

Hello, I'm Terrence McNally. Welcome to Free Forum: A WORLD THAT JUST MIGHT WORK. This episode was recorded as a LiveTalksLA event May 6th 2024 in Santa Monica. In it, I speak with historian and best-selling author, DORIS KEARNS GOODWIN, about her latest book, An Unfinished Love Story: A Personal History of the 1960s. You can learn more at doriskearnsgoodwin.com

Doris Kearns Goodwin's work for President Lyndon Johnson inspired her career as a presidential historian. Her first book was LYNDON JOHNSON AND THE AMERICAN DREAM. She followed up with the Pulitzer Prize winning NO ORDINARY TIME: FRANKLIN AND ELEANOR ROOSEVELT, THE HOMEFRONT IN WORLD WAR II. She earned the Lincoln prize for TEAM OF RIVALS, in part, the basis for Steven Spielberg's film, Lincoln, and the Carnegie Medal for THE BULLY PULPIT, about the friendship between Theodore Roosevelt and William Howard Taft. Her previous book, LEADERSHIP IN TURBULENT TIMES, was the inspiration for the History Channel documentary series on Abraham Lincoln, Theodore Roosevelt, and Franklin Roosevelt, which she executive produced.

On Free Forum we explore the lives, the work and ideas of individuals I suspect hold pieces of the puzzle of a world that just might work. We look at politics, economics, environment, science, health, and culture - all based on the fact that I believe we can do better and I want to find out how.

The show streams weekly on the Progressive Voices Network on TuneIn.com Podcasts are available anytime anywhere on Apple Podcasts, Spotify, Google Podcasts, most major podcast sites and at my site, terrencemcnally.net.

Applause

[McNally \(00:01:01\)](#): Good Evening, y'all...

[Kearns Goodwin \(00:01:04\)](#): "Y'all" - that sounds Texas...

[McNally \(00:01:06\)](#): Florida...I grew up in Florida. I also think we should have a second person, plural.

[Kearns Goodwin](#): ...here we are.

[McNally](#): She is No stranger to Live Talks la She appeared in 2021 with Walter Isaacson regarding his book The Codebreaker and Twice in 2018, both Times on Leadership and Turbulent Times with Frank Buckley in LA and then with Larry Wilmore out in Riverside. And all of those are available@livetalksla.org and at the Live Talks LA YouTube channel. And we

also have recorded two podcast conversations in 2013 on the Bully Pulpit and in 2005 on Team of Rivals. And those are available at most major podcast sites and at terrencemcnally.net.

[Kearns Goodwin \(00:01:59\)](#): Yay.

[McNally \(00:01:59\)](#): ...but Doris and I go back way further than that. I was an undergraduate at Harvard from 65 to 69, and as an upperclassman, I lived in one of the Harvard houses, Dunster House, and at Harvard, each House has a number of tutors... and what they are is sort of general mentors, advisors. They live there and they are there as resources.

Now, I checked today - I told Doris this backstage - and there are currently 18 such tutors at Dunster House. Nine female, nine male. However, when I was there, there was only one female tutor - and it was Doris Kearns.

I can't say we became close friends, but our paths crossed on a regular basis over 50 years ago.

And by the way, I congratulate you because the book that you are here to hear the author of is number two on the LA Times bestseller list and number one on the New York Times bestsellers. So good evening, Doris.

[Kearns Goodwin \(00:03:12\)](#): Good evening, young man. What would you like to talk to me about, sir?

[McNally \(00:03:17\)](#): Well, first of all, I wanted to just tell you that this is really fun for me. Those previous podcasts I've done with her on Team of Rivals and Bully pulpit, those books and those conversations have stuck with me. I find myself referring to things I learned in the books and in the conversations on a regular basis. And this one is even more fun because this is reliving the sixties as they went through Dick's past and Doris's past with Dick. I mean, what it is is it's our generation. When they meet in 1972, Dick Goodwin is 40, Doris Kearns is 29, and parenthetically Terrence McNally is 24.

So this is the times that we grew up, that we dealt with, and just reading the book is such a pleasure. The first scene that I want to talk about actually is the first scene in the book, which is just to tell us that first meeting and then I'll pick it up from there.

[Kearns Goodwin \(00:04:26\)](#): Well, just let me say first of all, what fun to be doing this with you. This is like reliving our lives together so it couldn't be a more perfect person to conversation with tonight.

So what happened is, I was a young professor at Harvard in 1972. We had an office in this little yellow house on Mount Auburn Street for History and Government people. And we heard when I came in one summer morning that there was this guy named Richard Goodwin who was coming to get an office that the Kennedys had gotten for him. We were so excited. We were all nerds. We knew who he was. We knew he'd worked for JFK, we knew he'd worked for LBJ, we knew he

was with Bobby Kennedy when he died, and we heard that he was kind of arrogant and brash and brilliant and captivating. I thought he sounded really interesting. (00:05:09)

So anyway, I'm up in my office and working on... two tutees are about to come in... Suddenly he just walks in and plops himself down on that chair. He said, "So you're a graduate student?" "And I said, "No, no, I'm an assistant professor." I told him all the courses I taught, and I went on and on about the resume and then he said, "I know. I'm just teasing you. I know you worked for Lyndon Johnson and you worked for him after I left..."

So we started talking that afternoon. We talked about LBJ, about JFK, about Bobby Kennedy, about rhythm, about astronomy, and physics, and sex, and all sorts of things, even the beleaguered Red Sox. And the talk that went on to a small restaurant on Back Bay in Boston. And I knew that night... I went home and told two friends of mine, "I've met the man I want to marry." So it happened right away.

McNally (00:05:54): Yeah! And for any of you who are just here because you love Doris and don't know this book, here's how I describe it: It is an unfinished love story. It's a relationship of 45 years, a marriage of 42 years between two people who have spent their whole lives dedicated to the better angels of America. And that is another unfinished love story that's in the air. We're going to talk a lot about Richard Goodwin, but before I ask you, "Who was Richard Goodwin?" Let me ask, who was Doris Kearns?

Kearns Goodwin (00:06:27): Well, Doris Kearns then was somebody who had loved history from the time I was a little girl. My father taught me that mysterious art of keeping score while listening to baseball games, so that when he went to work in New York during the day, I could record for him the history of that afternoon's Brooklyn Dodger game. And he would come home and with all my miniaturized symbols, I could recount every play of every inning. And it made me feel there's something magical about history to keep my beloved father's attention, even if it's only five hours old. So that's where the love of history started.

I think I learned narrative from those nightly sessions with my dad because at first I would blurt out "The Dodgers won..." or lost. Took much of the drama of this two- hour telling away. So I finally learned to tell a story from beginning to middle to end. (00:07:10)

My father never told me then that all of this was actually described in the sports pages of the newspapers the next day. So I thought without me he wouldn't even know what happened to the Brooklyn Dodgers. So it was pretty special.

Then I had a teacher in high school who won an award as the best teacher in New York state. She made us feel that when she was talking about the people who were long dead, that she knew them somehow. When she told us about Lincoln dying, she actually cried. Of course, she knew him. She must've known him. And that's the magic of what happens to so many of us, who get a vocation from a teacher.

So I wanted to be a high school teacher. I went to college thinking that's what I would do. I would be Miss Austin. And then I ended up teaching in college at Harvard, and I may have continued on that the rest of my life - being a professor in a university except that I was chosen as a White House Fellow when I was 24 years old and I went to Washington. (00:08:01)

You either were going to work for a White House staff or you'd work for a cabinet officer. We had a big dance to celebrate. President Johnson did dance with me. Not that peculiar. There were only three women. Once again, the numbers, three women out of the 16 White House Fellows. But as he twirled me around the floor and really dipping me down in Texas fashion, he whispered that he wanted me to be assigned directly to him. So...

It was not to be that simple, however, for in the months leading up to my selection, like many young people, I was active in the anti-Vietnam War movement, and a friend of mine and I had gone to a big march in New York, which had gotten out of control.

