Opening Quote:

“Robert Kennedy on his own left no great legislative legacy, founded no great institution, led no great movement. His most extraordinary accomplishment, and it was extraordinary, was to embody in himself and create in others the kind of transcendent yearning for the possibility of redemptive change.”

-- Hendrick Hertzberg, The New Yorker

Paul Kirk, Chair of the Kennedy Library Board of Directors:

Today is a day of special celebration. We mark the 75th anniversary of Robert Kennedy's birth by convening those who knew and served with him, those who have researched and written about him, those who were inspired by him, and those who loved him. In some ways, this Robert F. Kennedy conference underscores the mission of the Kennedy library itself. We convene, and this library exists, not to recall for our own nostalgia, but to record and preserve for others that they might be inspired to renew and learn from the lessons of our history and from the public lives we honor.

Today we recall Robert Kennedy's hope and energy, his idealism and his pragmatism, his belief in our ability to reach beyond ourselves, his belief in the politics of values, his anger at indifference, his summons to us to make a difference, his compassion for the forgotten, his courage to challenge the comfortable, and the moral force of his quest for criminal, social, and economic justice and peace.

If, as Oliver Wendell Holmes said, it is required that a man share in the actions and passions of his time, at the peril of being judged not to have lived, today's proceedings will celebrate the life of Robert Kennedy as one who lived life to the fullest.

Whatever images, impressions and recollections any one of us may have of Robert Kennedy's life, let me suggest that none is complete until one has read and reflected upon the remarkable book of the written words he loved best, and from which he derived his strength and guidance. These, and his own writings and reflections were compiled by his son, Max, in the book entitled, To Make Gentle The Life of this World. In my view, it provides the clearest window into Robert Kennedy's mind, his heart, and his soul. The work is a beautiful tribute by a loving son.

My thanks as well to the panelists and participants in today's conference who, by their service with or study of Robert Kennedy's life, or by their engagement in public life in response to his inspiration, have played a role in preserving and perpetuating his legacy. Not least of these is the Master of Ceremony of today's conference. He is a special friend and generous supporter of all that goes on here. He's the Chairman of the John F. Kennedy Library Profile in Courage Award Committee; he is the Chairman of the Book Award Committee of the Robert F. Kennedy Memorial. John Seigenthaler was Robert Kennedy's trusted advisor
and right hand in the Attorney General’s office. During the 1961 Freedom Riders, John was the chief negotiator with the Governor of Alabama, and others. He was a Neiman Fellow. He was Editor, Publisher and CEO of the *Tennessean*, where for six years he mentored the present Vice President of the United States, Mr. Gore. He was founding editor and Director of *USA Today* and President of the American Society of Newspaper Editors. He is Chairman and Founder of the Freedom Forum First Amendment Center at Vanderbilt University, and no one is better suited to guide today’s deliberations to commemorate and celebrate the 75th birthday of Robert Kennedy than his friend and our friend, John Seigenthaler.

**John Seigenthaler:**

I want to thank you all so very much for coming to this historical conference commemorating the 75th birthday of Robert F. Kennedy. As you can see from the program, we’ve organized a series of four panels to chronicle the life and the career of Bob Kennedy.

I’d like to begin by dedicating this entire day to Ethel, who knew Bob Kennedy best and loved him most. I know the speeches today will make it more than an exercise in nostalgia. For some of us it will mean sweet and painful reminiscence. Those thoughts and sentiments will attend every session throughout the day. For some of us, this will crystallize fragile sentiments we’ve come to feel in every presidential election since 1968. We continue to listen for echoes of Robert Kennedy’s speeches which urged us to turn away from war, embrace peace, share the wealth and the resources of the land with the less fortunate, embrace the ideal of social justice for all, and put aside the divisions of race, age, wealth, militarism and the narrow partisanship that have come to divide us-- and divide us still.

I believe we will look at what he was about, what his politics and policies were about, what his motivations and commitments were about, thereby enhancing the record of his life and times for those who will come to this place to continue the quest. Today, we remember the man, who for many of us changed our lives, the man who changed the country and, had he lived, would have changed it again and again.

I’ll introduce each of the three panelists and then ask them to speak in the order of introduction. First let me present Harris Wofford, the former United States Senator from Pennsylvania. Harris has had a long career in public service. Under President Eisenhower he was counsel to Reverend Theodore Hesburgh of Notre Dame on the first U.S. Commission on Civil Rights. During the Kennedy administration, he was a special assistant to the president and chaired the sub-cabinet group on civil rights. As a member of the White House staff, he helped Sargent Shriver plan and organize the Peace Corps. In 1962 he became the Peace Corps’ special representative to Africa and director of its large Ethiopian program.

Since then, beyond his service as a United States Senator, he has served as Pennsylvania’s Secretary of Labor and Industry. He is currently the Chief Executive Officer of the Corporation for National Service. He’s the author of the book *Of Kennedy and Kings*.

Ed Guthman was Robert Kennedy’s special assistant for public information in the Department of Justice and Kennedy’s first senatorial press secretary. He is now a distinguished Professor of Journalism at the University of Southern California. He has enjoyed a highly successful career in journalism, winning the Pulitzer Prize for national reporting in 1950. He is the author of *We Band of Brothers, a Memoir of Robert Kennedy* and he is the co-editor of *Robert Kennedy: In His Own Words*.

