

Hale Boggs, Oral History Interview – 5/10/1964
Administrative Information

Creator: Hale Boggs*
Interviewer: Charles T. Morrissey
Date of Interview: May 10, 1964
Location: Bethesda, M.D.
Length: 38 pages, 1 appendix

*D.B. Hardeman and Corinne “Lindy” Claiborne Boggs were also present.

Biographical Note

Boggs was a Representative from Louisiana from 1947-1972; vice chairman of the Democratic National Committee from 1956-1972; and a member of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy (Warren Commission) from 1963-1964. In this interview, Boggs discusses John F. Kennedy (JFK) as a congressman, the 1956 and 1960 Democratic National Conventions, JFK's assassination, and the Warren Commission, among other issues.

Access

Open.

Usage Restrictions

According to the deed of gift signed on August 26, 1971, copyright of these materials has been assigned to the United States Government. Users of these materials are advised to determine the copyright status of any document from which they wish to publish.

Copyright

The copyright law of the United States (Title 17, United States Code) governs the making of photocopies or other reproductions of copyrighted material. Under certain conditions specified in the law, libraries and archives are authorized to furnish a photocopy or other reproduction. One of these specified conditions is that the photocopy or reproduction is not to be “used for any purpose other than private study, scholarship, or research.” If a user makes a request for, or later uses, a photocopy or reproduction for purposes in excesses of “fair use,” that user may be liable for copyright infringement. This institution reserves the right to refuse to accept a copying order if, in its judgment, fulfillment of the order would involve violation of copyright law. The copyright law extends its protection to unpublished works from the moment of creation in a tangible form. Direct your questions concerning copyright to the reference staff.

Transcript of Oral History Interview

These electronic documents were created from transcripts available in the research room of the John F. Kennedy Library. The transcripts were scanned using optical character recognition and the resulting text files were proofread against the original transcripts. Some formatting changes were made. Page numbers are noted where they would have

occurred at the bottoms of the pages of the original transcripts. If researchers have any concerns about accuracy, they are encouraged to visit the Library and consult the transcripts and the interview recordings.

Suggested Citation

Hale Boggs, recorded interview by Charles T. Morrissey, May 10, 1964, (page number), John F. Kennedy Library Oral History Program.

GENERAL SERVICES ADMINISTRATION
NATIONAL ARCHIVES AND RECORDS SERVICE

Gift of Personal Statement

By Hale Boggs

to the

JOHN F. KENNEDY LIBRARY

I, Hale Boggs of Washington, D. C., do hereby give to the John F. Kennedy Library, for use and administration therein, all my rights, title and interest, except as hereinafter provided, to the tape recording and transcript of the interview conducted at Bethesda, Maryland on May 10, 1964 for the John F. Kennedy Library. The gift of this material is made subject to the following terms and conditions:

1. The interview is to be opened to general research at the discretion of the Director of the John F. Kennedy Library; his decision to be based on such considerations as potential embarrassment to living persons or their immediate successors, the interests of national security, or potential prejudice to the friendly relations between the United States and foreign nations.

2. Researchers who have access to the transcript of the interview may listen to the tape; however, this is to be for background use only. Researchers may not cite, paraphrase or quote from the tape.

3. The interview and its restrictions may be listed in general announcements of the Library's collection.

4. I retain literary property rights to the interview for a period of twenty-five years, or until my death, whichever is the later, at which time the literary property rights shall be assigned to the United States Government.

5. This agreement may be revised or amended by mutual consent of the parties undersigned.

Hale Boggs
Hale Boggs

July 20, 1971
Month, Day, Year

James B. Rhoads
Archivist of the United States

8-26-71
Month, Day, Year

Hale Boggs

Table of Contents

<u>Page</u>	<u>Topic</u>
1	1956 Democratic National Convention
7	John F. Kennedy (JFK) in Congress
10	Visit to the White House with Boggs' mother and mother-in-law
12	Cuban Missile Crisis
15	First U.S. manned space launch
16, 26	International trade agreements
18	White House leadership breakfasts
20	JFK's mannerisms and personality
22	1960 Democratic National Convention
28	Tax legislation
30	JFK's May 1962 trip to New Orleans
32	Boggs' speech in 1963 about hatred of JFK in the South
34	JFK's assassination
36	Warren Commission
38	Decision to bury JFK at Arlington National Cemetery

Oral History Interview

with

Hale Boggs

Also present D.B. Hardeman and Mrs. Corinne Boggs

May 10, 1964
Bethesda, Maryland

By Charles T. Morrissey

For the John F. Kennedy Library

BOGGS: Well, the 1956 Convention [Democratic National Convention] was interesting in many ways. To begin with, I had been the Southern campaign manager for Governor Stevenson [Adlai E. Stevenson] in 1956 and Mr. Hardeman, who is here with us—D.B. Hardeman, who is now associated with me—was one of my associates in that endeavor. We had managed Mr. Stevenson's primary effort in Florida against my late good friend, Senator Kefauver [Estes Kefauver], and the race for Vice President, as everyone knows, developed between Senator Kefauver and the late President Kennedy [John F. Kennedy]. We had no doubt about Mr. Stevenson being nominated but the problem at the Convention, as it had been at previous conventions, was whether or not we were able to keep the party halfway together, reasonably together. And I served in a sort of a liaison capacity between Speaker Rayburn [Samuel Taliaferro Rayburn], who was the presiding officer at that Convention, as he had been at others, and Governor Stevenson.

[-1-]

Our main problem in the first days of the convention was to write a platform that everybody could live with, or would try to live with. And at one stage there we recessed the

Convention, in effect, for about four hours. I don't remember who was speaking. Someone was called on to speak and suddenly instead of five minutes he had hours to speak. While this was happening, all of us—by all of us I mean Mr. Rayburn; Governor Lawrence [David Leo Lawrence] of Pennsylvania—some of these names come to my mind now—Steve Mitchell [Stephen A. Mitchell]; Paul Butler [Paul M. Butler], who had just recently been named chairman of the Committee; Congressman Bill Dawson [William L. Dawson] of Illinois; Sam Ervin [Sam J. Ervin, Jr.], the North Carolina Senator who was on the platform committee; John McCormack [John William McCormack] who was chairman of the platform committee; Governor Stevenson's campaign manager from Philadelphia, Jim Finnegan [James A. Finnegan]; Senator John Stennis [John C. Stennis] of Mississippi; and a half dozen others. And there we were for hours trying to come to some resolution on language having to do with civil rights. Ultimately we did and we avoided a floor flight. Stevenson was thereafter nominated, and he threw the convention open insofar as the vice presidential nominee was concerned. This, as far as I knew, was not traditional. Normally the presidential nominee pretty well decides who the vice presidential nominee will be. As a matter of fact, Speaker Rayburn was quite amazed that this would come to pass. He felt that it showed a lack of decisiveness on the part of Governor Stevenson.

Incidentally, I might say, in that connection as a footnote on history, that the Speaker himself suggested to me that maybe the obvious solution to the problem would be the nomination of Mr. Rayburn. Few people knew this. I knew that he was genuinely interested but even at that time Mr. Rayburn was past seventy-five, was he not? Seventy-four? So the problem, and I guess problem is the proper word, was age. I carried these messages back and forth between Stevenson and Speaker Rayburn.

[-2 -]

Jack Kennedy appealed to a great many of us. He was a young man. He came from the part of the country that we needed to carry. He was very popular with all the members of Congress, both in the House and the Senate. By that time he had developed a tremendous amount of political charm. Estes, as much as all of us liked him, had been in a race for President and had not made the grade as a presidential nominee, and we felt that Kefauver would not add anything particularly new to the ticket. This was not any reflection upon Senator Kefauver, for whom I had the very highest respect and regard.

