraith, recorded interview by Vicki Daitch, September 12, 2002, (page number), John F. Kennedy Library Oral History Program.



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John Kenneth Galbraith—JFK #2

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Second Oral History Interview

With

JOHN KENNETH GALBRAITH

September 12, 2003
Cambridge, Massachusetts

by Vicki Daitch

For the John F. Kennedy Library

DAITCH: Again I'll just set up the tapes by saying....

GALBRAITH: Let me start over, I guess.

DAITCH: Okay. We were talking to John Kenneth Galbraith, and we're talking about the Inaugural Address.

GALBRAITH: Well, there's one thing that everyone listening to this should have in mind, that the Inaugural Address of John F. Kennedy was a great success. It was widely heard and uniformly praised. And this leads to the major warning: that you must always be suspicious of the number of people who claim to have participated. I look at the Inaugural speech and unhandedly conclude that the best parts were mine. And that I think is true of others who worked on it. If all the claims were right, this speech might still be going on as we talk.

But it was a wonderful privilege, and I reviewed it for a few matters of content, also perhaps a little more rigorously for questions of English expression. The last thing which I would claim--I'm not going to make any general claim--was the very last, the very conclusion, of the final draft. I was sent, for some reason, possibly to show it to the vice president, sent with it up to the Hill, and I did not then feel that it ended very well. So I wrote, or worked on, the last paragraph, although I'm sure that the president and Ted Sorensen also had a role, and maybe a more important one. The concluding words are not in

this draft that I have. Do you have another draft?

DAITCH: These are the ones that are from the website. This is from the website at the library. But it's in tiny little print, and I think it's the same as that one, although I only briefly reviewed it. You told me about the words "Let us begin...."

GALBRAITH: Well, anyway, I thought it needed a better conclusion. I adverted to the statement that these tasks would not be finished in my forthcoming years and the longer time, and that was the end of it. And I added the words, "But let us begin...."

DAITCH: That's beautiful. And they're here a few paragraphs up, right here on this draft in the middle of the page. And then it goes on with a few more things.

GALBRAITH: What page?

DAITCH: This is page three in the middle of this draft.

GALBRAITH: Because I have page two here. I can see what you.... Point out what you're showing me.

DAITCH: Right here.

GALBRAITH: That was mine, yes. Later that day we went back to the White House or wherever with John Strachey [Evelyn John St. Loe Strachey], who had come with us for the speech. And that was a great thrill for both Kennedy and me when he asked what he liked the best, and he said, "Let us begin...."

DAITCH: He did?

GALBRAITH: And then the next thing that happened was that someone wanted to know whether that was a salute to some very high Israeli figure who was prominent at the time called Begin [Menachem Begin].

DAITCH: Oh, no.... [Laughter] People come up with the strangest things. But that's beautiful.

GALBRAITH: Can I tell you, going back to earlier matters, my most formidable recollection of a conversation with Kennedy? It was right after the Missile Crisis, which was joined in time by the--so far as we ever knew by accident--by the Russian Soviet invasion of India along the mountainous, highly mountainous border.

KITTY: Chinese invasion, not the Soviet invasion.

GALBRAITH: I was a little surprised, as an old bureaucratic hand going back to FDR [Franklin Delano Roosevelt], how much license I was allowed in handling that Chinese attack. And it was not until the film a few months ago on the White House was released that I really knew it was in some measure deliberate. Somebody comes into that meeting in the White House, yes, in the White House, and says, I think it was Robert Kennedy, that we've just learned that now the Chinese have attacked, the Chinese have attacked India.

Now we've just learned that the Chinese are attacking India. And the most agreeable comment I ever heard on the thing came from Kennedy, who said, "Oh, really! Galbraith is handling that."

KITTY: Well, you had your instructions to go back and just take care of everything, that Washington was too busy.

DAITCH: Oh, my goodness!

KITTY: So that was wonderful. I remember that, how happy he was.

DAITCH: Oh, yes.

GALBRAITH: I thought at the time that I'd had unusual authority, but I didn't know until that film that it was legitimate.

DAITCH: So what film was this?

KITTY: *Thirteen Days.*

DAITCH: And I have particular recollections, as you might think, of that period, and there are two: one of considerable amusement value and one that is deeply important. Immediately the Missile Crisis was over, two senators came to India to look into the war there and see what was happening. For some reason that I don't remember, Nehru [Jawahrlal Nehru] was unavailable. They obviously had to see a top official. So I took them to see President Radhakrishnan [Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan], who, as president, had all the appearance of an Oxford don.