And then we have Professor James W. Hilty, who is a Professor of History at Temple University. He’s written extensively about the Kennedy family, including, *Robert Kennedy Brother Protector*, and *John F. Kennedy, An Idealist Without Illusion*. He has also provided political commentaries for various publications, including the *Philadelphia Inquirer*. He served as historical consultant for NBC News Syndicated Documentary, “Robert F. Kennedy: The Man, the Myth, and the Memories,” narrated by Tom Brokaw. I asked him earlier what led him to write *Robert Kennedy, Brother Protector*. He said his mother told him to.
Thank you very much, John, and thank you to the Kennedy Library for this bittersweet occasion. Before coming I re-read Robert Frost’s poem, “Earth Word,” where, he writes, that in his old age the sweets of his youth were not enough. He had to have sweet that was mixed with pain. He needed to feel the earth with all its weight. I think that before Robert Kennedy was killed, in a sense, he was feeling the earth with all its weight and I assume a lot of us here are feeling some of that weight today.

But let us first celebrate the achievements that during the years 1960 to 1963 that this panel is devoted to. There was the achievement of winning the 1969 election by a margin of only 100,000 votes. There was a political price to pay for that, which led to the immediate appointments of J. Edgar Hoover and Allen Dulles. These appointments produced extraordinary problems in civil rights, and all kinds of complications with Cuba, to name two vital and difficult problems. This compromise seemed right at the time, and maybe it was necessary, given such a slim margin.

With regard to civil rights, just think of what was accomplished in the decade of Robert Kennedy in action. The combination of Robert Kennedy leading the response of public institutions to the popular protests that were led by Martin Luther King accomplished the two chief goals of those years: winning the right to vote and ending public segregation. By the time Robert Kennedy and Martin Luther King were both killed in that sad spring of 1968, that awful spring, those two great goals had been achieved by the meeting of popular protest and public power. If it had just been a protest movement without the response of the public power, it would have been like one hand clapping.

When Burke Marshall was asked about Robert Kennedy’s learning curve on civil rights, he responded by saying, “From ground zero, it was like this. It went on and on up.” This occurred under fire, from his first day as Attorney General. Facing the critical desegregation school case, he decided to act with a boldness that had not been seen before from a public institution. The Freedom Riders rode a little too early for Robert Kennedy’s taste. He would have preferred an all-out focus on winning the right to vote. His first reaction to the Freedom Riders was, “Get your friends off those buses. They’re embarrassing the President” (prior to his meeting with Khrushchev). The second reaction, within a couple of days, was, “How do we use public power to end segregation in public transportation?” He got the transportation agency and the FBI, reluctantly, to photograph every example of segregation they could find in the South, and they were numerous. At the end of that year, the Freedom Riders themselves testified that public segregation in public transportation was ended everywhere in the United States.

The question arises as to whether Robert Kennedy was transformed by tragedy and the experience of the early 1960s, in such a way that he was a very different person by the late ‘60s? Or was the process more gradual? I have been reading Evan Thomas’ new book and I’m not sure he ever answers this question thoroughly, for the truth is complicated. One reason I think the Evan Thomas book is going to help revive Robert Kennedy as a hero for our times, for the 21st century, is because he presents us with a flawed, complicated hero of great compassion, and leadership. His was not a leadership that sought to merely bear witness to the truth but rather one that sought results and shaped them in the anvil of action.

I think that there’s nothing our politics needs today more than the image, the model, the example, and the inspiration of Robert Kennedy’s life.

Throughout the Cuban Missile Crisis Robert Kennedy did what he had done as a young man. He asked moral questions: is it right or is it wrong? When I first met him, I didn’t like his answers. He was more of a Cold Warrior with a Joe McCarthy view of the world, than I was. What changed in Robert Kennedy, in my opinion, was that his view of the world became broader and deeper. The child that was compassionate, the child that was religious, the child that asked moral questions, was the man who in the Cuban Missile Crisis had the courage to ask the moral question, “Could we have a first strike and live with our conscience if we did?” In the
face of the geo-politicians in that room, he asked those questions. That was not easy to do, and he did it.

I'm left today with this terrible sense of “what if?”. Evan Thomas ends his book by saying, “One thinks of his struggle and wonders, what, if he had lived, he might have done.” While he was Attorney General, he started the task force on national service that led to Vista, the first domestic Peace Corps. He thought these would be the ground troops for a war on poverty. This year we're seeking 50,000 Americorps members, not the one million that Robert Kennedy imagined. We're so far short of making national service the common expectation that he had envisioned. His vision challenges us today.

And then lastly, in this election right now, the clear, important message from a country divided down the middle is that we want the next President of the United States to find common ground in the way that Robert Kennedy did. He attempted to reach out to left and to right, and beyond all ideological barriers to find a common ground, to get things done.

I would recommend to the next President of the United States that he immerse himself in the story of Robert Kennedy. I would say begin with Maxwell Kennedy's beautiful book and then go on to Ed Guthman’s collection of speeches. Can we revive in our time some of what we had? What were the words that we began this morning’s session with:"a transcendent yearning for the possibility of redemptive change." We all, I think, have that yearning. I think the American people have it. And the story of Robert Kennedy can drive us to try to realize that possibility.