I remember some amusing episodes about President Kennedy's campaign for the vice presidency at Chicago. For one thing, he went to call on the then-Governor of Louisiana, Earl Long [Earl Kemp Long], who described himself as "the last of the red hot papas," and it was not an inept description of Governor Long. He was not one who, should I say, stood on formalities, and he received Senator Kennedy in his B.V.D.'s. And B.V.D.'s is the proper description. Very few people wear B.V.D.'s now. You know those one-piece underwear things. I wore them when I was growing up, as a youngster. But they still make them, and Earl Long wore them all of his life, after he got through wearing his long winter undies that came down to his ankles. And Senator Kennedy was quite astonished. He said, "That fellow, Earl Long, is really something!" [Laughter]

Earl Long also had false teeth and he was not a bit timid about them. He would take them out and rub them and polish them up and examine them, regardless of the visitor who

happened to be there. This also occurred when President Kennedy visited his suite at the hotel. In any event, I was amused at the report that came back in regard to the visit, but the significant thing was that the Louisiana delegation voted for Senator Kennedy, so his visit was a fruitful and successful one.

[-3-]

In any event, that was one of the briefest campaigns ever conducted, that campaign for the vice presidency. It really happened over night. And neither of these candidates went to bed that night, and I don't think anyone else did for that matter. The next day was the most exciting day of that 1956 Convention.

I remember so many incidents there. For instance, I was one of those who talked to Governor Faubus [Orval E. Faubus]—this was prior to the subsequent events involving the school problem—and I got him to agree to cast the Arkansas vote for Jack Kennedy. If I remember correctly, Kennedy had almost a solid Southern vote. Mississippi voted for him for vice president. At the conclusion of the first ballot it appeared that he could win on the second ballot. It was the second ballot wasn't it? There were two ballots, were there not?

MORRISSEY: I think so.

BOGGS: In any event, the significant things that transpired between the first and the second ballot, some of the significant things in which I was very much involved, was the shift of the Texas delegation. Texas had cast its first ballot, I think, for Senator Gore [Albert Gore, Sr.]. I'm not sure about that, but I think it was for Senator Gore. Arkansas, incidentally, had cast its first ballot for Senator Humphrey [Hubert H. Humphrey], who was a candidate for vice president that year as well. John Connally [John B. Connally, Jr.], now the Governor of Texas, was in the Texas delegation, as was the present President, President Johnson [Lyndon Baines Johnson], as you well know. I went to Connally on the floor and we talked about it back and forth, and he said, "Well, I'm going to have a caucus right quick." They did have a caucus. And before he went into the caucus I did everything I could to convince him that we could win with Kennedy for vice president, that this would give us a much more powerful and a better balanced ticket. And the Texas caucus lasted, oh, about five or ten minutes. When they came out Connally rushed to me and told me that they had shifted to Jack Kennedy.

[-4-]

In the meantime, while they were in caucus, as I said a moment ago, Arkansas had shifted and I had talked to maybe four or five other delegations that had shifted. I didn't have anything too much to do with whether they shifted or not, but I was directly involved in the Texas and Arkansas shifts.

I dashed up to the rostrum to tell Speaker Rayburn that Texas had shifted to Senator Kennedy. I never knew then, or thereafter, who Mr. Rayburn was for in that contest. It was my feeling that he was for Senator Kefauver for reasons that, in his judgment, were quite valid, I think. As they were beginning to call the roll the second time, I remember dashing

back to tell Mrs. Boggs [Corinne “Lindy” Claiborne Boggs] about the shifting of Texas. And as I looked, right smack in front of me sat Nancy Kefauver, Estes’s wife, who is a friend of both of us and it was an embarrassing moment! She was practically in tears.

And you remember the results of the balloting. At one point there, it was my feeling that Kennedy had been nominated. That electronic computer which finally broke down, showed him, I presume, within four or five votes of the nomination.

This was when Tom Hennings [Thomas Carey Hennings, Jr.] shifted Missouri and Mike Monroney [Almer Stillwell “Mike” Monroney] was so provoked about Texas leaving Albert Gore so quickly, Mike was strong for Gore, that he shifted the Oklahoma delegation over to Estes. And as these shifts in the West and in the border states began to be felt, the Kennedy thing subsided, and as you know, he was not nominated.

I’m not sure that if we had been less precipitous on Texas, and had held out for maybe one other ballot, that Kennedy probably would have been nominated for vice president because the Gore people were more inclined, that is outside of Tennessee, to go for Jack Kennedy than they were to go for Estes Kefauver. But of course, like so many things, President Kennedy always felt that it was a blessing in disguise that he wasn’t nominated for Vice President.

[-5 -]

I’ll never forget that convention because I was in it up to my neck, literally, night and day, and I think that, in many ways, what we talked about really did come true. For instance, President Kennedy came to Louisiana in that campaign in 1956 and he had tremendous crowds everywhere—Senator Kefauver had very little appeal in the state—and what Kennedy did in that campaign on behalf of the ticket was tremendously helpful to him four years later when he ran for President.

MORRISSEY: How did Mr. Rayburn feel about Kennedy as a vice presidential candidate?

BOGGS: Mr. Rayburn had great misgivings about a Catholic for president or vice president. This was not because of any prejudices he entertained. As a matter of fact, Mr. Rayburn was as free of prejudice as any human being I’ve ever known, but he had been one of the loyal Democrats who had campaigned in Texas in 1928 for Governor Smith [Alfred E. Smith], and he had witnessed first-hand the tremendous prejudice that can be built up on that issue and he felt that it was still there and that it was latent and would be revived if any Catholic were nominated for either one of the top national spots. He also felt that particular year that Kennedy was too young. He felt that four years later, of course, when he was nominated for the presidency.

To get ahead of that part of the story a little bit, after Mr. Kennedy was nominated for the presidency, nobody on earth campaigned harder for him than Sam Rayburn! Nor, in my opinion, was anybody more effective than Mr. Rayburn. President Kennedy and Vice President Johnson carried Texas, but I don’t think they would have carried it if it hadn’t been for Speaker Rayburn, so I just mention that little footnote in connection with that particular Convention.

[-6-]

I remember very well when I first met Jack Kennedy, and the reason I remember it is that *Life* magazine had written a piece about his campaign for Congress and had done a kind of “day in the life of a candidate” sort of thing. They had a lot of pictures of him in the magazine and I had seen the magazine between the time that Jack Kennedy was elected and the time he took his seat as a Congressman.

The family name was well known. I had known the Ambassador [Joseph P. Kennedy] when I was a very young Congressman. He was the Maritime Commissioner and later Ambassador to the United Kingdom when I was first in the House. So I was interested in meeting Jack Kennedy, and when I met him he was, as so many people would say, not too impressive. He was a kind of a tall fellow. He didn't comb his hair very much. He didn't care much about the way he looked. In those days he was really a very careless dresser. In later years he became much more meticulous about the way he dressed, although even as President, I don't think, he paid too much attention to that sort of detail in his life. In any event, at that particular time he paid practically no attention to it and oftentimes he would walk around with khaki trousers on and some nondescript looking coat! But I was impressed with him from the very beginning, as a man of great intellectual capacity, one who obviously had a broad knowledge of the country and the history of the country. He was the kind of fellow that you would enjoy just sitting down and talking with. There are not too many people like that that you run across in Congress. Everybody is busy. But this man had great intellectual charm and to spend some time with him was a real pleasure. Also, from the very beginning, he had great political courage. I can remember many things.

[-7-]

One comes to mind. A petition was being circulated in Congress to obtain executive clemency for the late, lamented former Mayor of Boston, Boss Curley [James Michael Curley], who, as everybody knows, was a very colorful figure. And he had gotten himself into some little difficulties and John Kennedy, as a freshman Congressman, refused to sign that petition. He just felt that this was something he shouldn't do. I don't think he had any hostility to Curley as a person. He, I believe, thought that Curley had not personified what one would consider good government in his home city, so Kennedy didn't sign it. This, you know, at this stage doesn't seem particularly significant, but at that time it took a tremendous amount of courage for a young Congressman who was dependent upon Curley who had an enormous political following, a terrific ability to campaign, and was a fantastic stump speaker. Kennedy said, “No, I'm just not going to do that.”