People were burning draft cards and they were throwing rocks, and people... There was a sense of violence in the air. (00:08:41)

So we went back and, in a political sciencey fashion, argued for a third party to channel all this energy to run against Lyndon Johnson. But we heard nothing. We sent it to the New Republic. We weren't published authors. Two days after the dance in the White House, it suddenly appeared, with the title *How to Remove Lyndon Johnson in 1968*.

So I was certain he would kick me out of the program, but instead he said, "Oh, bring her out here for a year, and if I can't win or over, no one can."

So I ended up working for him and then accompanied him to his ranch to help him on his memoirs. Mostly he just wanted to talk and I loved listening to him. Great storyteller. And I figured that's why I was there, because I liked listening to him. But I also worried, maybe part of it was that I was from Harvard, and he had this feeling about Harvard... He used to say his father told him, "If you brush up against the grindstone of life, you'll have more polish than any Harvard or Yale person will." But he somehow didn't believe it.

But I also worried that part of it was that I was then a young woman. So I constantly chatted to him about steady boyfriends even when I had no boyfriends, and everything was working perfectly until one day he said that he wanted to discuss our relationship, which sounded ominous. (pointing to McNally) Look at this facial expression.

[McNally \(00:09:50\)](#): I'm ready for this one.

[Kearns Goodwin \(00:09:52\)](#): Well, you can hear this. So he took me to the lake, conveniently called Lake Lyndon Johnson - wine, cheese, red check table, all the romantic trappings. And he started out, "Doris, more than any other woman I have ever known..." and my heart sank. And then he said, "You remind me of my mother."

So anyway, I ended up working on his memoirs. I wrote my first book on Lyndon Johnson, the conversations that I'd had with him for all those years, and that set me on a path to being a presidential historian. So I'll always be grateful to old Lyndon Johnson.

McNally (00:10:25): By the way, what I envision is Lyndon Johnson and Doris Kearns (McNally's hands vertically separated by at least a foot)

Kearns Goodwin (00:10:32): And he had no sense...

McNally (00:10:33): He was what, like six four?

Kearns Goodwin (00:10:34): He was six four. But he also had no sense of space, not just with me, but anybody. He would just talk to you so close that your head is like in his chest. That was the way he got power.

McNally (00:10:45): Okay, so for members of the audience who may know the name Dick Goodwin, Richard Goodwin on, but are not that familiar with him - who was Dick Goodwin?

Kearns Goodwin (00:10:56): He was an incredible character, probably the most interesting one that I've ever met in my life. I mean, he went to Tufts College, went to Harvard Law School, was the first in his class at Harvard Law School, was the editor of the *Law Review*, then clerked for Justice Frankfurter, and then became... Could have gone to any law firm in the country. They were all scouting - the law firm people, and he went from one place to another, all of them wanting him. He could have taken a stipend to go to Europe, but he chose public service. And after Justice Frankfurter, he became the investigator of the rigged television quiz shows. Some of you older people might remember *The \$64,000 Question* and *Twenty-One*...

McNally (00:11:34): Or certainly the movie...

Kearns Goodwin (00:11:36): Or the movie...yeah. He was the investigator who discovered that the questions had been given ahead of time to these brilliant contestants, and they were making it up when they were in these isolation booths that they were sweating and all. And the movie was made by Robert Redford. He [Dick] was played by Rob Morrow in the movie.

So then after that, he became part of a contest that he didn't even realize was a contest. Jack Kennedy was looking... He was a Senator, was going to run for president in 1960, and Ted Sorenson needed a second speech writer. So he asked Dick to draft a few speeches. He tried one, tried another, and he didn't know that 30 other people had also been asked to do the same thing. But he got chosen to be the second speech writer. So...on the plane with JFK, an extraordinary experience to be in this small prop plane that they crisscrossed the country in. (00:12:21)

And then he was involved in the White House staff. He did his Latin American policy, and then he did civil rights for him. Then when he died... He was in the White House the night that JFK's body was brought back. He had become close to Jackie Kennedy on the White House staff. They had worked on projects together... and *A Night in Camelot*, when there was this big dinner that

they went to... All the Nobel Prize winners were there. And then he brought the Egyptian monuments and saved them during an Aswan dam thing. So she wanted an eternal flame. That was Dick's responsibility that night, to get the eternal flame at the grave site. And then he ended up working for LBJ, and then he went to all the great speeches that LBJ did - We Shall Overcome, Howard University, Great Society.

And then he left and he became an anti-war advocate, and he was with McCarthy in New Hampshire, Senator Eugene McCarthy. And then when Bobby entered the race, who was his closest friend, he went with Bobby in the campaign. He was with Bobby when he died, and that's it. He was Zelig in the middle of the sixties

[McNally \(00:13:20\)](#): Zelig, as she says.

One thing I was going to say is that when I was reading about his time as the assistant speech writer... Ted Sorenson, you guys who know the Camelot years, was not really eager to have an assistant speech writer, but Dick got the job.

But as you were writing about that campaign, I remember that when we talked about *Team of Rivals*, I shared that it was like *The Making of the President 1960* by Theodore H. White - some of you know - only a hundred years earlier. And we both shared how much we love that book.

You got to do it in this one.

[Kearns Goodwin \(00:13:54\)](#): Yeah, he was a great reporter, Teddy White, and I read all those books when I was in college. And when I was doing this book, I realized I now was living with Teddy White.

When I start writing these books, I feel like I'm waking up with these people in the morning and thinking about them at night. That was true about Lincoln and Franklin Roosevelt and Teddy Roosevelt. But now this was my husband, who I really waked up with in the morning and went to bed at night, and then the people that surrounded him, I felt like I knew them all over again, even though I'd read them 50 years ago when I was young.

[McNally \(00:14:21\)](#): Yeah, no, it was your shot to do what you'd admired.

[Kearns Goodwin](#): Exactly .

[McNally](#): So one of the keys as to how this book happened, which is basically my next question - How did this book happen - and who saves 300 boxes of papers?

[Kearns Goodwin \(00:14:35\)](#): All I know is that all through our married career, Dick had these 300 boxes of stuff that he had saved, really a time capsule of the sixties - journals, diaries, letters, memos, all the drafts of all the speeches he wrote, and they were in the attic or they were in the basement or they were in storage. And he didn't want to open them because he felt the decade had ended so badly - with Bobby's death, with Martin Luther King's assassination, with the riots

in the cities, with the campus violence. He only wanted to look ahead rather than looking backward.

I'd seen part of them. I couldn't wait to open them, but I couldn't do it because he just was so resistant. Finally, when he turned 80, a few months later, he came down the stairs one day singing, "Oh, what a beautiful morning..." and I said, "What's going on?"

(00:15:18) He said, "It's time. It's now or never. I'm going to open the boxes."

And he said - this is how he would talk - "If I have any wisdom to dispense, I better start dispensing now." What a crazy way to talk.

So we made a pledge that we would spend every weekend together going through the boxes from beginning to end chronologically, and that we would try to suspend judgment of what happened later so that we wouldn't be overlaid by the sadness of knowing that JFK was going to die or Bobby was going to die or Martin Luther King was going to die. So we could imagine what it was like to actually be there at that time.

And that's always the way history has to be told, because Barbara Tuckman, who was my great mentor - in my imagination, I hadn't met her at that time - but she said, "Even if you're writing about a war, as a narrative historian, you have to imagine you don't even know how that war ended." (00:16:06) Just carry a reader with you, have a step along the way.

So that meant that we went right back from the late fifties when he had all these letters and diaries and up to the early sixties and relive that decade that was when we were young. So that's really what the story is about.

It was an extraordinary decade, and once we went through it, there was a sense that more important than the sadness of the end was that it was a decade - [to McNally] You know it too, from being part of it - where young people especially were powered

by the conviction they could make a difference and that they really wanted to be in public life. People wanted to run for office. People cared about the country in a way then that their ambitions were larger than themselves. And, for all of its sadnesses, it was a great time to be alive.

So we felt that here we are in our seventies and eighties reliving this time of our life, which really mattered so much. So that's what the book's about.