Ed Guthman:

I always say—don’t try to psychoanalyze Bob. Look at what he said and look at what he did. He meant what he said, and what he did was incredible. I was a reporter on the Seattle Times in the 1950s. Dave Beck was the international president of the Teamsters Union. Paul Staples (another labor reporter) and I had been working for a number of years trying to put together a story on Dave Beck. We believed that Beck was doing a lot of things he shouldn’t have been doing, including stealing money from the Union, but we couldn’t prove it. We had a small amount of work that we could publish, but not enough. A reporter in the East, Clark Mollenoff knew what we were doing, and he was working on a Jimmy Hoffa piece. We were kind of cooperating. One day he called me up and he said, "The Chief Counsel of the Senate Investigation sub-committee wants to come out and talk to you and Paul Staples." I said, "Yes, well who is it?" "Bob Kennedy." He said, "You know, he’s Senator Kennedy’s brother." It meant nothing to me. We were in another corner of the country.

We agreed to see him and we spent a day and a half talking. We finally decided to help him, and the reason we did was he had the power to subpoena. Nobody in the State of Washington would take Beck on. Beck was so powerful that you couldn’t even bring eastern beer into the State of Washington because he protected the local breweries. He was a power unto himself.

Our prior experience with legislative committees had not been very good. We did not want a bunch of people from D.C. to come out, make a few headlines, and leave us sitting there with Dave Beck. We helped RFK and he kept his word to us 100 percent. Not only did he do an incredible investigative job, he did something that I don’t think people recognize. In those hearings, he would not put a witness on the stand until his investigators had checked the story out and Bob was convinced that the person was going to tell the truth. He exposed Beck as a Wizard of Oz kind of figure who was taking a lot of money, including money from a widow’s fund, living high, and abusing his power. Beck was eventually deposed and went to prison. The hearings moved onto the East and Robert Kennedy never forgot that we had helped him at the beginning.

As he learned more about labor racketeering and organized crime, he came to believe that "we have to be successful or they're going to be so powerful that they're going to end up owning the country." Nobody else in the country but the head of the Drug Enforcement was saying that. J. Edgar Hoover, in fact, was saying,
“There is no organized crime.”

As Attorney General, he forced Hoover to abandon that stance which resulted in the organization of 26 federal law enforcement agencies that work on organized crime. To one degree or another, that program exists today and it’s made a tremendous difference in our country.

Mr. Jim Hilty:

I was serious when I told John about my mother. Let me introduce myself. I’m my mother’s son. And my mother was Isabel Hilty. Isabel Hilty first met Rose Kennedy some time around 1955 in Columbus, Ohio, at a conference for retarded children and for the mothers of retarded children. They shared mutual concerns for their children, Rose’s daughter Rosemary, and my brother Bobby. They met again in 1960 when the Kennedy presidential campaign came through Columbus. Columbus, by the way, was a place that John Kennedy once said that they never received a warmer reception and fewer votes.

I’m in my 31st year of teaching at Temple University. I’ve attempted a political biography of Robert Kennedy, understanding at the outset that I can never capture the entire essence of the man. William Faulkner once said that biography is only the outer cloth, the clothes and buttons of a person. And with those caveats, let me comment just briefly on Robert Kennedy’s role between 1960 and 1963.

Historians study change. We look for momentous events. And as I looked at the partnership of John F. Kennedy and Robert F. Kennedy, I found myself overwhelmed with the use of the word unique. As I went through this catalogue of roles and responsibilities that John Kennedy had delegated to Robert between 1960 and 1963, I found myself writing unprecedented many times. It is extraordinary. As a historian writing about this period of the 1960s, I’d suggest to you that just Robert Kennedy’s role alone on the Senate Rackets Committee would have insured him a place in America’s history. The Enemy Within documents those efforts. In the 1960 campaign, of course, he became the chief operating officer for the Kennedy campaign.

While researching Robert Kennedy, Brother Protector, I went down to Maryland and got from the archives his desk diaries and telephone messages. I was astounded to find that as Attorney General of the United States he spent an extraordinary amount of time in National Security Council meetings in the Pentagon, meeting with CIA people. He had this dual role of National Security Advisory and Attorney General to the United States. As the Attorney General of the United States, he became director of one of the major covert operations in the CIA, and his office was filled day in and day out with CIA types. This constituted an enormous departure from the past. He was, in fact, the President’s trusted advisor in any number of areas well beyond the usual scope of the Attorney General. All of those things I would suggest to you were unprecedented.

During the Cuban Missile Crises, he also engaged in what we now call back channel negotiations. His meetings with Georgi Bolshakov and with Ambassador Dobrynin ultimately led to the resolution of the conflict. I can remember that autumn afternoon in October of 1962 when it was finally over. How great I felt and how tall I was able to stand! No matter how much revisionist retrospective we cast on the Cuban Missile Crisis, the fact of the matter is, as Americans we felt a hell of a lot better that Sunday afternoon when it was over, and we felt stronger, and we felt we had strong leadership.