There were many other things of similar nature. For instance, I had known Kennedy for maybe six or eight months before I even knew he had an injury, although in those days he was in constant pain. There wasn't a moment that he didn't suffer. Yet he never told anybody, at least not to my knowledge. I think Ted Reardon [Timothy J. Reardon, Jr.] was the person who told me about his back injury. I got to know Ted early. He came here originally with the President. I think he came before any of the others, before Larry O'Brien [Lawrence F. O'Brien], before any of them.

[-8-]

There were many things, some of which were very interesting. For instance, back in that Congress, the 80th Congress, I sponsored, along with Bill Fulbright [J. William Fulbright], a resolution which simply said that it was the sense of the Congress of the United States that the free nations of Europe ought to unite in order to solve their economic and political problems. And this resolution went in prior to the speech that General Marshall [George C. Marshall] made at Harvard that year about the Marshall Plan. It came along shortly after the announcement of the Greek-Turkish program by President Truman [Harry S. Truman] and the enactment of that program by Congress. The whole theme of it was that we were engaged in all of these part-time, piece-meal aid operations all over Europe, none of which were very effective. And, in any event, this gave me some notoriety. So Jack Kennedy asked me to go to Boston to talk to the Clover Club. I asked him what the Clover Club was, and he said, "Well, it's an Irish club. It's above shanty-Irish but it is not quite lace-curtain Irish." So I got myself a very high sounding speech all about European unity and the United States of Europe and I spent hours and weeks working on it. And I packed myself off to Boston, sat in a hotel room for half a day studying my speech, and about 2 o'clock in the afternoon some of the emissaries of the Clover Club arrived. The meeting officially opened at about 7 o'clock. The speechmaking started at about 9:30. By the time the speechmaking got under way there wasn't a sober Irishman in the crowd! [Laughter] And a man could have been making a pronouncement from His Holiness and he would have gotten about as much attention as a gnat in a tornado in Kansas! So I literally extended my remarks about Europe and talked a little bit about the Irish.

One of the pictures that I really prize hangs in my office—a picture of this gangling Congressman with a black tie on, all dressed up, some of the rest of us there, including his grandfather Honey Fitz Fitzgerald [John Francis Fitzgerald] who was still alive then, with a big Irish smile on his face. And Jack Kennedy put a notation on it, "to my friend Hale Boggs in memory of the night that we were in clover."

[-9-]

MORRISSEY: Do you recall your visit to the Irish Charitable Society in 1962?

BOGGS: Well, Jack Kennedy said, "I see you've been up there talking to that Republican group." He said "They really aren't Irish, and there's not a thing charitable about them!" [Laughter] I thought it was a rather harsh pronouncement and when he said it he smiled very broadly. He had so many human characteristics. One of the last experiences—is it all right just to jump around like this?

MORRISSEY: Sure. Go right ahead.

BOGGS: The President was assassinated on the 22nd of November. The week before that, I guess it was the Tuesday of the week before that—the

leaders of Congress always had breakfast with the President on Tuesday, except the last breakfast which happened to be on Wednesday. My mother [Claire Boggs] and my mother-in-law were both in town, and my wife said, "I think I will bring our mothers to the White House, maybe after breakfast. The President might tell them hello."

I had alerted Mrs. Evelyn Lincoln [Evelyn N. Lincoln], the President's secretary, God bless her, and after breakfast she was looking for them. One of the guards found them and brought them to the President's office. Not only did he tell them hello, but in typical fashion, he spent a considerable period of time with them, and his conversation that day was particularly human.

It was a beautiful fall November day. The flowers, the chrysanthemums, were blooming in the rose garden. The beautiful thing about that garden is how they rotate the bloomings of the flowers and shrubs through the various seasons. And these were particularly beautiful chrysanthemums. And of course it was a late fall. Normally you would have had pretty heavy frost by that time but we had not had one, or if we had had one it hadn't been heavy enough to kill the flowers, and the President's conversation to these ladies was about the garden and the flowers. He asked

[-10-]

Lindy, my wife. He said, "Lindy, how long do the chrysanthemums bloom in Washington in the fall?" I remember Lindy saying that I was the gardener and she wasn't. I said, "Well, they are blooming longer this year, Mr. President, than I can ever remember." Thereupon he pointed out a lot of things about the shrubbery and the trees around the White House that I didn't know. He pointed to the magnolias which stand there on the East Front of the mansion and said that they were planted by President Jackson [Andrew Jackson], or at the direction of President Jackson in memory of his wife [Rachel Jackson] who had helped him achieve the Presidency but had died before moving to the White House. And, of course, I guess that does make sense. The magnolia is a Southern tree. I just say this to demonstrate his kindness. He must have taken fifteen to twenty minutes, altogether. We had a picture made which I treasure. It was the last picture I had made with him.

But President Kennedy was in the midst of so many problems at that time, foremost among them the civil rights difficulties. His whole congressional program was slowing down. People were saying he was not able to move the Congress and he had just had a meeting with his Congressional leaders where he had expressed his concern about these matters. We hadn't even passed all of the appropriations bills. And yet, despite all of these things, he was able to relax and to be a very human person with people who, you know, really didn't make any great difference to him personally. But this was the kind of man he was.

MORRISSEY: What's the story about the table in the Cabinet Room?

[-11-]

BOGGS: Yes, We went into the Cabinet Room and I had never heard about the table, although I'm sure I must have on some other occasion. Jesse

Jones [Jesse Holman Jones] designed the table and gave it to President Roosevelt [Franklin Delano Roosevelt]. It has eight different sides. Jones was slightly deaf and designed the table so that he and all the others could be sure to hear what President Roosevelt was saying.

Talking about situations of that kind, I saw President Kennedy oh, almost every day during the Cuban crisis. Incidentally, Congress had just adjourned. My days may elude me, but I think it was about a Thursday or a Friday that we had finally gone home. I had not been home in some time, and I like to fish and I hadn't been fishing in a year, so I was in the Gulf of Mexico—way out in the Gulf—fishing on that following Monday. A helicopter picked me up and hauled me out and one of these fast jet planes that the Air Force have flew me to Washington in nothing flat. From then on I did see the President practically every day through that crisis. And the calmest man in the whole United States of America was John F. Kennedy. And if there ever was a time when one realized the awesome responsibility of the presidency, it was then. And also, if there ever was a time that I was grateful that Jack Kennedy was President it was then, because, of course, no man in this country has the power to incinerate the earth except the President of the United States, and he does have that power. And this man had made up his mind that if the Russians did not respond that he would take whatever steps were necessary, and if it meant all-out war he had made up his mind that that would have to be done too. And he was so completely convinced of the rightness of his course that there was no evidence whatsoever of strain or nervousness or of tension about the man. And this, in itself, was tremendously inspiring because when you are in a period of real crisis you look, then, to your leadership. And if your leader is nervous and upset and tense, this translates itself to everyone else and you in time translate that feeling to other people. So there came from the White House during that period this sense of complete confidence which, I think, had much to do in convincing Mr. Khrushchev [Nikita Sergeyevich Khrushchev] that the government of the United

[-12-]

States as symbolized by President Kennedy meant exactly what the President was saying.

And, in all the years that I was associated with President Kennedy, this to me was the most inspiring experience. As a matter of fact, I doubt if I will ever have a comparable experience in my lifetime because we really went right up to the brink of catastrophe, and this man was able to so balance the issues and the problems and the tensions that we averted the catastrophe and may have ultimately changed the whole history of mankind.

MORRISSEY: Do you have any other specific recollections of this Cuban crisis?

BOGGS: Well one that stands out in my mind. President Kennedy had the facility of putting real wisdom in a short sentence. When the crisis was over he said, "Well, we have resolved one of the great crises of mankind!" He said, "There will be another one when, and if, the Chinese get the hydrogen bomb." And, of course, the history of the world since that crisis seems to point in that direction. This is of concern now, both in the East and the West, about what may happen when and if this should come to pass. This was a summation of it.