KITTY: A very charming man.

GALBRAITH: Tall, well robed, handsome. I brought in the senators into the great presidential hall, and he came down the stairs. And the thing that had become evident by that time was the gross incapacity of the Indian Army and its leadership, particularly the leadership. That provokes the first question about the very questionable general in command for the Indians. Among the senators, the first question, they said, "Mr. President, we have just heard on the radio that your General Kaul [QuarterMaster General, Lt. General B. M. Kaul] has been captured by the Chinese." To which

Radhakrishnan replied, "Unfortunately, untrue." I have never seen two senators quite so shocked. And maybe I showed it myself.

The other thing that I remember, slightly more important, was coming back to Washington after that war ended, as it certainly did, and going over to the White House in the early evening to see the president. And he took me by the arm and said, "Let's go to a theater.... Let's go see a play." I inquired, and we walked down the hill down to a theater that was somewhere down on Pennsylvania Avenue. Terrible matter, I've forgotten the name of it. And I've forgotten the name of the play. But we were ushered in and seated, as you might expect, in the front row.

At intermission, we had to get out because we were overwhelmed with people who had a message for the president or wanted an autograph. So a couple of times we got up, walked around behind the curtain, and sat--found some chairs there. He was talking on one of those journeys, about the Missile Crisis. The word that was strongest then for me, and remains strongest in my memory, was, "Ken, you have no idea how much bad advice I had." It might have been a slightly different phrase.

DAITCH: Right. But he specifically said from...

GALBRAITH: But that was the force of it.

DAITCH: Who were the people that he felt that he had been so mis-advised by?

GALBRAITH: Well, I would have to go back to the generals and some of the more militant civilians, including secretary of state. But there were also, better to remembered, a very articulate group of opponents, of whom the most important and eloquent was George Ball [George W. Ball], undersecretary of state. He was a great figure for common sense then and in later years on Vietnam. But the outcome, of course, was wonderfully satisfactory. And, to some extent, the horror of those days has been partly forgotten. It's been replaced by the more serious mistake in Asia.

KITTY: When the Missile Crisis was beginning, you were on your way to the United States, and you got as far as London. I had fallen off my horse and broken a ligament in my back. I'd come home from the hospital, and they had me on a board; I had to lie flat on my back. So he went off in the evening to fly to London and spend the night in London and go on to the United States for some consultation. He got as far as London and decided to go to the theater and returned from it. He then got word from the president, someone called from Washington, the president....

GALBRAITH: The most brutal letter anybody ever got.

KITTY: It was a message.

GALBRAITH: "What the hell are you doing in London? I want you back in Delhi."

KITTY: He didn't quite know what it was that....

GALBRAITH: He didn't say, "I want you back." "Get back to Delhi!" Or, "Get back to India!"

KITTY: And the Chinese, and the fact that just at that moment we heard that the Chinese had attacked. It was about the same time. He came back, and I had heard he was going to be gone for three weeks. So I had my back board put onto his double bed so I had more space for my books and papers, and they carried me out. I had just gotten settled when they told me he was coming back the next morning, and I had to get back to my own room. Oh, dear, so they had to carry me back on my board. But I remember that very well. I went through the whole Indian-Chinese crisis lying on the board in my bedroom, for quite a while. Then I was able to kind of get up with a kind of a brace that Kennedy had with straps in front and.... And with that I could get up and walk around, but I had to get my clothes designed so they came up over the buttons.

Finally when the war ended, we went up to a flower fair in Delhi in a little.... We were going up so that I could see the soldiers up there. So I went up in a C-130 transport with my brace on. They let me sit in the nose of the plane, and they sat on--they had seats. They gave me a camp stool. And when we were landing, they all got buckled in their seats and told me. There's a pole. Hang onto that, don't lean back, just bend your knees, pretend you're skiing. I did that with my broken back.

DAITCH: Oh, dear. And it worked apparently.

KITTY: Yes, it did. It was fine. Very interesting. Very interesting trip.

GALBRAITH: Kitty was sitting on a large case which had the comforting words on it, "TNT."

KITTY: When I saw a pilot I said set me down. TNT. He said, Oh. No. And then came rushing in and it was labeled TNT, and he tried to convince me it wasn't TNT. Fortunately we didn't crash. It's an amazing flight to Dehli. [TOO FAR AWAY FROM MICROPHONE TO HEAR CLEARLY.] Nobody could ever walk that way [Inaudible]. And nobody had really seen [Inaudible] the people in China were doing. [Inaudible].