McNally (00:16:57): I'm going to jump on one thing you were just talking about there, about - if not a rational reassessment, an emotional reassessment... t

Kearns Goodwin: That's exactly right..

McNally: ... of the sixties, and that there was a propulsion at that time and so on. Two things I want to mention. One is, because a lot of people will say, and I certainly think about it a lot, and

Doris as well - These 2020s... there seemed to be a lot of echoes of the 1960s. I don't know if you know the book, *The Shattering* by Kevin Boyle?

Kearns Goodwin: Yes, I do.

McNally: And he points out something which I hadn't really thought about because of how old I was and what it looked like to me. But he said that America had been through a Depression, World War II, and they now lived under the cloud of possible nuclear annihilation. He said what they wanted more than anything was security, and all of the young people and the energy of change, while it caught fire and made a great difference, there was a feeling that that was going to upset this feeling for them. That was one thing I want to put out there.

The other was - because asking you to talk about the comparison of the two - was though the rights and power were denied many in the sixties - people of color, women, L-B-G-T-Q - but prosperity was shared. And I think that's a real key difference. How do you think about the two - our current moment of unrest and upset and need for change - and resistance - and the sixties?

Kearns Goodwin (00:18:34): No, I think that's right. I mean, you come through the fifties and that was the dominant theme of the fifties, that you wanted security, not only foreign policy security, but economic security because the remembrances of the depression were still strong on our parents. And so that the goal was to get a good job and to care about your material wellbeing. And young people rebelled about that. They wanted something more, and they were lucky enough to have more possibilities because of the affluence of the society. It was a very prosperous time. The early 1960s, inflation was low, the economy was doing well...

McNally (00:19:10): The great middle class...

Kearns Goodwin (00:19:11): The great middle class had been born. So the kids had a place to be able to rebel against that. I mean, one of the funny set of letters that my husband wrote to his best friend, George Cuomo, who became a novelist... When he was at Harvard Law School, he described in hilarious detail the pressure of being in law school where you knew that somebody else was studying, so you couldn't eat, you couldn't sleep because that person would then get a little better grade, then they'd get a better job, and then they get a better wife, and then their life would all be better.

And he said, "I know it's crazy, but we all feel this way." And the dean told them the first year that they were going to try and beat the record of the previous year where only seven people cracked up and had to be hospitalized.

So this is the way they thought. But what's interesting about my husband was that he, even as he worked hard, he just knew that something else he kept saying, I know I want more than that.

McNally (00:20:03): Well, I have this quote from him in which he said, I know I may be highly successful.” - I mean having finished first in his class and that sort of thing – “but I don't know that that will be enough.” And I thought, for a young man, that was such a significant look forward.

Kearns Goodwin (00:20:21): But there was a funny moment though when I was reading these letters, and he was talking to his best friend about the burden of choice, which law firm should he go to or take the stipend? And then right after that, I found in the same box, a picture of the *Law Review*. He's standing there in the middle with the baton, and there's two women on either side of the 60 men...

McNally: 60 men.

Kearns Goodwin: 60 men, two women. One is Ruth Bader Ginsburg, and the other was a woman named Nancy Boxley. So I rush in with this thing. I said, “Look at this. You're talking about the burden of choice. And she can't even get an invitation to a law firm, much less a job” - and yet spent the rest of her life somehow trying to open doors for the closed doors that she had. Then I decided after I started working on this book, I wanted to find the other woman I'd been seeing her face all that time. (00:21:05)

And I went to interview her in California, Nancy Boxley, and she was still a beautiful woman in her late eighties by this point. And she told me that she actually did get a job that first summer at Simpson, Thatcher, because she wasn't married, she didn't have a child like Ruth did. However, once she became pregnant, they went to her and they said, “We're not embarrassed by your state,” and they sort of looked at the stomach coming out, “but our clients might be.” So she lost her job. But then she eventually got back into the law and she said she went to her 30th Reunion at Harvard, and the great thing was - she went to a contract class. The professor was a woman wearing a short skirt, wearing boots, and pregnant. So change had happened.

McNally (00:21:48): One other thing I want to touch on, because it's certainly... When you said how Dick didn't even want to look at those boxes because of what had failed and the assassinations and so on...And we talked about this one moment over the phone the other day - I believe that we minimize, when we look back most of the time, the impact of those assassinations. That folks kind of go from the sixties, and they figure there was a reaction, and suddenly Reagan's in charge, and now we're on another path.

And yet what I think America yearns for is charismatic optimists. And there went JFK, RFK, MLK, Malcolm X, who is now turning much more to an anti-poverty versus an anti-white kind of thing - and when we lost them, it's not like you can go “Next?” you know...

And I think it made a difference that we neglect... We sell ourselves short if we neglect how much of an impact that had. What are your thoughts about that?

[Kearns Goodwin \(00:22:55\)](#): Yeah, I hadn't really thought of that until we talked about it a little bit the other day. I mean, I think, what happens is, you look back on it, it seems like, how could people have lived through a decade when so many assassinations took place?

I mean, that had never happened in our history - ...of people of such high level of leadership. And then you look back on it and you just say, yeah, well, it happened. And then we went to the...

And one big happening that happened was people assumed when John Kennedy was assassinated that that was the end of all the progressive legislation that he was sponsoring, that the country had now gone into the hands of a southern Texan. And it turned out that Lyndon Johnson, maybe not charismatic in the same way that the others were, but it was one of the more extraordinary presidents we ever had.

(00:23:38) So he got us through that transition. He knew how hard that was, and he made the decision the night he became President that he was going to make the passage of John Kennedy's stalled Civil Rights Act his first priority.

And his friends said, "You can't do that. You'll never get it past the filibuster. You'll fail. And if you do that, then you're going to try and run for election in 11 months. You'll fail there. You only have a certain amount of currency to use as president. You can't use it on this." And then he famously said, "Then what the hell is the presidency for?" So I think what we forget is Lyndon Johnson was there.

[McNally \(00:24:12\)](#): Yeah. And another thing we shared was that the notion of those eight years - from 60 to 68 - is really to me, a presidency - with a young charismatic guy who sets out a vision and then a grind-it-out...- One thing you point out that Dick noticed was that the lights were on in Lyndon Johnson's offices after everyone else had gone home - that a grind-it-out politician like Lyndon Johnson was necessary to actually get the stuff passed.

[Kearns Goodwin \(00:24:44\)](#): In fact, what happened to us when we went through the boxes is we were afraid a little bit that it would only exacerbate the continuing tension that had been in our marriage because I was so loyal to Lyndon Johnson. I mean, I knew what had happened in the war in Vietnam, but I also knew what had happened domestically during that period of time - Medicare, Medicaid, Aid-to-Education, voting rights, civil rights, NPR, PBS. It's incredible.

And he was still loyal to the Kennedys. And so we fought about it. I would always say "All those programs, he never got them through, LBJ did." "Yeah, but maybe the war in Vietnam wouldn't have lasted so long..." and it was a constant fight. And then what we finally came to realize was exactly what you said, that they were really, they each were larger because of it. The inspiration that John F. Kennedy provided, those laws were in the public sentiment, and then Johnson was able to get them through. That they were stronger together.

And some of that irritation and... His feeling for Lyndon Johnson became softened again... He had turned against him because of the war. They'd broken. And he felt the Great Society had been lost somehow. It hadn't. It was all around us still.

And he began to feel that. It gave him a huge sense of serenity in those last years

when we went through, it made such a difference to me. And to him. Everybody who knew him knew that something had happened. He felt a sense... We all want to be remembered somehow for having done something that mattered. And I think he felt that it had been lost, what he did...

McNally (00:26:06): That his role...and he coined the Great Society, right? That his role in that hadn't really happened. One of the things that you will hear repeated over and over again by the Right is that the War on Poverty was fought and poverty won. It's not what happened. Right?

Kearns Goodwin (00:26:23): Right. Poverty actually... When the statistics show - during that period of time, poverty went down substantially because of what he had done. But you bring up the Great Society and there's a great story about that, if I can tell it.

McNally: Oh, sure.