(Two years later, almost to the day, I was back in the White House with the joint leadership of the Congress and with many of the same people who participated in the 1962 Cuban Crisis meetings. At this time, however, the secret briefing involved the explosion of a nuclear device in Red China and its impact upon the free world. The consensus was that the free world was safe until such time as the Chinese were able to develop a delivery system for a nuclear head missile. From that point on there was grave concern about world peace. Throughout this briefing my mind went back to the statement made by the late President Kennedy when he said that “the world was now safe until such time as the Chinese developed a hydrogen bomb”).

[-13-]

I have many recollections of that week. We had three or four meetings of the joint leadership in Congress. The main thing was there was no doubt about the Russians having undertaken to install these missiles. We had the evidence and we were prepared to get them out of there, by whatever means required to get them out. I was the only person who really made that statement. I made it after one of the White House conferences and it was picked up and carried all over the world. Of course I am sure that Mr. Khrushchev knew it was what we meant anyway, but the fact that some of us said it indicated that the President was going to do just that.

My other recollection is that when it was over, it was over. It was almost like the man who had a terrible illness of some kind and suddenly he walks out and he's healthy again! I think that everyone there recognized that they were participating in events unlike any that had happened in this century; namely, that this country, the United States, faced with a real threat of war had stood firm, whereas in 1914 and again in 1939, we and the other countries in the West had vacillated and probably had a lot to do with the war ultimately coming on. This is personal opinion.

Kennedy had the attribute of saying things like that. He told me something one time that I have never forgotten. He said, “Never do anything simply because you are mad.” That's very good advice. It is hard to follow in politics. So much stuff is the result of anger or the desire to get even, or the desire for revenge of one kind or another, or to punish someone who has not supported you. And yet from the point of view of political policy, and also from the point of view of good politics, it doesn't make sense. This is why people said that he was cold-blooded. Well, he wasn't at all. He was an astute politician. What he told me is an astute statement, in my judgment.

[-14-]

I remember one of the last conversations I had with him, after the breakfast on Wednesday before the Friday assassination, two days before the assassination. He had been to Florida where he had had a tremendous reception and everybody connected with Florida and with the White House were as happy as they could be. He was going to Texas, and I remarked at the breakfast table about the factionalism in the Democratic Party in Texas. I may have said, “My, you are going into a hornet's nest,” and then he just looked. Oftentimes he might not comment at all or his comment might come a little later, and he said, “Well,

that'll add interest." And, of course, you know that is true. Political controversy is always interesting but this statement also demonstrated his optimistic point of view. Most people would prefer not to create interest that way.

Now, there is one time that I remember him as being very, very tense. The only time I remember him being tense, and a little irritable. It was the day that we finally launched our first man into space. Was Glenn [John Glenn] the first man? Shepard [Alan B. Shepard]. Well, you may recall that the flight was postponed, oh, a half dozen times.

MORRISSEY: Yes.

BOGGS: The morning that he was finally launched was, again, on a Tuesday, which coincided with our breakfast. And the launching was scheduled for very early in the morning, something like 5 o'clock, but there were many delays. And I watched most of them on television before I left home in the morning. Breakfast starts at 8:45 at the White House. It takes me at that hour of the day about forty minutes to get down there. So I was listening to the radio going down. We got to the White House and the President had a television set set up in the dining room, and I must say it was a pretty beaten-up, battered-up set! And he watched it right there. All of us watched it with him. And he was, on that occasion, quite tense because I think that he felt that the whole prestige

[-15-]

of the United States was involved, on whether or not that flight was successful, the Russians having already successfully launched a man into space who orbited the earth several times. I think that he was happier after that even than almost anything that transpired in his administration.

I might say that I saw quite a few policies developed under President Kennedy. The trade agreements one is a good example. I served as Chairman of the Foreign Trade Policy Subcommittee, of the Joint Economic Committee. And I served in a similar capacity on the Ways and Means Committee which inaugurates trade and tariff legislation.

In 1961, I went over and took a look at the Common Market, which had been formed pretty much along the lines earlier mentioned in my conversation about the Clover Club speech. I went to Belgium—to Brussels and visited with the commissioners for the Common Market; went over and talked to the British and others; had a long session with Jean Monnet, who is really the intellectual genius behind the Common Market and the concept of a unified Europe. I came back, and at that time I was not the Majority Whip of the House so I didn't attend these White House sessions every week as I do now. To see the President, you know, you had to call up and make an appointment, which I did. I, fortunately, had set up some hearings here in Washington where we had Chris Herter [Christian A. Herter], former secretary of State, and Will Clayton [William L. Clayton], former Under Secretary, head up our staff and make a report on what we needed to do in the way of trade legislation. And at that time the timid people in the administration were saying to the President, "Well, the best you can hope for is a one year extension of the existing act." The existing act, had it been extended for a year, wouldn't have been any good. It gave no authority to negotiate with

anybody like the Common Market, and unless we had quite specific authority, we were just as well off without any trade negotiating power.

[-16-]

So in any event, I went in and talked to President Kennedy about it. He asked me what I thought we ought to do, and I said I thought we ought to go for broke—whole hog. He said, “Do you think we can pass it?” I said, “I think we can do it overwhelmingly if we really go about it intelligently.” He said, “Well, who can do the job, Hale—you know we’ve talked about Monnet and the others?” I said “Well, my guess, the man I would say is George Ball [George W. Ball]. We don’t have a Monnet, but George has spent a lot of time there, he understands these problems.”

The President called Ball and sort of put the finger on him to do this. Ball then went to New York and made a speech before one of the groups there, a business group of some kind. Then the President made a speech before the Economics Club, I think it was, in which he outlined the necessity for a real, far-reaching trade program, and all of us went to work. I set up these Joint Committee meetings with Herter and Will Clayton. It was between sessions of Congress so we were able to get tremendous news coverage about it. The President brought down a Republican from Philadelphia named Peterson, a most attractive fellow. We worked on this thing and we ultimately passed the new trade program by a tremendous vote—three to one, or some such thing.

So that was how, I think, the President decided that he would try to press that bill, despite the fact that people were telling him that he couldn’t pass it, that the best he could hope for was a one year extension. And it turned out to be, in that session, the best piece of legislation we passed. That was the outstanding piece of legislation in the 87th Congress. Of course, without it we wouldn’t be able to do what we are doing now with these present negotiations.

[-17-]

MORRISSEY: What’s the story about the Tabasco sauce?

BOGGS: That’s just one of those things that happen accidentally. I was on the “Today” show. I’ve forgotten who it was, Martin Agronsky or someone, asked me a question about something that I couldn’t answer without revealing information that was totally confidential insofar as the President was concerned. So I answered by saying that, well, I had gotten this information at one of the leadership breakfasts but it was information that I was not at liberty to discuss and in order to change the direction of the conversation I said “By the way, don’t ever go to one of these breakfasts because the food isn’t any good.” And this really started something! The commentator wanted to know why it wasn’t any good and I said, “Well, the eggs are Boston-style—dry and uninteresting.” And they asked what else we had. I said, “Well, sort of weak coffee, no chicory in it, no Tabasco, no grits. [Chuckles] You know, in typical radio-newspaper-television fashion this became a great story. “Congressman complains about food at the White House.” The Boston newspapers picked it up; the New Orleans newspapers all

picked it up; the Boston radio and television stations got all mixed up in it with editorials—you know, tongue in cheek stuff. The President, in his inimitable way, had read all this business, you know. So the next Tuesday when I went back I didn't know whether I was going to be permitted to eat or not. But quite the contrary. Just about the time breakfast gets under way, here comes a waiter with a big bottle of Tabasco and here comes another one with a bowl of grits and another one with some coffee and chicory! Thereupon, the whole episode was reenacted. And even now, this happens right now, at the White House. I get Tabasco in front of my plate. The other day we had a joint leadership breakfast, which is unusual, the only one I've ever attended. President Johnson had the Republican leaders there too. Charley Halleck [Charles A. Halleck] couldn't get his eggs off the plate. They were all stuck together. The President sent the plate back with the eggs on it and said to the waiter, "Cut, those eggs apart so people can get them off." I said, "You know, Mr. President,

[-18-]

I've been complaining about this food over here for a long time!" "Well," he said, "this ham's all dried up, isn't it?" And you know, I just laughed out loud! [Laughter] But they never change the menu, you see, it's the same stuff. But that's how the Tabasco thing came about. I used to try to get President Kennedy to use a little Tabasco, but he wouldn't.