DAITCH: It must have been exciting, though.

GALBRAITH: You've seen my picture in my memoirs of that trip.

DAITCH: Mmmm hmmm.

GALBRAITH: But the best caption I ever wrote of the picture getting off the airplane and being greeted by the military, the best caption I ever wrote was: "Instant Eisenhower [Dwight D. Eisenhower]."

DAITCH: I loved your captions, by the way. One or two words captured everything. Can I ask you...? I think it's important to get back to Kennedy's feelings about the Cuban Missile Crisis, which you spoke with him about shortly after the fact. Did he tell you anything else about his sense of what had happened and its importance?

GALBRAITH: Well, that is so long ago that I wouldn't trust my memory, except for things I wrote at the time. But the overwhelming fact was Kennedy's deep mistrust of the advice he was getting, particularly from the military, and from some of the more militarily-disposed civilians who felt, some of them, that it was their duty to outdo the generals.

DAITCH: Just to back up a little bit, you told me on Tuesday that we had been talking about the fact that Kennedy had developed over time as a politician and a person, an intellect. And you had been watching him grow, and you were happy with the way that he was growing. But then you told me that you were very disappointed with the way that he handled the Bay of Pigs. Can we talk about that a little bit?

GALBRAITH: Oh, this was a ghastly mistake, as he was the first to say, or among the first to say. And it happened because, as a new president, he came into a situation where that decision had, for all practical purposes, been made, even to the point where Eisenhower is said to have warned him that that was the one thing from which he must not back off. That has to be checked for accuracy. But that was said in the sense [Inaudible] time. And here he was with the CIA, the State Department under Dean Rusk, the Pentagon, and the generals, and, as I said, some of his own staff, all committed to going ahead. The few of us who had doubts were very much on the side. I spent the night before the Bay of Pigs, or most of it, writing a memorandum opposing the operation. But I was only the distant ambassador to India, and not in any position for central discussion and decision. There were others, including Arthur Schlesinger and George Ball. But the whole central weight assumed the decision to be taken.

DAITCH: You know you said you were disappointed with Kennedy about that, and I think that among some historians the judgment of Kennedy has been harsh. I'm not sure that it's fair in terms of what you were saying. For all intents and purposes, the decision was made. What's your analysis of that?

GALBRAITH: Well, I make two points: First, no one should doubt it was a wrong decision. Second, it was a wrong decision that a new president, taking office and surrounded by civilian and military warriors, would have encountered, and did encounter, not resistance but just assumed action. And that was what Kennedy was up against. On the other side, he had warnings from some old friends like Schlesinger and Galbraith, one or two others, with no bureaucratic position, no natural knowledge of the subject, and no other really strong opponents. Or few other really strong ones, I should say.

DAITCH: Were there other ones that you can think of who were maybe a little bit more on the line?

GALBRAITH: I'd have to check my memory.

KITTY: Chester Bowles [Chester B. Bowles]?

GALBRAITH: Chester Bowles and George Ball would be the two most prominent.

DAITCH: I read before that the loss of life really haunted Kennedy.

GALBRAITH: Beg pardon?

DAITCH: I read somewhere that the loss of life in terms of the Cuban force really haunted Kennedy. Do you know anything about that?

GALBRAITH: I think there's no doubt that it had two effects on Kennedy: First, one for which he was apologetic, very apologetic. He did not like to look back on that event. On the other hand, it had a deep educational influence. He knew from that time on that you could not trust automatically the whole organizational, the whole bureaucratic advice, that it could be wrong. What I say as a footnote, the people that were on the wrong side of that.... I called it the Bay of Pigs; it was the invasion of Cuba. The people that were on the wrong side of that suffered far more than JFK did.

DAITCH: In what way, do you think?

GALBRAITH: They were excluded from government operations, public advice, and, to some extent, even from life itself. One of my closest friends in economics in those days, who had been one of the first to bring the great modern ideas of Gross National Product, National Income Accounts, into practical use, was--his name's....

KITTY: Richard Bissell [Richard M. Bissell].

GALBRAITH: Richard Bissell, yes. By any calculation one of the better, perhaps one of the best, quantitative economists of that time. And it was the end of Dick Bissell's life. He had no further career in Washington, was given a job quite useless in a defense company in Connecticut, and then retired, and died.

DAITCH: Ohhh.... Right.

KITTY: Many years later, maybe twenty-five years later.

GALBRAITH: I remember Kitty and I having lunch with him...