The policy in Vietnam, I’ve commented on in my book a bit. I tend to agree with other historians, that it was un-formulated. One of my colleagues describes it as a kind of shambles by November of ‘63. There’s no doubt of that. But there’s also no doubt that there was a direction beginning to take shape. And there’s also no doubt that Robert Kennedy was going to be drawn closer into those deliberations.

What I would say, and what my research in Robert Kennedy’s life has brought me to conclude is that we have moved into another stage of historical evaluation in which the popular and the political cultures have merged.
Camelot, this mythological representation of 1961 to 1963, that one brief shining moment, means many things to Americans. Its meaning has changed over time and it will change again. Each of us, however, has to look back on that period. We are our own historians. And we look at history through our own eyes.

I was once asked, “What did I think Robert Kennedy’s most distinguishing feature was?”, and I said it was his eyes. The photos of him, the movies of him, the way in which he moved with people, the deep blueness of them, the sharpness of them. The eyes are the windows to our souls. Robert’s eyes could be coldly direct, they could be penetrating, they could be chillingly defiant. But they also reflected hurt, hope, vulnerability, and a capacity for change. Sometimes he could change in the blink of an eye, as Harris Wofford could well remember the afternoon he changed his mind about the importance of making a telephone call to Mrs. Martin Luther King.

If the eyes are the windows to the soul, and if the eyes are the windows to history, I imagine I will, therefore, always continue to see these years through my mother’s eyes.

Mr. Seigenthaler:

Thank you very much. Harris, it might not be bad to begin this several minutes we have for exchange and questions with your taking us back to that moment when the phone call was made. You said a little earlier that when you asked questions, you didn’t always like Bob Kennedy’s answers. We might as well begin right there, in Atlanta in 1960. As I recall, that was a moment when there was some tension and contention.

Mr. Wofford:

In October of 1960, Martin Luther King had been jailed for his participation in an Atlanta department store sit-in. Six months before he had received a suspended sentence and probation for driving with a suspended license. His participation in the sit-in was interpreted as a violation of his probation and he was sentenced to four months of hard labor. The whole world was shocked. It was a major story all around the world. It was a scandal. Nixon’s response was "no comment."

There was a great compulsion in the civil rights section, which I was coordinating with a great man, Louis Martin, to do something and to do something publicly. We had a strong, strong statement that Robert Kennedy had approved, and the Senator had approved. But then the governor of Georgia said if you don’t issue any statement like that, I’ll get the son of a bitch out. And they said to me, "Look, what we want is to get him out of jail. It’s not a public statement." And of course, one had to agree. But King was still in jail, and Mrs. King was six months pregnant. At one point she became hysterical because he’d been taken to an out of state penitentiary in the middle of the night. Louis Martin and I thought that Kennedy himself should call Mrs. King and express his sympathy and say, "We’re doing something."

Because we had stirred up a few things several weeks before, we couldn’t push the idea through the campaign. The next morning, I said to Sargent Shriver, "Look, we had this great idea last night, but nobody on the campaign staff would take our phone call out there in the Midwest. Shriver said, you know, “Just hold on. It’s a great idea.” And he said, "If they don’t arrest me, I’ll do it." He went out and looked in the room. I don’t know if Ted Sorensen was there, but the team (Salinger, O’Brien, O’Donnell) was in the room and Shriver told us, "If I propose it now, it will be a committee meeting and it will never happen." He waited until everybody left, and then proposed it to John Kennedy. John Kennedy grinned and said, "That's a great idea. Do you have a number?" And he called Mrs. King. He didn’t check with Bob Kennedy; I mean, he didn’t check with anybody.

By the way, Teddy White’s first version of this was that there had been a command decision made by the team to place the call to Mrs. King. Bobby and Eunice then followed suit and called the judge. Well, as you see, it wasn’t a command decision. Bobby, having learned about it in the middle of the next morning, called Louis Martin and me and said, "You bomb throwers. You probably lost the election. There’s nothing more
whatevsoever you’re going to do on civil rights in this campaign.” It was two weeks before the end. He was white with anger. Twenty four hours later, a call came from Bobby saying, "Would you draft a statement explaining why I called that judge this morning?" Louis and I were dumbfounded. We said, "You just finished saying that this was the worst thing." He said, "Well, I got so tired of thinking about some cracker judge embarrassing the United States and screwing up Jack’s campaign and the scandal of this, I called him and said, "If you are a good American, you’ll get Dr. King out of jail by sunset."

Other versions of this are that he was advised to call the judge. The judge’s own comment is that he said, "Look, we’re both Democrats, and my brother may not even be able to carry Massachusetts if you don’t do something." So who knows what he said. But he changed his mind. He made the call. I think he felt that we were in the middle of an important event and therefore he was going to see it through and get results, rather than just make a public relations gesture. He got results. Daddy King switched his vote. It was a very significant thing for many, many Blacks.

Mr. Seigenthaler:

The question of his motivation that morning, when he called the judge, has been a matter of controversy for some time. Evan Thomas deals with it in the book, and tries to resolve it. Perhaps he comes closer than anybody has. But it was a seminal moment in the campaign. First, when the call came from Senator Kennedy. And secondly, when the call came from Bob to the judge. I know that when he left for upstate New York that morning to speak, he was furious at the judge. As we discussed it, I thought that I had convinced him that he shouldn’t call him.