MORRISSEY: Did President Kennedy follow any particular pattern at these leadership breakfasts?

BOGGS: Yes. Usually he would kid somebody a little bit, you know, tease him a bit. He would have read something about someone who was there. And he had the ability to kid about himself. And every now and then, you know—for instance, Senator George Smathers [George Armistead Smathers]. He would say to George, occasionally, "George, when do you think that day is going to come and you are going to be able cast that really courageous vote?" We had these meetings on the Civil Rights bill—this was at the height of the crisis, joint leadership bills were being considered. At the end of the last meetings he said to the whole crowd, "Hale Boggs is going to introduce the bill in the House!"

There are so many things that I—well, I guess D.B. told you about some of the episodes in California relative to Johnson getting on the ticket.

MORRISSEY: I can't remember them. I can remember D.B. telling me about Kennedy pulling up his socks down in New Orleans. But I don't recall the California stories.

[-19-]

BOGGS: Yes. That Kennedy had a habit. You know he really was a very shy man even until his death. He was not a forward person at all. And yet he liked crowds. He was instinctive in crowds but he was still shy. It was amazing. Back in the days about the sock pulling episode he wasn't as acclimated to

crowds. He had lost the vice presidential nomination. We had him in Louisiana to campaign. We had him in the French part of Louisiana which is very warm in its affection. There was an amazing crowd of people, a tremendous crowd, and he was sitting up on the back end of a convertible.

We were riding along and had all these people, thousands of them literally, and they were just as friendly as they could be, you know. These Louisiana French people are very out-going and they were all just quite demonstrative. "Hey, Jack!" "Hi, Jack." And I'd look around and he'd be there pulling his socks up! And I remember his socks so well. They were grey woolen socks! And I said to him "Look, either wave at the people, or quit pulling those socks up, and the next time you come down here, for God's sake, get yourself a pair of garters or something! You can't ride around here with all these people and spend half your time pulling up your socks." And, do you know, until he died, when I used to see him, he had socks on about the same color, and he would pull them up all the time. It was one way he got rid of tension. As I told you, he never showed tension.

Another thing he'd do ever now and then was play with his finger. Did anybody ever tell you that?

MORRISSEY: No, and I never noticed that either.

BOGGS: That's right.

[-20-]

MORRISSEY: I can remember the coat button business. There was always one button on his coat...

BOGGS: But this was different. He'd be talking to you and he'd stop. Both fingers would start moving, like this (indicating), and you could tell he was really thinking then.

MORRISSEY: What's the other story you were going to tell when I interrupted you there?

BOGGS: It was about the Senate race. He had been in Florida and was on crutches. He had not had his operation. And he had fever every day. The word got around that he was running against Lodge [Henry Cabot Lodge]. I stopped him one day behind the rail on the House floor and I said "Jack, are you really running for the Senate?" He said "Yes, I'm running." He said to me, "What do you think about it?" "Oh," I said, "I hope if you run, you know exactly what you're doing. It would be terrible to lose you altogether." He said to me, "Do you think I've got a chance?" "Well," I said, "I wouldn't know." "Well," he said, "I don't really think I've got a chance." "Well," I said, "how can you run and how can you campaign all day long, you know, on crutches?" He said, "I can get around. I've got a good family." He said, "The first campaigner in my family was my mother [Rose Fitzgerald Kennedy]," and he went on talking about his mother and how she was putting these coffee parties on and so forth. And

you remember that, in an Eisenhower [Dwight D. Eisenhower] sweep, he won against a *name* like Lodge, and a *man* like Lodge—but again this demonstrated the kind of fellow he was. He never turned away from a fight. This was traditional with him. He, never batted an eye. That’s all. It’s just a little anecdote.

[-21-]

MORRISSEY: Yes.

BOGGS: There were so many things.

When the 1960 Convention was being put together, the last Convention, he knew of my very close connection with Speaker Rayburn, and Mr. Rayburn was actively supporting Vice President Johnson, so Kennedy never once.... You know, there was never any discussion about whether I was supporting him or supporting Mr. Rayburn. He never even mentioned it. This, of course, is the attribute of a brilliant politician, one of the most significant attributes.

After he was nominated for President, he offered the vice presidency to President Johnson. There was some question about whether or not Mr. Rayburn approved of this move.

I woke up D.B., who was then associated with Mr. Rayburn. Got him out of bed about 10 o’clock in the morning. He’d gone to bed at about 8. [Laughter] And I’ll never forget it because I got a key to his room. That’s how I woke him up. I walked in there and he was sound asleep, really asleep, and I almost had to punch him to get him awake. And I said, “Get out of that bed! Get up, pal, things are going on here and we need you!”

“What’s cookin’? What’s cookin’?” “Well,” I said, “Johnson’s going to be the Vice President.

“Oh,” he said, “You’re kidding. You’re kidding.”

“No. Get up! Get up! I’ve got to get to the Speaker’s room. Get out of here. Get me in the Speaker’s room.” So, in about five minutes I had him wide awake and had him convinced that he was participating in a moment of history, more so than anyone realized at the time.

Lindy?

MRS. BOGGS: Yes? [from inside]

BOGGS: Come here a minute.

[-22-]

MRS. BOGGS: Okay.

BOGGS: And we went down to Mr. Rayburn’s room and Mr. Rayburn was there by himself. There wasn’t anybody there. John Holton was there. By himself I mean there were no outsiders there. John Holton was his administrative assistant.

MRS. BOGGS : Hi.

BOGGS: Hi. So, Mr. Rayburn was there with John Holton and he said, "What do you think about this?" I said, "Well, do you want Nixon [Richard Milhous Nixon] to be President of the United States?" I knew that this was one thing that he didn't want to happen. That's a gross understatement. And he said, "You know I don't want that to happen."

"Well," I said, "unless you approve of Lyndon taking the nomination, that's what's going to happen. How can any man turn down being the Vice President?" I said, "You wouldn't turn it down." I knew he wouldn't, you see.

"Well," he said, "that's right. He's got to do it." That's about how much discussion there was. And in his political mind, and he had a remarkable mind, he immediately started realizing the handicaps and he knew that already the opposition had set in. And he said, "Get the President down here so we can decide it *immediately*."

He said, "Now, there are those that are trying to stop Johnson." Of course there were. You know who they were. Michigan and others.

[-23-]

So he was on, if I remember correctly, on the twelfth floor of the Biltmore in Los Angeles. President Kennedy was on the fourteenth floor. And I wound my way up the stairs to Kennedy's suite.

He was mobbed by people and I just kind of eased on in, you know, and finally got next to him and said "Look, you better go down there and talk to the Speaker right now." He said, "Yes, where is he?" So I told him where and I said "You better come now, not a half an hour from now." I said, "Come on."

So I went on back, you see, and when I got back and the old man (Rayburn) was getting a little impatient, about that time Kennedy walked in with Kenny O'Donnell [Kenneth P. O'Donnell]. President Kennedy said to Mr. Rayburn something which implied "Would you like to have Hale here while I talk with you?" And I said "Why, Mr. President, you and the Speaker talk. Kenny O'Donnell and I will talk." I scarcely knew Kenny O'Donnell. And they went in and Kenny O'Donnell and I talked. I asked Kenny what he thought of the ticket and so forth. And he was dubious, but after we got to talking about it and putting it together, I think that he became considerably more enthusiastic.