KITTY: In the 1980s.

GALBRAITH: ...and common friends. A few years later, and he was an old, ill, helpless man. That was the bad thing.

DAITCH: Why do you think someone...? Actually, I didn't know he was.... Why was he so central to this whole thing? I remember reading about his role and his name. But he was an economist. Why was he...?

GALBRAITH: He was a diversely intelligent man who, like other economists of the time, had gone on to become a military authority, a military expert, and to being associated with military decisions.

KITTY: Was he in the CIA?

GALBRAITH: Probably. Cut that off a moment. [BREAK]

DAITCH: The influence of the military, I think, has been written about, and in some ways I think in that period it's hard to overestimate. But getting back to Kennedy and the influence of the military on him in those years, in some ways I wonder if it's not more remarkable how much he resisted it after the Bay of Pigs than it is that he found it difficult to resist during the Bay of Pigs.

GALBRAITH: No. Uh uh uh. There's no doubt in my mind about that. He was new, unacquainted in some degree with the bureaucratic forces, and subject in the Bay of Pigs to the whole power, not only of his decision but that of Eisenhower's and everything that had gone before. If he had not gone ahead with the Bay of Pigs, one of his critics, most likely critics, would have been Dwight D. Eisenhower. There's been some indication of that in the history. And the wonderful thing about JFK was how deeply he learned, deeply and wisely, he learned from experience. And maybe we should look back with satisfaction on the Bay of Pigs. Because if it hadn't been for that, we might have had a different outcome on the Missile Crisis.

DAITCH: I've often thought of that myself. We'll go back up to the Missile Crisis. How would you analyze the way that Kennedy handled that? You were probably involved in things of your own, but you were aware...?

KITTY: You didn't know, right?

DAITCH: Really?

KITTY: The Missile Crisis, you really were barely aware of it. [TOO FAR AWAY FROM MICROPHONE TO HEAR CLEARLY.]

GALBRAITH: I was completely locked into my war, which was up in the mountains. And aware only by telegrams and the USI, U.S. Information Service, of the

Missile Crisis. But there should be no doubt I hoped for, possibly on one or two matters urged, what was the course of action taken.

DAITCH: You did?

GALBRAITH: I did not value the blowing up of a whole part of the world on short notice.

DAITCH: Right. Absolutely. I'm surprised you actually had time to think about it enough to say something.

GALBRAITH: I didn't have time to think about it. My mind was already made up.

KITTY: [TOO FAR AWAY FROM MICROPHONE TO HEAR CLEARLY.]

DAITCH: No doubt. And lucky Kennedy, that he actually had you over there to oversee that while he was.... You said something a few moments ago about the organization of the government. I wanted to get back to that a little bit because I've read that Kennedy's style of organization was completely different from that which came before and then after. That he dismantled the White House system that Eisenhower had in favor of--rather than the hierarchies that all went down these separate lines, that he created something that was more like spokes, with him at the middle. Does that sound like a reasonable analogy to you, what you saw of the way that his power structure worked?

GALBRAITH: Not at all. I saw him overwhelmingly as the president facing the old, the established bureaucratic structure and contending with it. And finding that to be a source of major problems, and, as in the case of Cuba and the Missile Crisis, pressure for the wrong and for the dangerous decisions. The thing that came up most in my association with Kennedy, after agriculture and a few of my own specialties, was the bad advice he was getting. And he said that. He said--I told you about the Missile Crisis.

DAITCH: Right. He was getting all this bad advice, and it deeply concerned him. Who do you think were the people that he most valued and most trusted?

GALBRAITH: In those years?

DAITCH: Mmmm hmmm.

GALBRAITH: I suppose it would be Robert Kennedy. But there was also George Ball and Ted Sorensen, of course, and Arthur Schlesinger. I was in India but had frequent communications, as you might guess. But I couldn't count myself in that group, not because I was reluctant to give advice, but I was just too far away. That came up against the military and Dean Rusk, who went along with the old State Department positions and the military as though they were golden. And some of the other established

government Cabinet officers who took their guidance from their departments rather than from the president. But it was in foreign policy and military policy that Kennedy ran into the real opposition, and where he had to have allies.

DAITCH: How did McNamara [Robert S. McNamara] fit into that?

GALBRAITH: Beg pardon?

DAITCH: How did McNamara fit into that?