Mr. Guthman:

Should not?

Mr. Seigenthaler:

Should not call him. Because, you know, it’s a judge and he’s a lawyer and it didn’t seem to me, a journalist, that this was something you’d want to get your name in the paper about. So then a little bit later, Roger Tubby, who was handling press for the campaign came in and said, "That cracker judge in Georgia says Bobby just called him." And I said, "Issue a denial." And he told me he wouldn’t do it. Then Bob called a little later and said, "Well, yes, you better take back the taking back. Better recall the denial," which we did.

Ed, let me ask you about -- To break the egg open a little further on organized crime, you mentioned, almost in passing, that J. Edgar Hoover did not believe that organized crime was a reality in this country. Would you just discuss that in a little more depth so that we clarify that the progress in the Justice Department, both in the field of civil rights and in the area of organized crime, was made over the strong objections of the FBI director.

Mr. Guthman:

Well, that's right. I'm no expert on J. Edgar Hoover, but I think I represent what anybody who came from outside the Department of Justice saw. It didn’t make any difference if you were a Democrat or a Republican. You came to the Department of Justice thinking highly of Hoover, and then, when you saw him straight up, it was a different story. In 1957 or 58, Hoover was caught off guard by the report of a New York State Trooper about the gathering of many high level members of the organized crime families of New York at a location in upstate New York. Hoover really didn’t do anything about organized crime until Bob became Attorney General. Hoover, who always went where the power was, then responded.

The FBI has an enormous amount of ability, and they moved very quickly. What we didn’t know at the time was that in order to make up for lost time, they installed an awful lot of illegal bugging. That came out a little
bit later. When Bob traveled around the country, he would always meet with the FBI and the major law enforcement agencies. We made a point of going to New York, Chicago and L.A. at least twice a year. When we were briefed by the agencies in Chicago and they played this tape of a meeting of some Cosa Nostra leaders in Chicago. Bob asked, "Where did you get that?" I said, "We got this from the Chicago police." We didn't question that. Later on, when it came out, that these were all gathered through illegal FBI bugging, we said to each other, "Weren't we dumb?" We should have asked. Well, we should have guessed, but we didn't.

**Mr. Seigenthaler:**

You took their word that it had come from the police department and they had not been illegal bugs by the FBI, which it was.

**Mr. Guthman:**

It was. But the program was effective. The FBI did make an enormous contribution to fighting organized crime and it has carried forward.

With regard to civil rights, I might just say one thing because we had a rude awakening when the Freedom Riders went South and there was no real advance for them. We didn't know that they were going. But when they got to Anniston, Alabama, the Ku Klux Klan attacked them, burning their buses and beating them up. That's when we got into it. We found out somewhat later, that the FBI knew that the Klan was going to attack the buses. They didn't tell anybody, nor did they do anything to stop it. That's when we realized that we could not rely on the FBI for intelligence about what was going on in the South.

At that point, we put in place our own quasi-intelligence operation. John Dorr, who was an Assistant Attorney General in charge of the civil rights division, had a large number of young lawyers going through the South. They compiled the data on which, ultimately, the voting rights act would be based. They documented what discrimination was occurring. Those young lawyers became a real intelligence network for us.

The other part of this quasi-intelligence gathering was my contacts with the newspapermen that were covering it in the South. We would just trade information. I don't know whether you could do that today, but we could do it then. So we had our own kind of little intelligence operation and it worked pretty well. But we had that problem of not being able to depend on the FBI in the South.

**Mr. Guthman:**

I was just going to say. And John is exhibit A. And you might tell them about that.

**Mr. Seigenthaler:**

Well, yes. I was one of those. I went down to Alabama after the incident at Anniston. A second wave of Freedom Riders came down after I had gotten the first wave from New Orleans and went back to negotiate a little bit with the Governor. I sought to help some of the Freedom Riders when they ran into trouble in Montgomery and I ran into trouble myself. I was hit in the head with a pipe and haven't been the same since. (Laughter) For some time I felt some animosity toward them because they left me there for half an hour. I just would tell you when I left the Justice Department, Robert Kennedy gave me a plaque, which is on my wall at home. FBI agents on the scene picked up the pipe with which I had been struck. But anyway, the plaque says "To John Seigenthaler for using his head in Montgomery, Alabama beyond the call of duty and for the pipelines he'll always have to this office."

Let me go to you, Jim, and ask a little bit about the Bay of Pigs and Robert Kennedy and John Kennedy's sense that not only the FBI had to be questioned and examined closely about its findings, but also the CIA
Mr. Hilty:

I would like to add a quick coda to both what Harris and Ed have said about the FBI. I spent a lot of time looking at Robert Kennedy’s FBI file, which didn’t commence until he was appointed Attorney General. I looked through what was an amazing record. It was primarily a record of surveillance in which the FBI wasn’t there to provide protection for the Attorney General as much to find out what he was saying to other people about law enforcement matters and particularly about J. Edgar Hoover. The FBI seemed to be everywhere but not doing anything at this time. I think that's the general feeling that comes out.