The President walked out of the room positively exuberant. And from that point on, Mr. Rayburn was one hundred percent for the Kennedy-Johnson ticket. Waiting in the aisle, so to speak, were, outside, Price Daniel [Marion Price Daniel] and John Connally and all those Texas politicians just praying that that would happen, you know. Well...

[BEGIN SIDE II TAPE I]

MORRISSEY: How about some more California stories?

[-24-]

BOGGS: Well of course, I think that the real turning point in that episode was

when President Kennedy accepted the invitation to appear before the Texas delegation and present his case. That was an historic moment, really, and, of course, it again demonstrated the kind of person that he was. I mean he was able to keep political controversy in the proper context and this, I think, history will record about the man. He was able to be totally friendly and compatible with Barry Goldwater [Barry M. Goldwater] although his political philosophy was as different from Barry Goldwater as political philosophies can differ in this country.

He was able to carry on a political dialogue which was as sophisticated and as mature as anything we have ever had in this country. And this was what was so tragic about those people who misunderstood the man. This man did more for the maturing of political thought in America than any man in modern times in my judgment, and yet the people who harbored these strong emotions against him fail to understand that completely, as I see it. His whole effort was to temper conditions, to overcome disagreement, to unite the nation. This is why he took so long to come out with a civil rights bill. He had a thorough understanding of the difficulties that confronted the smaller Southern communities and so on. He understood this perfectly. His whole approach was one of understanding and sympathy, and yet, once he had decided on a course of action, he never hesitated. So when he got this invitation, and I'm told it was by sheer accident, he got this telegram to appear before the Texas delegation, he just went right there and there it was, you know, on television and you recall it. So many things like that.

[-25-]

People say to me, well, was President Kennedy as active in contacting members of Congress as President Johnson is? Well, President Johnson, having been reared in Congress, is of course in many ways more adept at that sort of thing than President Kennedy was, but the idea that President Kennedy didn't do this is just completely, totally wrong. He did it all the time, and as D.B., who was responsible for putting those votes together, can tell you, we would call him and give him ten or fifteen or twenty names to call and he would call them. It didn't matter who they were, people that you would never think he would call. But there wasn't anyone in Congress, on either side, that he would not actually call and talk with about matters.

I think that the people that he really disliked were people who didn't understand that about the American political scene, that you could be totally in disagreement and yet be entirely agreeable about it.

MORRISSEY: I'd like to go back to the timing of the trade legislation. As I understand it, the administration thought that they'd use '62 as the time to build up and then try to get something passed in '63, but instead they decided to go ahead and shoot for what they could get in '62. Could you remark on this?

BOGGS: What did you say, Lindy?

MRS. BOGGS: I said, don't be modest.

BOGGS: Oh. [Laughter] Well, maybe Lindy's right. I think I had something to do with that decision and I think the only reason I had anything to do with it was that the logic was so overwhelming. I mean the logic, as I saw it, was that you would get just as hard a fight on a program of no significance such as a one year extension of an outmoded piece of legislation as you would get on a meaningful piece of legislation. So my argument was: look, you have no alternative, you have to act. You either have to ask for a year's extension, a one year extension of the existing act, or you have to

[-26-]

come forward with a new act which has some new ideas and some new principles. And I think that this is what did it.

All of the special interest groups, and I use the term broadly because an importer is just as much a special interest man as the exporter, you know. He wants his import right protected just like the domestic manufacturer wants his rights protected, so I'm not calling anybody any names but the opponents of the legislation, the traditional opponents, the various industries like chemicals, textiles and so on, lumbering and others. They were just as much against the one year extension as they were against the bill. So the President decided we will go for a bill and from thence it was a wonderfully conducted thing. It was well managed; it was sold to the American people. I won't say "sold to them." When they understood it, they were for it. And you know it is working pretty well right now! Talk about a chicken war! If we hadn't had that bill, we would have lost our foreign trade position.

Foreign trade in this country today accounts for something like thirty-three billion dollars—as compared to six or seven or eight billion dollars just at the end of World War II—of our gross national product and that tells just part of the story.

The impact that trade has on international relations, on comity between this country and all other countries, made this an historic piece of legislation, and something that the President was very proud of.

MORRISSEY: Did the President ever comment on your proposal for a domestic peace corps?

BOGGS: Lindy was the one that did all that work.

MORRISSEY: That's why I ask the question.

[-27-]

BOGGS: As a matter of fact, she worked very closely with the President on a lot of things. She could tell you things that I don't know anything about. And our daughter [Barbara Boggs Sigmund] worked over there at the White House. He knew her very well. The President knew everybody over there.

Until these hearings on the new trade bill were held before the Joint Economic Committee, everyone, including people in the government, were saying that we couldn't pass a bill that year, that we would have to do just what you've suggested, wait a year; and I started saying we can pass it, and I remember a news conference that I had, these newspaper men were saying "Do you believe this?" "Certainly I believe it!" And all of a sudden people started saying we can pass a bill and the whole climate changed! Now, of course this, incidentally, is true in a great many political matters. If you say it can be done, why, people say it can be done. If you start pointing out why it can be done and why it is logical to do it, then it can be done! And in this particular instance we really mobilized the opinion in the country and I had as much to do with it as anybody else. I went out deliberately to mobilize public opinion and I knew pretty much how to do it. That bill passed because we did that and because the President, once he committed himself, gave it everything he had. Everything! And yet he was quite skeptical about it in the beginning.

The tax bill was a very interesting thing. He's the first President who ever really adopted an economic theory, as you know, as radical on the surface as his tax proposal was. What the bill really says is that at a time of budget deficits, we'll risk making the deficit bigger but in the process increase the gross national product and, in a reasonable matter of time, reduce the deficit altogether because of increased economic activity. Now this is a degree of economic sophistication that a lot of people don't understand and the President did as fine a job of explaining that to the American people as any President in history.

[-28-]

One thing that rankled the President was the fact that he was very friendly to business and that he understood business problems and that business didn't respond, which is quite true. You know there had been a business upturn since the day he became President, now the longest in the history of the country by several months, and the indications are that as a result of the tax bill, it will be a great deal longer. But he felt that regardless of what he did, he wasn't able to get acceptance in the business community.

The tax bill was a good example. The people of the country, once they understood the tax bill, were for it and yet with some of the tax proposals that he favored he actually encountered business opposition.

One of them was the Tax Bill of 1962, the investment credit, which was a unique thing and which probably has had as much to do with the increase in industrial capacity in this country as anything we've done and that was strictly the President's idea. It was his. Nobody else's. It was his idea. He promoted it and he sold it and he passed it. And many of the people, you know, that he was allegedly politically obligated to were opposed to it but it proved to be just exactly what he thought it would be, the kind of stimulus that industry needed, particularly certain heavy industries. The railroad industry is a good example.

There were so many things like this. I'm sure that he felt that he had been a little too strong on the steel thing, that he had given the country the impression that he had acted intemperately, and this was the one thing he never liked anybody to think. He really never acted like that.

MORRISSEY: Could you comment some more about President Kennedy as a

legislative leader?

[-29-]

BOGGS: President Kennedy in the House was never particularly active as a legislative leader. He took positions and he held to them, but I think he felt that the House hierarchy, so to speak, was pretty well lined up in other hands. John McCormack was Majority Leader and came from his own state so obviously he would not become the majority leader at any time soon. I think that he was a bit impatient with the House. You know it takes a long time, but he was very popular in the House. Everybody liked him. Everybody. And he was always very popular with the Southern members. And this was true after he was President.

You go back and read the congressional debates for the three years of Kennedy's incumbency. I don't think you'll really find an intemperate speech made against him as a person by anybody from the South in the Congress.

MORRISSEY: I understand he went to New Orleans in May, 1962, for a wharf dedication.

BOGGS: Yes.

MORRISSEY: Do you remember much about this trip?