GALBRAITH: McNamara was a changing figure. Bob came in for probably one of the two most powerful Cabinet positions, and identified himself initially with his organization. Then, as time passed, this was perhaps more true in the Johnson [Lyndon B. Johnson] Administration, being an extremely intelligent man, accustomed in business to a large organization, he came to see that the bureaucratic position could be quite wrong, and became, especially later under Lyndon Johnson, a dominant voice against it.

DAITCH: You mean against Vietnam or against militarism in general?

GALBRAITH: Against militarism in general and against the Pentagon's viewpoint.

DAITCH: As long as we're talking about people, can you tell me a little bit about... There's always been this sort of myth that Johnson and Kennedy hated each other. Maybe that's a little too strong. But you knew both of them. How did they interact?

GALBRAITH: They didn't interact. They each had their own agenda. LBJ didn't urge a strong public program on Kennedy, and Kennedy was quite content to leave Lyndon to his own senate role, his own legislative role, and his own life. They were not close. I speak on that with some certainty because LBJ was Kitty's and my best friend.

DAITCH: Oh, really!

GALBRAITH: For many, many years, going back before the Kennedy Administration. I saw their relationship with a certain measure of intimacy.

KITTY: It was a different relationship with LBJ.

GALBRAITH: What'd she say?

KITTY: I said it was a different relationship.

GALBRAITH: Oh, it was a wholly different relationship, yes. My relationship with

Lyndon Johnson was much more personal than bureaucratic or policy-oriented. When I got to India, Kennedy, knowing of this friendship, arranged my first visitor, the vice president.

DAITCH: Oh, that was nice.

GALBRAITH: And I've told many times that that was my introduction to successful fiction. He and Nehru met for two hours, and it was my task to write what they talked about and decided. This was the greatest range of invention that I've ever had outside of formal fiction writing.

DAITCH: Didn't they tell you what they talked about?

GALBRAITH: They both agreed on the importance of rural electrification. And there was something else. I've quite forgotten what it was.

KITTY: Bicycles.

GALBRAITH: And I had to expand that into side--take side remarks and create an impression of grave foreign policy discussion.

DAITCH: Oh, dear. Johnson was a completely different kind of character than Kennedy, wasn't he?

GALBRAITH: Oh, sure. But also there were other differences. Those of us who knew Lyndon Johnson--I was by no means the only one--found him an admirably qualified person as a politician, not only admired but in some degree marveled at his skills, his talent. Kennedy didn't have that feeling anything like to the same degree.

DAITCH: What was it about him that you admired, and why do you think Kennedy didn't see the same thing?

GALBRAITH: I admired....

[END SIDE 1, TAPE 2]

[BEGIN SIDE 2, TAPE 2]

GALBRAITH: Well, there was no doubt about that, and some of my views were shared by Kennedy. He, first, had a vast-range intelligence. He was, second, enormously familiar, wonderfully familiar, with the government process, particularly on the Hill. Third, he had a great sense of humor. And fourth, he could surround

you with things, occasions that you enormously enjoyed. I loved my visits to the Johnson ranch. I don't think Kennedy would have had the same reaction.

DAITCH: Really. Just different tastes and styles?

GALBRAITH: Johnson was my recapture of farm life in Canada. Kennedy did not have that misfortune.

DAITCH: Or good fortune. Farm life is good. So obviously they had differences in terms of their personal styles and that sort of thing. But politically?

GALBRAITH: Politically they came out the same place. They both were subject to political influences which were larger than themselves, and the same ones. And so while there was an element of choice in domestic policy, including economic policy, and particularly in things like civil rights, where both were good but Johnson especially so, and with the confidence that came from being a Southerner himself, they had very different personal styles. I think it's fair to say a different appreciation of their own trust ability, power. Kennedy saw it as something to be developed, worked on. Lyndon took it for granted. When he told somebody to do something, he'd expect them to do it.

DAITCH: That's interesting. Can you expand on that a little bit? I've seen you say that or read that from you before, about their different views of power, and I think that's a very interesting comparison.

GALBRAITH: Well, this was something that was very close to my heart--my experience, I should say. On the last day, last main day of the convention, I got back to the hotel after the celebrations of the day before rather late, was still asleep in the morning when Bobby called me up around eight or nine. Told me to get out of bed and get back to the convention hall because Jack, as he said, had decided on Lyndon Johnson as the vice president. And there would be a liberal revolt which was up to me to help quell. I was the most visible liberal on the Johnson side.

DAITCH: So Johnson wasn't considered liberal?

GALBRAITH: No. Not in those days. He was a Southerner.

DAITCH: Isn't that interesting.