Kearns Goodwin: ...which is how the Great Society was formed. So first of all, how did he get to from JFK to LBJ is interesting because there were fault lines between the Kennedys and the Johnsons even then.

And so one day - we weren't sure of the origin of how LBJ wanted him to come - we found the tapes, those wonderful tapes that LBJ kept - pressing a button in his oval office, and then he could... whatever deals he had made with congressmen or senators, he could remember what they were.

So in this case, the tape was him talking to Bill Moyers, his aide in the White House, (00:27:08) and this is in March of '64. So John Kennedy's killed in November of '63, and he says, "I need a speech writer here. I need somebody who could put sex into my speeches. I need somebody who could put rhythm into my speeches. I need somebody who can write great Churchillian phrases. Who could that be?" And Moyers says, "Well, the only one I know is Goodwin," because he had known Dick from the Peace Corps, and he said, "but he's not one of us." And that's because the fault lines were there.

But Johnson said, "Well, let's try." And he came over to work on a speech, actually a message to Congress on poverty, so he gets to the White House and then a month later, Moyers comes and says, "The President wants to talk to us. Now that he's getting the tax cut bill through, the civil rights bill's going through, he wants Johnson programs. (00:27:52) He wants to talk to us about his vision for the future."

So Dick says, "In the Oval Office?" "No, no, in the White House pool."

They go to the White House pool. Naked, swimming is Lyndon Johnson, up and down the pool. And Dick said he looked like a big whale going sideways up and down the pool. So then they're standing there in their ties and their suits, and Johnson says, "Well, come on in boys." They had no choice but to strip on the spot. And now you suddenly have three naked guys swimming in the pool. And after a while, Johnson finally stops and holds onto the edge and starts talking about his vision for what he wants to do, and everything is there already. He's going to pass Medicare, he is going to pass Medicaid. He is... It was extraordinary what he was going to do.

(00:28:32) And they decide that they need a name for whatever it is that he wants to pass, and they decide they'll make a speech in May, which is a deadline for getting this program together. So Dick tries out a few names. Somebody in the White House wanted to call it the Glorious Society. Somebody wanted to call it A Better Deal. And finally he just tried out A Great Society in a couple places and it becomes the Great Society .

And then the speech is made at the University of Michigan, which was real chutzpah because that's where John Kennedy had given his speech in the campaign in October of 1960 where the Peace Corps was born - which is another great story in this whole thing.

Anyway, so he gives the speech. And the speech is really challenging this generation to say, "We are the most affluent country in the world. This affluence has to be used and contributing to the welfare of the people as a whole." And then he laid out the whole program, and then the 89th Congress comes and they pass every single one of those bills just about. And it changes the face of the country because of that. And Dick was so proud to be a part of that.

McNally (00:29:39): If you could tell it briefly... As you were talking about someone who can give us that zing and so on, the game that the people in the JFK staff are playing about slogans...?

Kearns Goodwin (00:29:55): During the campaign, they used to while away the time by talking about all the slogans, "Keep cool with Coolidge" or "Get on a Raft with Taft", which was a complicated thing since Taft weighed 300 pounds, to be on raft with Taft. And then JFK was listening to them play the game, and he realized that all the Republican slogans were sort of "Stand Pat with McKinley", and the Democratic ones were New Deal, Great Society, eventually New Frontier.

And so there's a moment when Dick had written a speech on civil rights during the campaign for JFK, and he was was so excited, first big speech,

all the rest were sort of regular speeches. JFK goes, and he listened to this game and he starts out for the first 20 minutes just talking about the slogans. And it's so funny, and everybody's laughing, and Dick says, "Where's my speech coming?" Finally, he pulls out the speech and he gives a little bit of it. And then at the end he says, "Nice speech, Dick." And then Dick says to him, "Both speeches, Mr. President." And then the next day in the newspapers, they said, he's

great extemporaneously, much better than when he makes speeches. So Dick was sort of downfallen for that. But anyway, it was a civil rights speech.

McNally (00:31:05): Right. Exactly.

I want to add one other thing, parenthetically, which is when you said, Dick comes down the stairs and he says, "It's now or never", he was not in any medical danger at that point. It was really a feeling of...

Kearns Goodwin (00:31:25): It was just a feeling of aging,

McNally (00:31:26): A feeling of purpose wasn't that he was... The cancer that took him six years later was a surprise. I just wanted to mention that because otherwise it puts sort of a pallor on the whole thing.

Kearns Goodwin: No, that's true.

McNally: So what did you learn? What are the biggest lessons you learned personally, in relationship, and in terms of the biggest picture?

Kearns Goodwin (00:31:47): I think one of the things we learned is that words matter, and that words can inspire, or words can divide, or words can hurt or words can soothe. And words really mattered at that period of time. I also learned that - and I knew this before, but we relived it emotionally - that when change really happens, it's when the citizens themselves are mobilized. There are movements in the society, and then, if they reach a stage where they create public sentiment, that's when you get into the highest channels of power.

And the best example of that was what happened in Selma, Alabama. And I think it's probably the heyday of the most important speech that LBJ ever gave or that Dick contributed to.

So what had happened is Martin Luther King had decided after the Civil Rights Act passed in 1964, that the next big challenge was voting rights and he was absolutely right. In the southern states, you couldn't register to vote if you were Black, they would ask you questions about the 16th or the 14th or the 15th Amendment. (00:32:47) They would ask you how many seeds in a watermelon, things you couldn't possibly answer. It was just a way of keeping the registration down so that more than 50% of say people in Selma were Black and only 2% were registered.

So Martin Luther King decided to march from Selma to Montgomery, and they went across - as we know - the Edmund Pettus Bridge. And they were accosted by the Alabama state troopers who tore into their ranks with billy clubs and whips and horses that hospitalized many of them. And we all watched it on television. I was a graduate student at the time. I remember watching it that night and horrified that this was our country somehow. And Johnson realized... He was going to wait for voting rights until the next year, until we could absorb the Civil Rights Act, but he understood that something had happened, that he had to talk right then about it. (00:33:35)

So a week later, he decided to give a speech to a joint session of Congress, and he decided on a Sunday night that he would do it on Monday night. And my husband happened to be at Schlesinger's home, the historian's home, and he was eating and drinking that night. He got no call from the White House. He was surprised because he was the main speech writer, went in the next morning, and all of a sudden Johnson is saying, "How's Dick Goodwin doing on the speech?"

It turned out someone else had been there that night, assigned it to someone else, and Johnson was furious. So Dick had only from nine o'clock in that morning until six to write that speech. And it was such pressure he was under. And they said, "What can I do to help you?" And he said, "Serenity. Nobody can bother me. I'll send the the pages out (00:34:14) little by little. He can edit them. They'll come back, but nobody can bother me."

So he was alone in that office, and he described it... He put his watch away, as if he put his watch away, time wouldn't go away. And then finally in the middle of the afternoon, he went outside to smoke a cigar and there was people in the distance singing, *We Shall Overcome*. He came back in and the words all came together.

It still to me is one of the best speeches I've ever heard. He wrote... started out, "I speak tonight for the dignity of man and the destiny of democracy. Every now and then, history and fate meet at a certain time in a certain place. So it was in Lexington and Concord, so it was at Appomattox, so it was last week in Selma, Alabama." How could he do that, right?

(00:34:57):

And then he goes on, "This is not a northern problem, not a southern problem, not a state's right problem, not a national problem. It's a human rights problem. And we are here tonight not as Democrats or Republicans to meet that problem."

And then he says, "But even if we do, then the just blessings of American society still need to be distributed among Black Americans, and we have to overcome years of bigotry and prejudice. But if we do together, we shall overcome." - using the anthem of the Civil Rights Movement to bring it to the highest callings of power.

I had been at the march on Washington in August of 1963. It was the most exhilarating moment of my young life to be there. I was carrying a sign, "Protestants, Jews and Catholics Unite for Civil Rights." And that's when, of course, Martin Luther King made his major speech, but we all sang, *We Shall Overcome* there, and I felt like I was part of something larger than myself.