BOGGS: Oh, I remember a great deal about it. I remember.... Well, he came really because I asked him to, and then some of the racists sent word to some of his associates in the White House he'd better not go, that he'd be booed and insulted. At the opening of the baseball season in April, 1962, we were all out at the baseball game and about the second or third inning it started raining. So we went back into the Senators' dugout, and he sought me out and he told me about these reports that he'd gotten, all of which I knew because some person had overheard some of these people talking to him and they told me what they had told him. I said "Yes, Mr. President, I know about that, but all I can say is one thing. If the time ever comes when the President of the United States can't go to any city in the United States,

[-30-]

then our country has ceased to be the hope of mankind." I said, "If you can go to South America, then you can certainly go any place in the United States. And if you think it might be bad to go and maybe have a few signs, how bad do you think it would be if the word got out that you would not go?" And of course he just said, "Well, I'm going," and there wasn't any further discussion about it. That ended it.

And, incidentally, he had the most phenomenal crowd that I've ever seen in New Orleans. It was a beautiful May day. I remember it vividly. The date, I think, was May 4th, although I'm not sure about that, but it was the first week in May and it was a lovely, lovely day. It was a day pretty much like we are having here today, just about this temperature

which is unusual for New Orleans. It is usually hotter than that, hotter than this. His motorcade went through what we call uptown New Orleans and this area is characterized by massive live oak trees which branch over the streets. The people came out in droves in spite of all the conversation and propaganda. You never saw friendlier people! They were just pleased to death to see him, all of them.

And then he addressed a meeting at the New Orleans city hall, after the dock board dedication, where there were people as far as the eye could see and they gave him a fantastic welcome! Really, I'll never forget it. And when he left he was as happy as a man could be because he had gone into the deep South and he had seen that the people there genuinely loved him.

And that's the only trip that he made to Louisiana after he was president. He didn't go to the state when he was running for President. I think it gave him a great uplift. He was tremendously pleased by it and I know it was very gratifying to me because I'd heard all these stories, you know, about how they would boo him, this and that, and so on. None of that happened.

[-31-]

MORRISSEY: I understand that you were in New Orleans a few weeks before the assassination at which you gave a speech about hatred. Could you tell me about that and the statement you made right after the assassination?

BOGGS: Yes. I wrote that out in longhand. I sat there in the Ways and Means Committee room and wrote it out and many people criticized me for that statement. I got it out about a week ago to read it over again, and if I had to do it over I wouldn't change a word in it! And I had a lot of people say to me, "We loved your statement because you showed indignation and you showed feeling about a man who had made a contribution to this country which history will appreciate," and that's very true.

The death of President Kennedy was an unbelievable shock to me. What happened was that we were building up all this stuff. It was almost like the Civil War all over again here. You just can't imagine how bad it was. It got so you had to say, "Look, I'm an American!" You had to say "I love my state, but my state without these other forty-nine states, without the strength that comes from union, would be like Haiti or Santa Domingo or some underdeveloped country! We are strong because we are part of a great union, a great country."

It got so that those of us who had the responsibility of representing our constituencies here were looked upon in a good many quarters as almost being aliens! And we'd just had a very bitter campaign in my native state of Mississippi. I was born in Mississippi, where the whole issue had been how much you despised the President of the United States! Fantastic! Utterly fantastic! I had seen this in President Truman's Administration, but I had not seen anything like it as virulent, violent, really hateful as it was against President Kennedy. And I could feel it growing in my own area. It was like a mad disease, so I decided I would just speak out about it. And what I said was really not sensational. It was so ordinary that it shouldn't have created a ripple. But it did. The radio station used it in full.

What I said was that there never had been a great president that hadn't created dissenters, people who disagreed, that probably the most abused president in the history of this country was Lincoln [Abraham Lincoln]; and, in modern times, no president had been abused more than Harry Truman, and yet it was just as certain as the sun would rise that he would go down in history as one of the great presidents of all times. And I said why. And I mentioned others: Jackson [Andrew Jackson], Roosevelt, and I talked about it. I said sure we've got race problems, race tensions, but I said it certainly isn't limited to our section. Any man who thinks about it is bound to realize that this is a moral issue rather than a political issue. And I said that I had served with many presidents, from Roosevelt on. That I had disagreed with them but that the notion of hating a president of the United States was so foreign under our system of government that it was reprehensible and that if we destroyed the presidency then we destroyed our country because the President was, whether you be Republican, Democrat, or whatever you might want to call yourself, he was the ultimate leader that you had on account of the way in which you lived.

Well, the meeting was attended by some of the real racists and they did some loud booing, but my friends were in the overwhelming majority. Somehow or another this speech got a lot of notoriety—I guess simply because somebody should have said it. And the bigots and others, they just put me down for real execution, you see, but as fate had it, President Kennedy was assassinated. Here is the statement I made at the time of the assassination. [See Appendix]

The President knew about this speech. I didn't tell him about it but apparently he got some reports on it and he was so much interested in it that he asked me to send him a copy of it, which I did.

MORRISSEY: What do you recall about the day of the assassination?

BOGGS: After getting the awful news and meeting Air Force One with President Kennedy's body at Andrews Air Base, we (the leaders) had this message to meet with President Johnson, but there was confusion about where we would go, whether we would go where we normally met, which was the Cabinet Room, or whether we would go to the office of the Vice President, which is in the Executive Building. So I asked the guards where to go and they said, well, I guess, maybe the President's office. Everybody was stunned, you know. So I walked into the Cabinet Room and there wasn't anyone there; I walked into the President's office and the place was completely empty. And I looked about and I knew that it would be different from then on, that somebody else would be there. I looked at all the mementos of the man, and then I went into the Fish Room where we have our press conferences after the breakfasts and there, by himself, was Ted Sorensen [Theodore C. Sorensen]. Not another human being around him! And he was watching the playback on television of the President's speech before the group at

Fort Worth that morning, the breakfast group. It was a magnificent speech. And he greeted me and said “They wouldn’t even let him have three years.” That’s all.

And I walked on over to the Executive offices and there were gathered the different leaders of Congress with President Johnson who was tremendous, in my judgment. He very flatly stated that “I am President in a way that no man would ever want to become President, but I am President and this country now faces the test of whether or not we can show that we are a continuous government; that there can be an exchange of power in this country, even under these circumstances, and institutions will continue to function as they should function.” And he asked for the help of all of us, which everybody pledged immediately.

[-34-]

I think everybody left there saying to themselves that one of the really great things that President Kennedy did was to select President Johnson as his vice presidential candidate.

Of course, the whole evening was a tragic one: watching the plane land at Andrews; seeing that beautiful girl [Jacqueline Bouvier Kennedy], the blood spattered dress; a moonlight night, and the battered ambulance from Bethesda Naval Hospital. There was a man that I’d seen two days before, vibrant and full of life. That was one of his real qualities. He always gave you the impression of being totally alive, and then to see a casket moved out and the look of utter unbelief on the faces of people like Larry O’Brien, Kenny O’Donnell and Bobby Kennedy [Robert F. Kennedy]. I think I was the first one really to greet President Johnson and Mrs. Johnson [Claudia Alta “Lady Bird” Johnson]. And I watched Jackie open the door to that ambulance. She opened it herself. The casket went in there. I didn’t have to take notes on that; I remember every bit of it so vividly! So very vividly....

MORRISSEY: Were you on the House floor at the time the news came through?

BOGGS: No, I had gone downtown, and the whole place was in pandemonium. You couldn’t get telephone calls through! You couldn’t get taxi cabs! You couldn’t get anything. And I had gone to the bank. I was overdrawn, literally. It was Friday. And the whole place was sheer pandemonium! We’d had a committee meeting that lasted until about one o’clock, one p.m., and we were supposed to go back in session at three o’clock that afternoon in the Ways and Means Committee, and I usually go on Fridays.