GALBRAITH: And the real liberals, including Mrs. Roosevelt, had been holding off in the hope for Stevenson. And so I got out of bed, and Sargent Shriver [R. Sargent Shriver Jr.] picked me up, and we headed out for the convention for what I decided was the most difficult exercise in persuasion I would ever have. It turned out to be, on the whole, quite easy. The excitement over having got Kennedy was still strong. And my liberals, when I met with them and a series of groups, were all, to some extent available for the same argument, which was: certainly Jack Kennedy has picked Johnson. He

has to win this election. And he has done it for the same reason that Franklin D. Roosevelt picked John Nance Garner. And that simple comparison of Johnson and Garner, by which I hadn't previously set much store, was very good for all the liberals that were looking for a way to conform.

DAITCH: Right. And maybe the comparison of JFK to FDR?

GALBRAITH: Oh, that was it. Oh, that was prime. It wasn't a comparison of Johnson to Garner, but it was a similar decision of FDR.

DAITCH: Right. If it was a good enough tactic for FDR, then we suppose that Kennedy can get by with it, too.

GALBRAITH: That argument dawned on me as we were driving out. It was the best I could do, but it turned out to be very good.

DAITCH: Yes.

KITTY: What was that?

DAITCH: The argument for Johnson as vice president when Kennedy picked him as a running mate, the comparison between FDR and choosing John Nance Garner.

GALBRAITH: And in those days, evoking the name of Roosevelt was a fairly good line for any liberal.

DAITCH: Was Kennedy much of a Rooseveltian Man?

GALBRAITH: Beg pardon?

DAITCH: Was Kennedy much of a follower of Roosevelt?

GALBRAITH: Not to the extent that I was, no. He was fully aware, as a good politician, of the role of the Roosevelt name, including Eleanor, in American political life at that time. But the Kennedy family had been associated with Roosevelt, but, as we know, not always with great affection. And Kennedy appreciated but had no internal sense of association.

DAITCH: He was capable of using it politically if he needed to.

GALBRAITH: Oh, absolutely. He was very anxious to have Eleanor on his side.

DAITCH: She ultimately came around?

GALBRAITH: I told you about that, didn't I?

DAITCH: I think so. But maybe we should....

GALBRAITH: By June of the election year, she was fully aboard for Kennedy, except for his father.

DAITCH: Right. And you think that's largely thanks to you getting them together at the radio program, is that right?

GALBRAITH: That was, I thought, that Sunday, my supreme achievement in politics. And Kennedy decided it only showed the other error of relying on a Harvard professor.

DAITCH: Getting back to Johnson, why do you think--I mean aside from what you already said, that there is a comparison between FDR choosing Garner and Kennedy choosing Johnson, why do you think that he really.... I mean obviously Kennedy and Johnson didn't have much personal rapport. And it doesn't seem to have been a terribly easy decision for him. Why do you think that he ultimately did choose Johnson?

GALBRAITH: Well, there are three points. He was impressed by Johnson's legislative power, which was one of those things that everybody dwells on, his role in the Senate. There was, secondly, the South and Texas, which he had to carry, and it was particularly important for anybody from, say, Boston and Massachusetts. And third, he appreciated, but not always, Johnson's political intelligence, political positions. There were some which he regarded as flamboyant or extravagant. But broadly speaking, he was a compassionate politician, but not by any means totally so.

DAITCH: What positions did Johnson take that Kennedy would have thought flamboyant?

GALBRAITH: Oh, his maneuvers through the Senate when he was lining up votes. It was his mode of operation rather than difference on particular issues.

DAITCH: It's interesting....

GALBRAITH: There were some differences, but it was the Johnson style rather than the Johnson content.

DAITCH: Right. I have these images of Johnson right up in someone's face, talking them to death about something or another. And I don't have any similar image of Kennedy at all, a completely different type of persuasion.

GALBRAITH: There was certainly a difference in personality. No doubt about that. I was

born and brought up on a farm in Canada. You've seen my book, *The Scotch?* I graduated from a college of agriculture and had a close association with the Department of Agriculture, Henry Wallace [Henry A. Wallace]. This was an avenue, perhaps not very important, but an avenue to Lyndon Johnson, which Kennedy didn't have.

DAITCH: I don't have any image of Kennedy as a senator, moving things--or as a president, really, when I think about it. I don't have an image of him moving things through Congress in the way that one always thinks of Johnson moving things through Congress.