As Attorney General, RFK effected a dramatic shift in the concentration of power and control of the civil rights enforcement from the Justice Department to the White House and the Civil Rights Commission. One of the most memorable lines from those times, is one that, I think, captures RFK’s role. It occurred during a contentious discussion on civil rights between President Kennedy and a Southern Senator. As the Senator continued to blame the President for the course of events, President Kennedy said, “Can’t you just call Bobby a son of a bitch and let it go at that?” Bobby took the heat. He took a lot of the flak. And I think that was part of an intentional plan.

Shifting quickly to the Bay of Pigs and to this unique advisory capacity that Robert Kennedy played to his brother, it is clear from the documentary evidence, of course, that they felt betrayed by the reports from The Joint Chiefs of Staff and by the CIA in particular. I think it’s a fairly well known story about Mr. Bissell’s role in the ultimate firing of Allen Dulles. And I really would defer to Ted Sorensen on this, because it’s very clear that what happened in the Bay of Pigs led ultimately to a reorientation of White House decision making that's been well documented. It's also clear, in a less documented way, that Robert Kennedy became, in effect, the “overseer” of the CIA. It was pretty clear that most things that went on inside the CIA had to be cleared through Robert Kennedy in one way or another. Am I wrong on that, Ed?

Mr. Guthman:

No, that's basically right.

Mr. Seigenthaler:

I will close this panel discussion with one brief anecdote about the conflict with Mr. Hoover, which was very real. The genesis of it, from my perspective, had to do with Mr. Hoover’s focus on internal security and Robert Kennedy’s desire to transfer many FBI agents from the field of internal security (which was communist subversion), to the area of civil rights and organized crime. As I recall, Mr. Hoover was quite adamantly opposed to this. Therefore, what had started as a reasonably positive relationship between the two broke down when the Attorney General insisted on this change in focus. When Mr. Hoover’s press machine bypassed Ed Guthman’s press operation, RFK became upset. This only exacerbated the difficulty between them.

But I do recall that early in Robert Kennedy’s term as Attorney General, he began to visit various divisions of the Justice Department. He would show up in the tax division at the office farthest removed from Lou Oberdorfer and work his way back toward Oberdorfer’s office, just talking to lawyers about cases, on which they were working. It took maybe ten minutes for Lou to find out where he was and to join him. But that was sort of the purpose of it. To give everybody a chance to be on their toes and it kept the lawyers involved and interested. After several of those visits, Robert Kennedy said to me one day, “It occurs to me that we have no Negroes working in the Department of Justice in anything except clerical and janitorial roles. Would you do a survey?” This took me a week to do. It turned out that we did have an African American lawyer working in the civil rights division, believe it or not. One.
Every department, including Immigration and Naturalization and the Bureau of Prisons, responded to the survey in a helpful way except the FBI. There were a couple of memos between Director Hoover and me. Finally we had a telephone conversation in which he said, "Well, it's against federal law to ask." And I said, "Some of the Assistant Attorneys General have gone out and done a sort of visual check, and if you look, Mr. Hoover, you might be able to discern." And he said, "Well, who else has reported?" I told him, "everyone but the FBI." That afternoon a memo came up from the FBI and identified two, GS 16s I think, FBI agents. One had been in the Justice Department for years, came by that afternoon. He knew about the controversy. And he said, "Have you ever heard from Hoover?" And I said, "Yes, we have, he's got two. He's got a hundred percent better record than anybody else." And I showed him the names, and he laughed. "Both are his chauffeurs."

So the conflict between them began over Mr. Hoover's inability to perform, as the Attorney General wanted him to, in the area of civil rights and organized crime. Their relationship further deteriorated.

Mr. Guthman:

Can I tell one quick thing? There was a young Black lawyer that the prosecuting attorney in Seattle sent back during the Rackets Committee, Charles Smith. He came back and brought the case against Beck. When I came to the Department of Justice, Bob called me in and he said, "What's Charles Smith doing?" I said, "Well, he's left the prosecutor's office, and he and a couple of lawyers are opening a practice, but I don't think they're doing very well." He said, "Do you think he'd come and work for us?" I said, "Yes, I think he would." He said, "Call him up and see if he'll come."

So I walked back to my office, and then I walked back and I said to Bob, "Bob, listen. There's one thing you ought to know. Charles was head of the Citizens for Nixon in King County." He looked at me, he said, "I'm not hiring him for his politics. I'm hiring him for what he can do." And of course, Charles came and became a key figure in the racketeering squad. He led the case against Jimmy Hoffa, which resulted in Hoffa going to prison. He went back to Washington State, became a judge and later a justice on the Washington Supreme Court.

Mr. Seigenthaler:

We have a couple of more minutes. A person in the audience asks about Robert Kennedy's relationship with Martin Luther King, Roy Wilkins, James Farmer and A. Philip Randolph. I don't think we need to do more than simply encapsulate -- they were different relationships, and they were four different people with, at times, four different agendas.

Mr. Wofford:

Yes, I would distinguish between Martin Luther King on the one hand and almost all the other Black leaders. The other Black leaders were easier to deal with. They were closer to John Kennedy, particularly his style of talk and action. But the relationship between Martin Luther King and both Robert and John Kennedy has, I think, been distorted. I think the fundamental story is how they came together, not the tensions that inevitably came when their agendas differed. But that's a much longer story.