(00:35:54)

So anyway, that night... There's one more thing... The only time that Johnson interrupted him, and Dick said it was the softest voice he'd ever heard in Lyndon Johnson. "Dick, I don't want to interrupt you, but I'd like to talk about Cotulla." And Dick knew exactly what that meant.

Johnson had taken a year off from teaching at Southwest State Teachers College, from becoming a teacher, to teach at a small Mexican-American community in Cotulla, Texas, where the kids were really poor. They came to school without having had breakfast. He said he knew that they felt somebody disliked them, but they didn't know why. And he said to Dick, "I'd like to talk about that tonight."

So a great passage was written for him, in which he said, "In 1928, when I was there, I couldn't do much for those kids. I gave my salary to get soccer and baseball, but there was not much I could do. But now I'm here. It's 1965 and I'm the President of the United States, and I have the power and I intend to use it."

It was great. So anyway, Dick was standing at the back of the well that night and listening to this, and it was a fusion of love for Lyndon Johnson. And he said, then never could he have imagined that two years later he'd be marching in the streets against him on Vietnam.

McNally (00:37:07): But something I learned from you and from this book is the terrible fate that happened with Johnson, Vietnam, and how it didn't go the way Johnson even hoped it would. Could you tell that?

Kearns Goodwin (00:37:24): Oh, I'll tell that story too.

McNally (00:37:25): ... and then I have one more question and then we'll open it to you guys.

Kearns Goodwin (00:37:28): What happened is, so Dick went up to New Hampshire to work for McCarthy. The kids were incredible. It was one of his happiest campaigns he'd ever worked on. They came from all over the country, and it has an impact when we look at the protest movements today, because the civil rights movement has been on their minds, they knew how disciplined the civil rights marches had been, that there was non-violence, that they knew they had to have a message. These kids knew that, and they had their own student leaders and they had McCarthy. The boys cut their beards, they cut their long hair, the girls wore long dresses instead of short skirts. They went in every Democratic house in New Hampshire, and they just listened to the people talk and told them, don't you want the chaos to be gone? Don't you want something different to happen?

Kearns Goodwin (00:38:10): And he got 42% of the vote. That helped to bring Bobby Kennedy into the race and it helped Lyndon Johnson to make the decision on March 31st, 1968, that... He started off saying that he was going to stop the bombing, which was what they all wanted. He was going to try and negotiate a peace, and - surprising to the nation - he was going to withdraw from [campaigning for] the presidency to try and focus on getting this war over. And he also knew he was in terrible trouble in the primaries as well, of course.

And what happened is - so that's March 31st, and he went out the next couple days, there would be signs, "Thank you." All the newspapers said he had sacrificed his political career for the

larger good, and for the first time, he wasn't booed on the streets. And then on April 3rd came the word from North Vietnam that they were going to come to the peace table. (00:38:58)

On April 4th, he was planning to go to Hawaii to start talking to the generals. The whole White House plane was filled with all the staff, and he had to stay to do a congressional dinner that night, and then he was going to join them at midnight. And then at five 30 that night, he gets the word that Martin Luther King had been shot. Then the riots broke out in the cities. He couldn't go to Hawaii. Fate... This is where fate intervened, and eventually there was a long series of stalling on where they were going to meet, what should the rectangle table be or a round table, and it seemed to stall out.

And then comes the Democratic Convention. Those same kids are there who are just trying to work for McCarthy still. My husband was there to work on the peace plank. I was there just as a spectator at that time. (00:39:44)

This is one of the places... My husband always used to say he was looking for me our whole lives. We were at the Civil Rights march together in '63, but there were 250 other thousand people there. And again, we were at the Democratic Convention.

But then again, and just as a lesson for us today, there were many people there were just peacefully wanting to get a peace plank through and to show their support for that. But there were others who just came for mayhem and disruption, wanting the whole system to break down. There were rocks thrown, the police were provoked, and the police totally overreacted. And Teddy White, the great reporter, said that night when there was a split screen between Hubert Humphrey accepting the nomination of the Democratic Party and the mayhem in the streets, that the Democratic Party had lost the election that night.

Richard Nixon ran on a law and order campaign, and he continued the war for years afterwards. So fate intervenes at certain times, and we have to just hope that there's lessons to be learned from the importance of - if you do have a cause and you're fighting for it, violence will always hurt your cause. It'll end the people's support for you. And that's what's important in the country, is changing people's opinion for the way you want it to be changed. So you need to remember what worked and what didn't work in the 1960s.

McNally (00:40:56): ...Even... I did my share of demonstrations and at the Harvard University Hall takeover, when the troopers arrived the next morning, I was in the building. This is 1969, and there were two doors to University Hall, and they came with a battering ram to the door where I was on the front row. And there was a picture that ran in some of the Harvard publications of how scared I was... And they couldn't break the chains on that door. They went to the other door and they came in where... now I'm on the back. And they came in, they didn't say, "Put your hands up." They didn't say "March out." They just started swinging Billy Clubs at my friends, and I was able to jump out of a window so I wasn't arrested. It's one of those quirky

things, but if you act a certain way, you will in the minds of the police, justify their repression of you. And then it builds and builds.

Kearns Goodwin (00:42:09): And that's what happens if you take over a building and you prevent people from going to their commencements. I mean things... You've got to think about what Lincoln said, the most important thing is public sentiment in a democracy. If you get public sentiment behind you, it's more important than a Supreme Court law, than a Congressional law, because in a democracy, public sentiment will shape things. Without it nothing can happen.

So in the end, the goals of any movement, and the great thing about the sixties were not only was the Civil Rights movement so successful in... I mean the Civil Rights Act and the Voting Rights Act changed the face of the country. And it was the soldiers of that civil rights movement that made that possible. But it was the launching of the gay rights movement and the women's movement, and those movements have made all the differences in the country's history, but it has to be done in the right way at the right time.

McNally (00:42:55): The last thing I want to mention, because it's another thing that is very on our plate, on our minds today, is the peaceful transfer of power. Yesterday on *Meet the Press*, Tim Scott refused six times to say whether he would accept - and Tim Scott's considered not super maga, just kind of a mainstream. He refused six times to say that he would accept the election results of 2024.

And we can look back to 2000 - and it turns out this is one moment from after all those turbulent sixties, - Al Gore reached out to Dick Goodwin to help write his speech after the 2000 election.

Kearns Goodwin (00:43:43): Yeah, I mean, what had happened is that just about the time that Dick got the diagnosis of cancer, we had reached most of the boxes in the sixties. And I remember he said to me, looking ahead, there were still hundreds of boxes left, and he said, "I wonder who's going to finish first me or the boxes."

But anyway, we did get into some of those later boxes and we came upon the draft of the speech that he'd written. Al Gore had called Dick up when the election was in dispute and to say he would like to have a victory speech or a concession speech. And Dick knew the concession speech was more important so he worked on that. And it started out with Al Gore saying that the Supreme Court has spoken. I don't agree with the decision, but it's the law of the land and ,remembering that above one of the great law schools was the sign, "Not under man, but under God and under law." (00:44:36) And he ended up saying that he was accepting this decision, and may God bless the stewardship of President-elect Bush.

And every other president, except for the former president, has done that. It's very hard to do. I mean... Having studied presidents, that they've just been through a campaign, they feel they've let down their supporters when they lose. They feel they've let down the country. They feel they would've been the best for the country. And yet every one of them... Jimmy Carter said when he lost, that he had promised people that he would never tell a lie. So now he had to tell the truth,

“This hurt. It really hurt.” And he said, but on the other hand, he'd been given so much and he believed in the transition of powers. Hillary Clinton said, “We not only respect the transition of power, we cherish it.” (00:45:23)

And it is the key to a democracy. Democracy. What does democracy mean in this most simple sense? If you look up the definition, it means a system of government where the people can vote the leaders in or throw them out. And you've got to have people... When you want your kid to learn that when they lose, that they accept losing, that they don't pretend that they haven't lost. And I think that's where we're at right now. I just hope to hope that somehow in November that the election is not close, and that there's no way that it can be subversive again, that people are going to say, it didn't happen this way, and we're going to have an endless degree of illegitimate governance because people don't believe that it happened the way it happened.