GALBRAITH: Absolutely. Johnson had far more power when it came to maneuvering through Congress and far more willingness to do it than Kennedy. This is one of the reasons we should remember Johnson--because of things like civil rights, things like voting rights, things like the program for the poor, though it was always disappointing, or all things which Johnson shoved through Congress, including through a certain number of senators who were either opposed or didn't know what they were doing.

DAITCH: Now, these were programs that Kennedy would have been probably in favor of as well.

GALBRAITH: He was in favor of it, but the difference was in the force, which Johnson brought to congressional action.

DAITCH: Some people have said that Johnson was able to do some of these things because of the emotion after Kennedy's assassination. The broad support for any program that seemed to be something that Kennedy would have wanted pushed through. Do you think that's true? Or do you think it's more a result of Johnson's own efforts?

GALBRAITH: Well, I would say that's the result of an undue effort to enlarge the influence of JFK. This is certainly something that Johnson had in mind. We talked about it back in the days of the vice presidency, as deeply informal discussions out on Beacon Hill where we had common friends. And I have never had any doubt of the inner motivation of LBJ.

KITTY: Beacon Hill? Not Beacon Hill. Seminary Hill.

GALBRAITH: What's she say?

DAITCH: Seminary Hill?

GALBRAITH: Oh, Seminary Hill. Did I say Beacon Hill?

KITTY: Yes, you did. I didn't see how we got LBJ up here.

DAITCH: I wondered about that, but I don't know. Okay, Seminary Hill.

GALBRAITH: There was a collection of liberals, including some Southern liberals, living outside of Alexandria in Seminary Hill. And we were there. The dominant figure was Clifford Durr [Clifford J. Durr], D-U-R-R, who was a true Southern liberal and an effective one legislatively.

DAITCH: He was a legislator?

KITTY: He was head of the FCC, wasn't he?

GALBRAITH: Beg pardon?

KITTY: Wasn't he head of the FCC for a while?

GALBRAITH: Yes.

DAITCH: FCC, okay. And Hugo Black [Hugo L. Black]?

KITTY: Hugo Black was a justice.

DAITCH: Right, of the Supreme Court.

KITTY: That was his brother-in-law because Hugo Black was married to Clifford Durr's wife's sister.

DAITCH: Really!

KITTY: We didn't see much of Clifford. They all spoke about [Inaudible]. We didn't see Hugo Black very much, but we saw a lot of Clifford Durr. [TOO FAR AWAY FROM THE MICROPHONE TO HEAR CLEARLY.] Thomas Eliot [Thomas H. Eliot] was a congressman from here. The congressman who was the author of the Social Security Act [Inaudible].

DAITCH: And what was his last name?

KITTY: Eliot. Bridge, Madison.

DAITCH: Oh, he's the Eliot of....

KITTY: He was the grandson of the....

GALBRAITH: With Johnson I somehow had, as did Kitty, the closest friendship of anyone

in politics. Much closer, in a very professional sense, than that of JFK. I enjoyed going down to the ranch, as did Kitty.

KITTY: Oh, I never went to the ranch.

GALBRAITH: You never went to the ranch?

KITTY: You went down and told me all about it.

GALBRAITH: I'm sorry.

KITTY: I had small children, remember?

GALBRAITH: But Kennedy would not have been enthusiastic about a weekend on the ranch, which I was.

DAITCH: I think I read in one of your books that Johnson had more of a, I think you called it scatological sense of humor.

GALBRAITH: We both did.

KITTY: [TOO FAR AWAY FROM MICROPHONE TO HEAR CLEARLY.] Kennedy announced [Inaudible]. I just thought, he's too young to be president. [Inaudible]. He looked so young.

DAITCH: Right.

KITTY: [Inaudible].

GALBRAITH: Lyndon regarded me as a useful source not of economic information but of economic thought. He had never felt that he'd been sufficiently exposed to it as a student himself, and he spent a lot of time, or considerable time, which I enjoyed very much, quizzing me on economics and agricultural economics and international economics. He was pleased by the fact that I have no degree in economics, only in agricultural economics.

DAITCH: This has been rolling around in my mind. It's a little bit off the subject but not too much. I think maybe a lot of historians have gotten it a little mixed up about Johnson's successes in domestic policy they've somehow attributed to Kennedy because they were things that Kennedy had talked about and initiated. But likewise, I think that historians have attributed the fact that Johnson got so mired down, so bogged down, in Vietnam, to the fact that Kennedy somehow.... Kennedy had escalated Vietnam, and Johnson was somehow just taking over the same thing. I've read that you didn't believe that, that you thought that Kennedy wouldn't have followed that policy.