[-35-]

I was just so completely shocked that all the time I was thinking about these various episodes that I’ve been telling you about. Even now it is very difficult for me to imagine Jack Kennedy as being dead, because even when he was sick, he never appeared to be sick! This was one of the astonishing characteristics of this man. In the years he was in the White House—they were talking about him having back troubles—every now and then you could see him flinching a bit and every now and then you knew that he was in pain, but never did he give any impression, you know, except that of a really vivacious man, isn’t that right?

MRS. BOGGS: That's right.

BOGGS: He had a way, you know, just a way. I guess the mark of a great leader is to have every man who follows him feel that he is very close to him, and this is one of the real traits that Kennedy had. There wasn't a man who didn't think he was close to Jack Kennedy! The most remote Congressman over there felt a compatibility with Kennedy that was astonishing. Isn't that right, D.B.?

And he could get people to work for him that never saw him, never spoke to him, didn't know him. He really had the quality of inspiring people. Terrific!

Well. You know, this one other note. I'm on the assassination commission [President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy] and I've gone through all this gruesome stuff. I've held in my hands a dozen times the rifle that was used to kill him, and looked down its telescopic sight that the killer used, and seen the bullets, and seen the clothes that he had on, including the tie he used to wear that was like one that I have. He had it on that day and the first bullet that hit him came right through the middle of that tie, right in his neck, right where he tied the tie. Despite all that as I said a moment ago, having listened to all this, having seen it all, it is still hard to believe.

[-36-]

Governor Connally was before the Commission just a week or so ago and I had no idea he was so seriously wounded. It is miraculous that he lived. He has a scar which begins here in the back and comes all the way around his body, and right here, this bullet came out right below his breast. Apparently it just tore a gapping hole through his body and they had to take flesh from all over his chest to pull that wound together, you see, so he is terribly scarred. To show the force of the rifle shot, that one bullet that hit him penetrated his body, and after penetrating his body went through his wrist, and after penetrating his wrist and breaking the bone in several places it lodged way deep in the thigh of his left leg. And at the time that he testified, the physicians who had attended him, said that it was just fortuitous that he survived. Apparently he slumped forward into Mrs. Connally's [Idanell Brill Connally] lap (down in this direction) and in doing so he automatically closed his wound which was described as a sucking wound. In a relatively short period of time, I'm told, with that kind of wound you will suffocate.

Of course he told us about the President's last words, Mrs. Kennedy's remarks, and so on. The President was horribly shot. A part of his head was just shot away. Brains were all over the car, in the hands of Mrs. Kennedy, many of them. The first shot he could have survived. The second shot was a mortal wound, and had he survived it—obviously he didn't but if he had—he would have been, well, just a vegetable. I think there are many lessons we can learn from all this.

MORRISSEY: Could you tell me why the President was buried in Arlington National Cemetery?

[-37-]

BOGGS: It was originally planned to bury the President in Massachusetts and Kenny O'Donnell and Larry O'Brien, among others, in talking with Bob McNamara [Robert S. McNamara], recalled a day in November, 1963, when they had gone out to the National Cemetery in Arlington for a memorial service, maybe it was Armistice Day, and the President stood on the spot and looked across the Potomac and said, "This is one of the really beautiful places on Earth! I think, maybe, someday it is where I'd like to be." And McNamara reminded them of this conversation and that's when, I'm told, they decided to bury the President on that very spot. And of course nothing could have been a wiser decision for this man is already a legend and a hero, but it might be well for somebody to talk to Bob McNamara and get all the details.

MORRISSEY: Yes. I'm sure somebody is. Dick Neustadt [Richard E. Neustadt], I think. Thank you very much, Mr. Boggs.

[-38-]

[END OF INTERVIEW]

APPENDIX

STATEMENT OF REPRESENTATIVE HALE BOGGS

ON THE ASSASSINATION OF PRESIDENT JOHN F. KENNEDY

November 22, 1963

I am grief-stricken by this unbelievable act. John F. Kennedy will go down in the history of our country as a martyr to the American ideal. I knew him intimately; I loved him dearly.

He was the personification of Americanism; a man who almost lost his life fighting for our country in World War II. Born to wealth, he labored throughout his life for the ordinary man and for the American dream of hope for every man.

Calmly, with wisdom and with understanding and patience way beyond his years, he labored for peace for all mankind at a time when mankind desperately needs peace.

Another great American, Abraham Lincoln, was assassinated almost 100 years ago. Both he and John F. Kennedy gave their lives for the union, for sanity and for freedom for all Americans.

This fall I went to New Orleans, my home district, and I made a speech. I tried to calm the drums of blind hatred against the President of the United States. I warned that we were on a collision course. But the drums beat louder there and in other places. It is a sad day for America; it is a sad day for the world. The radicals and haters in politics and elsewhere have had their way. They are the ones who really pulled the trigger which killed a great American. But they will not prevail; our nation will prevail, and John F. Kennedy will be enshrined as one of its greatest heroes.

May God give President Johnson, Mrs. Johnson, and Mrs. Kennedy the courage and the strength to lead our country through this dark hour.

Hale Boggs Oral History Transcript
Name Index

A

Agronsky, Martin, 18

B

Ball, George W., 17
Boggs, Claire, 10
Boggs, Corinne "Lindy" Claiborne, 5, 10, 11, 22,
26, 27
Bulter, Paul M., 2

C

Connally, Idanell Brill, 37
Connally, John B., Jr., 4, 24, 37
Clayton, William L., 16, 17
Curley, James Michael, 8

D

Daniel, Marion Price, 24
Dawson, William L., 2

E

Eisenhower, Dwight D., 21
Ervin, Sam J., Jr., 2

F

Faubus, Orval E., 4
Finnegan, James A., 2
Fitzgerald, John Francis, 9
Fulbright, J. William, 9

G

Glenn, John, 15
Goldwater, Barry M., 25
Gore, Albert, Sr., 4, 5

H

Halleck, Charles A., 18
Hardeman, D.B., 1, 19, 22, 26, 36
Hennings, Thomas Carey, Jr., 5
Herter, Christian A., 16, 17
Holton, John, 23

Humphrey, Hubert H., 4

J

Jackson, Andrew, 11, 33
Jackson, Rachel, 11
Johnson, Claudia Alta "Lady Bird", 35
Johnson, Lyndon Baines, 4, 6, 18, 19, 22, 23, 24,
26, 34, 35
Jones, Jesse Holman, 12

K

Kefauver, Estes, 1, 3, 5, 6
Kefauver, Nancy, 5
Kennedy, Jacqueline Bouvier, 35, 37
Kennedy, John F., 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12,
13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23,
24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 32, 33, 34, 35,
36, 37, 38
Kennedy, Joseph P., 7
Kennedy, Robert F., 35
Kennedy, Rose Fitzgerald, 21
Khrushchev, Nikita Sergeevich, 12, 14

L

Lawrence, David Leo, 2
Lincoln, Abraham, 33
Lincoln, Evelyn N., 10
Lodge, Henry Cabot, 21
Long, Earl Kemp, 3

M

Marshall, George C., 9
McCormack, John William, 2, 30
McNamara, Robert S., 38
Mitchell, Stephen A., 2
Monnet, Jean, 16, 17
Monroney, Almer Stillwell "Mike", 5

N

Neustadt, Richard E., 38
Nixon, Richard Milhous, 23

O

O'Brien, Lawrence F., 8, 35, 38
O'Donnell, Kenneth P., 24, 35, 38

P

Peterson, 17

R

Rayburn, Samuel Taliaferro, 1, 2, 5, 6, 22, 23, 24
Reardon, Timothy J., Jr., 8
Roosevelt, Franklin Delano, 12, 33

S

Shepard, Alan B., 15
Sigmund, Barbara Boggs, 28
Smathers, George Armistead, 19
Smith, Alfred E., 6
Sorensen, Theodore C., 34
Stennis, John C., 2
Stevenson, Adlai E., 1, 2

T

Truman, Harry S., 9, 32, 33