I think that by the time Robert Kennedy was killed, the depth of his relationship with MLK was very deep. This is reflected in the fact they were both pointing to just the same things in the year 1968. A reporter once said to me, "You were so lucky to have had the chance to serve and work with John Kennedy, Robert Kennedy, and Martin Luther King." And I said, "Some luck. They all three were killed." And an hour or so later, I called her back and said, "Please don't quote me that way. Of course, we were tremendously lucky to have them and I was lucky to serve them. And they were lucky to be working together in the same decade. We were lucky that they were, by and large, working together in that decade." (Applause)
Mr. Seigenthaler:

I would just add to the question briefly, that there were times when, for example, Roy Wilkins and Martin Luther King had some differences between themselves as to the proper way to proceed. I think Roy Wilkins preferred a slower pace. Farmer was still another personality in his own right. He started the Freedom Riders. They were his idea. It was a CORE project. Dr. King was not into it until after the violence in Montgomery.

A. Philip Randolph was a leader, an elder statesman who had the respect, I think, of most of the rest. He was an independent thinker, an independent actor and sympathetic, I think, to the efforts of all three of the others. Since I was there, I might just say a word about the first meeting between Robert Kennedy and Dr. King. Bob sought in an eloquent and pragmatic fashion to convince Dr. King that the civil rights movement could move forward better if there was a major effort to register African Americans to vote. He worried about the safety of the civil rights demonstrators, and he worried about his ability, because of the reticence of the FBI, to provide any sort of help or any sort of pressure on local police. There weren’t enough FBI agents in the South to protect them anyway. So Bob suggested that the way to solve this problem would be through the ballot box and the courts. Dr. King’s response was eloquent and idealistic. He said, “We must confront this evil, this corruption of segregation wherever we find it. Help us where you can and if you cannot, we’re willing to bear the burden and pay the price.”

Mr. Wofford:

Thanks for correcting me, John. I didn’t do justice to Jim Farmer. He was a Gandhi and he wanted to bring Gandhi action into America. He was closer to the Martin Luther King position. Roy Wilkins, Thurgood Marshall and Whitney Young were in the other camp I think.

Mr. Guthman:

Well, there’s one other element in the relationship between Martin Luther King and Bob Kennedy that should be discussed. Very early on, the FBI came to Bob and said that a person who was close to Martin Luther King was a secret member of the Communist Party. They alleged that the fact that they knew that was a matter of absolute top national security.

Bob, Burke Marshall, and then ultimately President Kennedy asked Martin Luther King, not to have anything to do with this person. But he did and this stuff kept coming back from the FBI that MLK was continuing to meet with him. At the time, the FBI was bugging Martin Luther King’s phone. And ultimately in October of 1963, they asked for permission, as a national security matter, to bug Martin Luther King. In order to settle this thing, Bob finally agreed to do it. After President Kennedy died, the bugging continued for some time. Later on, it turned out that this was something that the FBI made up, but it was something that we respected at the time.

In 1968 when Bob was running for President, Hoover leaked the information about the bugging of Martin Luther King to columnist Drew Pearson. When the column appeared, Bob was in Oregon. He called me and said, “What do you think I ought to say?” And I said, “Well, it was a national security thing. But you can’t say that”. We felt we were under the bonds of national security. So he may have put out a statement saying that the only wiretaps he had ever approved were for national security. It wasn’t very satisfactory, but that was a fact of life. It was a factor in the relationship between the Kennedys and Martin Luther King, but I agree with Harris, that, in the end, they had come much closer together.

Mr. Hilty:

Can I comment just quickly on that? I spent a little time looking at those documents inside the Justice Department. I believe that a distinction should be made between wiretapping and bugging. The Attorney General did authorize a wiretap on Martin Luther King’s telephones, both his office and his home, on the
basis of national security. When Burke Marshall and Robert Kennedy did the oral history for the Library, Anthony Lewis, who did the interview, was shocked to hear that there were extraordinary national security concerns here. This wasn’t just this one report. In fact, what the FBI did divulge ultimately to the Attorney General was that there were two members of the seven member executive committee of the United State’s Communist Party that were, in fact, FBI informants. The Attorney General was faced with an extraordinary amount of evidence from the FBI pointing to Mr. Levinson’s connection to these people.

The question was did it still exist, and was there, in fact, a connection to King? I think the wiretapping order was essentially justified in hindsight. I don’t think the Attorney General had any choice. The other matter is bugging. Illegal trespass surveillance was another matter altogether. The FBI did that without the consent of anyone. The Attorney General didn’t order that.

Mr. Seigenthaler:

Let me just say, before I ask the audience to help me thank the three of you, that Harold Levinson was not a member of the KGB. That information, including the memos from Hoover, was false. I have no idea where they came from. But to suggest that Harold Levinson was a subversive influence on the life of the civil rights movement is really in error, and Bob Kennedy knew that. But we came to know it very late as a result of Hoover’s deception.

We saw in that last film clip the self-effacing sense of humor that Robert Kennedy possessed which added, I think, to his ability to relate to people. I recall once I was here in Massachusetts with him, and he was getting ready to run for the Senate, I was telling him that I had come from rather humble Tennessee beginnings. It was impossible for me to understand how he could ever relate to the poor and powerless and dispossessed of society. I was teasing him a little bit about that.