McNally (00:46:04): And one of the most revolutionary things in the American Revolution is not in 1776 or 1789, but in 1801 when there is the transfer from one party to another. It had never happened before.

Kearns Goodwin (00:46:18): We are all Republicans. We are all Democrats. It was not Republicans then. That's right. That was the statement that was made at the time.

McNally: Yeah.

Kearns Goodwin: Now I just feel, I don't know that the great thing about history that I've gotten such solace from is that we do feel we're living in a really, really hard time right now, but we've lived in really, really, really hard times before. And that's important to remember .

I mean, when Lincoln came into office, he said that seven states had seceded from the union, and a war that was going to bring about 600,000 deaths was about to begin. He later said if he could have ever known what pressure he would live under, he wouldn't have thought he could have lived through it. And he did. And we ended up with the emancipation secured and the union restored.

In the early days of the Depression, one out of four people out of work, starving people wandering around the streets. (00:47:06) Somebody said to Roosevelt, “If your program works, you'll be one of the great presidents. If it fails, you'll be one of the worst.” He said, “No, if it fails, I'll be the last.” There was a real feeling democracy was at risk then.

When Teddy Roosevelt came in at the turn of the century, there was such polarization in the country between city and country, between... the gap between the rich and the poor. The industrial order had shaken up the economy like globalization and tech have today. And yet he said, if people begin as they were doing, continue to see each other from other regions, sections or parties as the other, rather than as common American citizens, democracy will be in peril. And that yet somehow we came through rational legislation at that time that eased the worst parts of

the industrial revolution, took some of the big companies out that were not playing by the rules of the game. (00:47:54)

And then the early days of World War ii, when Hitler in one week conquered most of Western Europe, leaving England standing alone, and then France had fallen as well, and we had only 18th in military power. We couldn't help. And yet somehow we mobilized, and by 1942, we were creating a plane every four minutes, a tank every seven minutes, a ship was launched every single day, and our lend lease used by people all over the world.

We came through all of those. And the people didn't know at the time, they knew... They were as anxious as we were. They didn't know how it was going to end.

So I just keep feeling that somehow the citizens came through in those times, not just the leaders. And it's up to us to write this next chapter in our history, and we better be prepared to do it, that's for sure. But I think we can. At least I believe we can.

McNally (00:48:40): Now we're ready for Q and A

Speaker 5 (00:48:42): I'm just wondering if you are ever going to write the definitive history of the Boston Red Sox.

Kearns Goodwin (00:48:51): Somebody was asking me the other night, what would I have loved to be if I hadn't been a historian? And I realized I'd love to have been Commissioner of Baseball, what fun to be..and then I dream that if I had been Commissioner of Baseball, that I would be able to figure out a way that all the teams would - and this may not be a very popular thing to say in Los Angeles, because you've got such a great team, and money helps, right? But I'd like to have every team have an equal amount of resources so that every kid could wake up in the Spring... so that they could believe they might have a chance at the playoffs and the World Series. And then I could write not only about the history of the Red Sox, but about the history of baseball and the big changes I'd made. But I think it's a little too late,

McNally (00:49:30): By the way. And it wouldn't be that unprecedented because Paul Giamatti went rom Yale Professor...

Kearns Goodwin (00:49:34): I know. I know. Exactly. Why not? I love baseball so much.

Garcia (00:49:40): Hello, my name is Walter Garcia, and I should just quickly say, doesn't start with W, my name does, but learning about Dick's letters in law school was quite horrifying as a recent law school graduate. So I appreciate you sharing that.

My question is the following. You have lived in such extraordinary moments, and I'm wondering how you managed to seemingly handle them with such grace and what your partnership was like in that effort With Dick?

Kearns Goodwin (00:50:10): You mean the partnership with my husband?... Yeah... I was so lucky because at the beginning when we first met, I really wasn't sure that I could be a writer. I knew that I could teach well and I loved teaching. And I remember my husband said to me, "Just write like you talk." And I said, "That would be great cause I talk fast." But I never wrote fast.

But he gave me the courage to think that... It's a different thing. I knew I could tell stories well, but I was able to become a full-time writer because of his courage. He read everything I read. I'd wake up early in the morning and start working before he was even up, so I could have some hours without this big force coming down the stairs. And then I would write in the morning and every day at lunch, I'd show him what I wrote and he would edit it, and I'd edit what he did. (00:50:58)

You're lucky when you have somebody... I mean, people can fall in love with completely different interests and contrast can be great. In our case, we both loved the same thing. We both loved history. We both loved government.

And it doesn't mean that there weren't problems in marriage. There always are. We had great kids. There were complications with them. I love those kids and yet, life is complicated, but I had somebody for 42 years that I loved, and as much as it's been hard to let him go in these last years, and I wasn't sure that I could really write this book alone after he died...

McNally (00:51:32): This was originally going to be...He was going to be lead writer, right?

Kearns Goodwin (00:51:32): He was going to be the writer and I was going to help him. And then when he died, we hadn't written very much together yet, and he made me promise that I would finish it. He had some desire really, to have this story told. But then I had to move from Concord to my...because it was too hard to live in the house without him. Our big house of 10,000 books, and we gave 7,500 of them to the Concord Library, and they have a room now called the Goodwin Room. There's Alcott, there's Thoreau, there's Emerson. It's just so wonderful. And it's a place for high school kids to come or civic engagement to happen. So my buddies, the books are there. But anyway, during that period of moving, I couldn't get anything done and I wasn't sure I was going to do it. (00:52:13)

And then I just realized one day I really did want to do it, and I was afraid it would just make me sad. But on the other hand, it's just made me feel like I brought him to life. I mean, my whole life has been spent trying to bring presidents who are no longer alive to life. And now this was my goal to be able to bring him to life. And I think it's what we all want.

I think talking about this to people... because I've been... Somebody said to me, maybe more people should start going through the memorabilia of their families before they die, because you wait until they die and it's so sad. But if you could talk to them about it, go through the scrapbooks of your parents or grandparents and listen to their stories. We all want our stories to be told. That's how we live on.

And you don't have to be on Mount Rushmore, you don't have to be in a currency. You just want to be able to have people who knew you tell other people, this person lived, this person walked, and this person was on the earth for a period of time.

Somebody said to me about this, what would you advise people? And I'd say, start doing it now. Start talking to people, get their stories, and then they'll feel their part of their life afterwards.

Speaker 8 (00:53:24): A consistent theme that you have mentioned about Dick is that he was a visionary. What vision do you think that he would pass along to Joe Biden in these highly consequential times, especially in the next six months as we prepare for the election?

Kearns Goodwin (00:53:42): I think what somehow Joe Biden has to do is to make people feel, as Democrats used to be able to make people feel, that he's on their side. Roosevelt said, FDR, the most important thing is for the people to feel that you're somehow fighting for them and you're on their side. And somehow people feel that former President Trump is on their side, and I think Biden has started becoming more of a fighting... I thought that months ago, that he had to be much more like Teddy Roosevelt, that you can't just be a rational good man, decent man, compassionate man. You have to let people feel... and especially if young people are going to make a

big difference in this election and everything suggests that they made a big difference in 2022, in the last, the midterm elections in 2022, they showed that that was huge. (00:54:44) So they cannot sit out this election.

I think people have to be reminded that the vote has been fought for so long. I mean, just the hundredth anniversary of the suffragettes this last year, did you realize what they went through to get the right for women? What blacks have gone through to get the right for that? property? This is what Lyndon Johnson said. The vote is the fundamental right upon which all the others depend. So somehow he's got to make people feel... not by just talking about democracy in general, but about - what are the things that we agree on in general in this society? I think we agree... If you had a majority vote, it would be for climate change, doing something about it. It would be for gun safety, it would be for the right to choose. There's all sorts of things that I think... and maybe for more equitable distribution of things. And you've just got to make people feel that you're fighting with them, so that they feel this is their election to win, not just yours as a leader up there. Somehow he's got to involve the citizenry. So ...not so easy, but hopefully it can be done.