GALBRAITH: If Kennedy had lived, there would have been, I have no doubt, notable achievements. How great, one doesn't know. There would have been the Vietnam problem. But there should be no doubt that Johnson's achievements, particularly on civil rights, of full racial equality in general, and on economic programs for the disadvantaged and the poor, was very much his own, very much his own thrust. He didn't invent them, but his commitment was complete. And so you cannot attribute what Johnson accomplished to JFK. They were his achievements.

DAITCH: Do you think he was more aggressive about it than Kennedy would have been in pursuing similar programs?

GALBRAITH: Nobody could be more aggressive than Lyndon. But he had a different authority. He was a Southerner, and Kennedy was from New England. He knew what his base was. And being Johnson, he didn't minimize it.

DAITCH: What do you mean, he didn't minimize it?

GALBRAITH: He took for granted that what he wanted, there would be supporters, and there were.

DAITCH: You've said that the other side of that was the story about Vietnam and the fact that Johnson got so bogged down in it. And you said that you thought that Kennedy probably wouldn't have. Can you say a little bit about why you thought that?

GALBRAITH: Well, the opposition to Vietnam came overwhelmingly not from the Kennedy community, the Kennedy supporters. And so the support for Gene McCarthy [Eugene J. McCarthy] in the '68 campaign and, of course extending on to, or preceding any other domestic program. And the fact that the whole Kennedy legacy, political legacy, was mobilized against Vietnam was a very important fact of that time. I was McCarthy's floor manager and nominator at Chicago. Floor manager, I have to correct and say, that it was not clear that there was any management. And nominator, I must point out that I was the seconder. And all of my associates were young Kennedy supporters. Though there's no doubt that--there's never been doubt in my mind that JFK, if he had lived, would have been with his supporters and would have had to be.

DAITCH: What do you say had to be?

GALBRAITH: Beg pardon?

DAITCH: Why do you say he would have had to be? Because there was plenty of support for escalating Vietnam, obviously.

GALBRAITH: No, not in his clientele. The whole Kennedy liberal movement was almost uniformly against.

DAITCH: His constituency, is what you're saying.

GALBRAITH: That was the constituency I had at Chicago, which was my minor appearance at the political center.

DAITCH: That must have been quite an experience.

GALBRAITH: Oh, that was wonderful.

DAITCH: Wonderful?

GALBRAITH: The greatest....

KITTY: [TOO FAR AWAY FROM MICROPHONE TO HEAR CLEARLY.]
[Inaudible] on television. "Listen! Listen!" Suddenly I was told about the rioting and everything, and I thought [Inaudible]. [Inaudible].

GALBRAITH: One night there was the greatest moment of my public life, such as it's been. Those of us who were backing Gene took turns going from the hotel across Michigan Avenue, through a solid line of National Guardsmen, through several hundred rebels who were camping across Michigan Avenue. And it came my turn, which was, I think it's fair to say, one of the speeches they wanted most. I had seconded Gene at the convention. I walked across, through the line of the guardsmen.... Did I tell you this?

DAITCH: No. I think I've maybe heard you say it before, but go on.

GALBRAITH: Got up on a temporary platform, and made my speech, telling them my own personal position. Well, it was the same as Gene's: no violence. And saying--and I wished the minute I'd said it I could get it back, "I don't want you trying conclusions with these National Guardsmen behind me here. Because just bear in mind they're draft dodgers the same as you are and [Inaudible]." And that was my closing line. So I got off the platform, and sure enough, the head of the National Guard was there waiting for me, and said, "Wait a minute, sir." And I waited. He said, "I just want to shake your hand. That's the nicest thing anybody's said about us all day."

DAITCH: That's sad. I think that's sad.

GALBRAITH: God, what a relief.

DAITCH: Oh, yes. You told me not to let you forget we have to talk about Jackie's [Jacqueline Bouvier Kennedy] visit to India. I'm sorry we're bouncing around a little bit, but you wanted to talk about that.

GALBRAITH: Come back again someday when you're otherwise free. I want to talk about that.

DAITCH: Okay.

GALBRAITH: I'm getting tired.

DAITCH: Okay. That's absolutely fine. We'll stop right now, and we'll make arrangements to come back another day.

GALBRAITH: Let me show you something. Would you look there for a file which says "Current"? No, here. It's somewhere down there, the current file.

[END INTERVIEW – JFK #2, 9/12/2003]

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