Schwazo (?) (00:55:42): Hi, my name's Christian Schwazo. I go to Saddleback College. I'm a Saddleback Association and Government President. With the amount of protests that are happening around the nation, do you believe that there will be a parallel between the 1968 DNC protest and the upcoming 2024 DNC protests or the upcoming 2024 DNC?

Kearns Goodwin (00:56:05): I worry about that. I mean, I think it depends so much... Again, this is where fate's going to come in. It depends on where the war is. If it's hopeful say, there were a

ceasefire and it's held to between now and then, and the issue has at least diminished for a while, then maybe the Democratic Convention could go through and talk about what would normally be talked about.

If it's still going on, and if things are happening, and outside people are coming into that convention beyond the delegates, it is scary to think that the echoes of the past might happen. And if there is mayhem there, I think then that might make, again, the idea that law and order is the most important thing. And people, when they feel threatened, then they go inside themselves and don't have that outward...

[McNally \(00:56:54\)](#): That common feeling that we are in this together.

Let me just say two other things about that too. One is that when people talk about outside agitators as they have forever, certainly in the sixties as well, I got to say, I now seriously wonder if those outside agitators might not be in Moscow.

[Kearns Goodwin \(00:57:14\)](#): You cannot not wonder...

[McNally \(00:57:14\)](#): If you saw the situation in this country and you had ways to push here and there, they'd be doing it.

The second thing I want to say is that Hamas knew what they were doing, I think. And that one thing when we were talking about the assassinations and the act of fate, the two that I left out accidentally were Sadat and Begin...that we might not be having this war in the Mideast had those two not been assassinated. The power of assassination has been, I mean, it's tragic. I mean with capital T, capital R, all of that.

[Kearns Goodwin \(00:57:54\)](#): Think about Abraham Lincoln. I mean, if he had lived with that philosophy that "with malice toward none and charity for all, let us bind up the nation's wounds," it may be that Reconstruction would've been different under him and better under him. And that...

[McNally \(00:58:08\)](#): Well, Johnson was the direct opposite,

[Kearns Goodwin \(00:58:09\)](#): Right, exactly - trying to undermine reconstruction the way it was put under Lincoln.

[Speaker 10 \(00:58:19\)](#): Thank you very much. First off, I've read most of your books and you're just brilliant.

[Kearns Goodwin \(00:58:25\)](#): Oh, thank you.

[Speaker 10 \(00:58:31\)](#): Secondly, I am a community college history professor, and I teach five different courses, and I'm often asked, which one is your favorite? And my answer is, whichever

one I'm lecturing on. Picking a better course is picking your favorite child. So now I'm going to ask you of all of your writing, who was your favorite child?

McNally: Ah hah...

Kearns Goodwin (00:58:53): And I can partly suggest what you just said. I mean, if I'd been asked that when I was in the middle of writing about one of them, I'd have to say them. I used to feel like that was my person. That was my guy. And I used to feel guilty actually when I moved, say from Lincoln to Franklin Roosevelt or Franklin to Teddy, and I'd have to move the books out of my study. It was like leaving an old boyfriend behind.

But I think if I had to choose just one, it would be Abraham Lincoln. Not so much for what he did alone, but what he was as a human being. And I'll tell you a story that replicates that. When I was first starting the book on Lincoln, I went to see one of the great Lincoln scholars, David Donald, you may have known him when you were at Harvard, and he lived in Lincoln, Massachusetts on Lincoln Road in Lincoln, Massachusetts. Incredible. (00:59:37)

And so I lived in Concord. I went and he was so helpful to me, and he said, "I'll just tell you one thing. You'll never regret living with Lincoln. You'll feel like you're a better person at the end."

And it was because of who he was. Somebody who didn't let resentments from the past get to him, who was able to somehow tamp down the feelings of jealousy and envy and anger that we all feel, knowing that they would poison him. He was just a person who was... I told Daniel Day Lewis, I told Steven Spielberg when they were starting the movie on Lincoln, that they would feel the same way. And I remember Daniel told me afterwards that, compared to the other characters that he played, Billy the Butcher and all these, he was so happy. And Rebecca Miller, his wife, said she was so happy he was Abraham Lincoln for those period of years... there is something... (01:00:21)

But the story that I can tell is that I didn't want to end *Team of Rivals* with Lincoln's death. I never want them to die at the end.

And so luckily, I was able to find a story that Leo Tolstoy had told. He had spoken to a New York reporter at the turn of the 20th century, and it had to show how far Lincoln's name had reached. He said he'd just come back from a remote area of the Caucuses where there are a group of wild barbarians. They'd never left this part of Russia. And they were so excited to see Tolstoy there that they asked him to tell stories of the great men of history. So he said, I told them about Napoleon and Alexander the Great, and Frederick the Great and Julius Caesar, and they loved it.

But before I finished, the chief of the barbarians stood up and he said, "But wait, you haven't told us about the greatest ruler of them all. (01:01:08) We want to hear about that man who spoke with the voice of thunder, who laughed like the sunrise, who came from that place called America that is so far from here that if a young man should travel there, he'd be an old man when he arrived. Tell us of that man. Tell us of Abraham Lincoln."

Tolstoy was stunned to know that Lincoln's name had reached this remote corner, but he told them everything he could about Lincoln. And then the reporter said to him,

“Okay, so what made Lincoln so great?” And Tolstoy said, “Well, he wasn't as great a general as Napoleon or Alexander the Great, and he wasn't as great a statesman as Frederick the Great. His greatness consisted in his character and the moral fiber of his being.” And that is what we need in our country more than anything right now is character .

Speaker 11 (01:01:59): Thank you for your time tonight. I have a technical question about your writing. I'm working on a collection of my great-great grandfather's letters who was a friend of Andrew Johnson's. They're available, by the way.

Kearns Goodwin: Wow.

Speaker 11: How do you keep track of all the facts that you gather? Is it three-by-five cards or is it Scribner or research assistants? How do you keep track of everything? I know your research is just unbelievable.

Kearns Goodwin (01:02:28): Well, the only way I can do it is to start doing the research chronologically. As a matter of fact, it takes me so long to... It took me longer to write about World War II than the war to be fought. It took me longer about the civil war... And it's mostly the research that takes that long period of time.

But the important thing that I remember - somebody told me early on, you can't just keep researching year after year after and not start writing. So almost the beginning, as soon as I've got outline of what the story is I want to tell - and that's the hardest part of it all - even more than keeping control of the facts, is what to write about when you're choosing as your subjects, people to whom everybody else has written about too - 16,000 books about Lincoln, big biographies about Teddy Roosevelt. (01:03:11), so much about Franklin.

I had to find a *Team of Rivals*, so I was writing not only about Lincoln, but about Seward, Chase, and Bates and the surrounding team in the Cabinet. It was not just Franklin, but Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt, and the home front rather than the war front. Then it was not just Teddy Roosevelt, but Teddy and Taft. So that was the first hardest thing to decide: what new angle can I hopefully contribute so that I'm not just repeating what other people have done?

And then the next thing to do is to start doing the research and then start writing. I do it chronologically. I may start a chapter at the beginning that looks back, but then from then on, it's chronological because I think chronologically storytelling. And then I start writing that chapter. Otherwise, it would be too hard if you get all the research done.

Kearns Goodwin (01:03:54): So I would give you advice: start writing as much as you can. Maybe you already have. But I remember when I was in graduate school, there was this person that we heard of who was writing the biggest book on Sam Rayburn, and everybody couldn't wait for the book. And he just kept researching and researching, and then we heard that he died and he never wrote the book. And so that was such a nightmare for me that I think that's what I lost...

McNally: ... That has haunted you ever since.

Kearns Goodwin: It's haunted me ever since.

Some people use three-by-five cards. I finally made big notebooks of everything, you know, with real paper inside the notebook. And each notebook would be an event or a person or something. So that I now have like 30 notebooks for some two years of what I'm writing about.

Speaker 11 (01:04:38): Just following that for a second... Forget the researching. I don't really understand what's up with your memory. I can't even remember the book I finished last month. I don't understand how you remember your whole life.

...but in any case... I wanted to clarify. You said when you went to first go through the boxes, was the idea then that that was going to become a book and that your husband was going to write it, you were going to help... If that was the idea and it ended up the opposite, is this the book you think that he would've written too? (01:05:11)

McNally: Good question.

Kearns Goodwin: Great question. Yeah. I think Dick, when he decided that he wanted to go through the boxes, did hope that there might be something we could make out of it, that he could have a book from it. He wanted to write another book, and I think he thought he could write about just reliving this period of time, and what lessons it would give us for the future. And that's what I was going to help him doing.

And then, as I said, once he died, I couldn't write it in his voice. And that was the hardest thing because then I knew I had to be an historian, so that meant more research. I'd have to write about the sixties. I had to get newspaper articles. I had to understand each one of the events that I was going to be talking about with him.

And then I also wanted to interview people. (01:05:56) There were certain times where there were things he hadn't been able to do to follow up on. So I was able to follow up. For example, when he was at the inauguration, there was a parade after it in 1960. It was very cold that day, and nobody could wear a coat because John Kennedy didn't have a coat on. So he couldn't wait

until the inaugural parade was over, and he went into the West Wing to inspect his new offices. He was so excited. And he finds John Kennedy in there doing the same thing, inspecting his office.

And Kennedy says to him, “Did you see the Coast Guard contingent? Dick said he couldn't remember anything about it. He just stood there blankly. And Kennedy said, “There wasn't a black face among them. I want you to do something about it.” It was his first mission - to find out why there was no Black person in the Coast Guard Academy, and they discovered that there had not been one. (01:06:44)

They recruited one, Merl Smith, who became a very honored first Black man trailblazer, much as Jackie Robinson had been, other people had been, and he eventually earned a Bronze star in Vietnam, then became a lawyer, went to the Coast Guard. Anyway, I went and interviewed his widow, and I was able to talk to her about him and what it was like to grow up and to be married to somebody who had to be a trailblazer .

There was another case where Dick had wondered what happened to this river that he had promised when he was in JFK's campaign, he would clean up in Ashland, Wisconsin. So I went and talked to the town historian, “What ever happened to the river?”

Just following up on all these things was something else that took some more years so that I knew this was going to take a long time, and that was the scary thing too, knowing that I was getting older, would this be the right thing to spend my time on? But I think Dick would be very proud. I hope he would be, and I am so glad to know that I was able to do it.

McNally (01:07:43): I'm going to follow up then on... You said, “Am I getting too old? Is this the right thing to be...? When you titled this - this could have had any number of titles - *An Unfinished Love Story*... It seems to me it has multiple meanings, including love for our better angels, but how did you arrive at that title, and what does it mean to you?

Kearns Goodwin (01:08:06): Well, I think it both meant it was an unfinished love story because my husband and I had started on this great adventure together, and I was finishing it for him, but I think it also meant something larger, which is the unfinished love story for America, that we're always at promises that are made that aren't kept, but we keep making these promises and we're trying to move, like you say, to our better angels. We're trying to move closer to the ideals.

One of the things that Lincoln said when he was in his twenties, he gave a talk at a Lyceum. It's a famous talk, in which he was worried that the country was coming apart of the seams. There were abolitionists who were being killed. There were lynchings in the South. There was a mob violence that had taken over in the country, and the rule of law was not being followed. (01:08:52)

And he was worried about a dictator could arise in such an unsettled time, and he was worried that part of it was because the Revolutionary War generation was fading. They were dying, much

as the sixties generation is fading and dying right now, and that it was important to keep those ideals of the Revolution alive. So he wanted every mother to be reading about the Revolution to their children. He wanted everybody in school to be teaching it to the kids. He wanted everybody in a pulpit to be preaching the ideals of the revolution to keep them alive.

And I think part of what I was thinking about, there was so many ideals that were there in the sixties about a society that could be made better for all. As idealistic as it might've sounded, as naïve as it might've sounded, racial justice got further along during that period of time. (01:09:38) Social justice got further along, but it didn't get anywhere near where it needs to be.

So those were the unfinished promises of that generation that was fading, so that I was speaking not only for Dick, but for my generation who are not going to be around all that much longer. And I wanted to remember that idealism that... and you're part of it too. You felt it too.

McNally: Yes.

Kearns Goodwin: ...why you were there fighting for something that mattered. And I just hope that that can be what people feel. You feel larger than yourself when you're fighting for something, whether it's a school committee or whether it's a city or a state or national government. But you just want to have people want to go into public life again.

If I had one thing I could do, I'd love to see a national service program that would bring high school kids after that year to go from one part of the city to a country, from the north to the south, from the east to the west, so that we can... an internal Peace Corps. And they have a common mission that they have to accomplish and that they can learn what it's like to be with each other. (01:10:38) So...

Speaker 12 (01:10:44): Thank you for being here tonight. My question is kind of an observation as well. You keep saying that the violence and protests could undo the DNC this summer.

I'm just wondering, the Republican Party says it's the party of law and order, so as a presidential historian, I'm kind of wondering why are the Republicans not following this up with their presidential nominee? Why are we having such a problem with law and order and their presidential nominee?

Kearns Goodwin (01:11:17): That is a great question.

Speaker 12 (01:11:25): I just don't understand. Why aren't they falling apart?

Kearns Goodwin (01:11:29): No, it's a very confusing situation. You're absolutely right. I mean, obviously law and order is following a presidential election and agreeing to how it was ended up, and you accept and you go away, and then you come back and fight another day. And there's trials that are going on for a Republican nominee now right now, that's not law and order.

You're right. It's got to do with the way the media is handling things. It's got to do with what is not considered truth anymore, and that January 6th can be now reconsidered by some people as a tourist attraction. It's really sad and very scary. That's what happened in the 1850s is that you only read your partisan newspaper, so the only truth you got was from a partisan viewpoint. If Lincoln's in a debate with Stephen Douglas and you read the Democratic paper, they say he was so bad that he fell on the floor and they had to carry him out. (01:12:30)

Embarrassment. You read the Republican newspaper, he was so great, they carried him out on their shoulders.

And that was what led to that disintegration of any common sense of what is true. And so you're right, you're larger question is what is truth anymore? We don't agree on that. We don't agree on facts. People have a wholly nostalgic view of what happened in these last years beforehand, and I don't know how we combat that. We have got to figure out what's happening with the media. We've got to figure out what we believe in. It's going to take a long time for us to heal. It's interesting, we were just talking to some people today about the 250th anniversary that's coming, and I guess part of my idealistic thought is that we keep thinking, what is it going to do to bring us back together again? (01:13:16)

And just thinking about Lincoln, having said that he wants everybody to be remembering the ideals of the Revolution. Maybe as we prepare for this coming celebration of America, people will remember what it was that makes us common citizens and what kinds of values we have, and what laws we have on the books, and what we respect, and what we hope will come back to us again.

It's going to take some time, but I'm hoping that maybe that will be something that'll draw us back together again. We do have a common birthday coming up, and it is an incredible country. No matter what, people still want to be coming here more than want to be leaving here, and we just have to remember that, and just trust in ourselves somehow...

[McNally \(01:13:54\)](#): And that them wanting to come here is not a crisis.

[Kearns Goodwin](#): Correct.

[McNally \(01:13:58\)](#): ...or it is more than a crisis.

[Kearns Goodwin \(01:13:59\)](#): No, it's a good thing that they want to come here still.

[HapteGabr \(01:14:02\)](#): Thank you, Terence. Thank you, Doris.

Applause

Again the book is *An Unfinished Love Story: A Personal History of the 1960s* and the website is doriskearnsgoodwin.com

For this conversation and many other interviews and articles, and to join me in pursuit of a world that just might work go to terrencemcnally.net or aworldthatjustmightwork.com – the same website. If you want to receive my weekly email announcements of guests and issues, plus links to 10-15 articles I choose each week to flesh out the conversation, sign up at my site or email me at temcnally@mac.com. You can also subscribe and listen to the Free Forum podcast on ApplePodcasts and at most major podcast sites.

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