At that moment, we were in Brookline and driving past a house. And he said, “Do you see that house?” I said, “Yes.” “I was born in that house.” He said, “The day I was born, my father was $12 million in debt. Now that’s real poverty.” It was that ability to turn a phrase on you that was endearing.

Peter Edelman is the former Assistant Secretary of Health and Human Services in the Clinton Administration. Many of you will remember when he resigned as a matter of conscience from that distinguished position in the Health and Human Services. He’s now a Professor of Law at Georgetown University. He has had a distinguished career in all three branches of government before joining the Georgetown faculty. He was Special Assistant to Assistant Attorney General John Douglas. In the Department of Justice, he was legislative assistant to Senator Robert F. Kennedy. He also served as Vice President of the University of Massachusetts, and as Director of the New York State division for Youth. He’s a leader in various community enterprises and national organizations addressing poverty, welfare, and juvenile justice issues. Peter’s next book, Searching for America’s Heart: RFK and the Renewal of Hope, will come out in January of 2001. This is an advance commercial. It’s about U.S. poverty policy and how it’s evolved over the last 40 years.

Douglas Brinkley is a distinguished Professor of History and Director of the Eisenhower Center for American Studies at Metropolitan College of the University of New Orleans. His books include Dean Acheson: The Cold War, Years, The Unfinished Presidency: Jimmy Carter’s Journey Beyond the White House, American Heritage History of the United States, FDR and the Creation of the United Nations, and The Magic Bus and American Odyssey.

And Jeff Shesol is a Rhodes Scholar and the creator of a nationally syndicated political cartoon strip, "Thatch." He’s also the author of Mutual Contempt: Lyndon Johnson, Robert Kennedy and the Feud that Defined the Decade which began as a senior thesis at Brown University. He’s currently the Deputy Director of Speechwriting for President Bill Clinton.
Mr. Peter Edelman:

Well thank you John. I’m so honored to be here, to participate along with so many other good friends. To be here with Ethel Kennedy is particularly special. I do want to say just a personal word. My association with Robert Kennedy certainly changed my life. I guess I was headed to being a lawyer in private practice. I was a good Democrat, but I didn’t have much involvement in the kinds of issues that could really change my commitments and deepen them. It was my privilege to get that education from Robert Kennedy as we tried to respond to the needs of the poor people, especially poor children, in this country. I am grateful for that education.

I wouldn’t have met my wife except for knowing Robert Kennedy. She is here today and you will be hearing from her later. And so, for me it’s all intertwined. Writing this book has brought back memories and added other knowledge about how important he was to all of us.

On this panel we will talk about the Senate years. I really want to talk about Robert Kennedy and poverty. In order to do that I need to break with the chronology rule and start earlier. As was true with so many things about RFK, he was deeply interested in issues about poverty long before he became a United States Senator. One of the very first things that he did when he became Attorney General was to install Dave Hackett, his old friend, in a little office next to him in the Justice Department. He was to work on something that they called, at the time, juvenile delinquency, which really meant much more, as important as that is; it was much more than problems of young people getting involved with the law.

In early 1961, all of these other things that we talked about this morning, the Bay of Pigs, the Freedom Riders, while all of that was going on, he went up to Harlem and met with gangs, Black and Italians, separately. He gave a speech in April of 1961 in which he talked about the need for employment and educational opportunity. He talked about the importance of moral discipline and control as a part of the answer to creating opportunity and pursuing success for these young people.

Under his aegis, the planning for what became the war on poverty started with people from both inside and outside the government. He had this tremendous ability to drop in on a conversation that he had been away from for maybe a month or so, and not miss a beat. He was absolutely there to lead it. In those conversations he pushed for a national service corps. He thought that was extremely important. He believed that low-income people, poor people, had to be involved in what was going to happen to them themselves. This notion became maximum feasible participation and community action in the war on poverty.

When he came to the Senate, he took up that issue immediately. In fact, if you look at the issues he was involved in the whole time he was a Senator, again it’s just so hard to say that there was any one thing, because there’s so many things that he was interested in. But there was always this question of seeing poverty, of being concerned about poverty. He was sensitive to the connection race and poverty. He was particularly adept at seeing it all through the lens of children and young people. Within ten days of coming to the Senate, he had gotten an amendment onto the Appalachian Regional Development legislation that was going through to include the southern tier counties in New York in Appalachia. Well, that’s poverty policy. That was about helping low income people, getting economic development to these areas that were so impoverished.

He was worried about low-income elderly people and introduced legislation to change social security, to work on that. He was involved in the implementation of Medicaid, healthcare for low-income people in New York State. I remember the meeting with Cesar Chavez. This was so characteristic of Robert Kennedy; when he got interested in something, he just couldn’t let it go. He always believed that one person could make a difference and this was so true with respect to Cesar Chavez. He was just deeply committed to the cause of the farm workers and to Chavez personally after that.

This is how he learned. It was, of course, my privilege to be there along side of him through some of it. He learned by going, seeing, and touching, using all of his senses to gather information to try to understand. It
was more than once that he would get all the way across town with a child that he picked up in the motorcade and then have to turn the motorcade around to take the child back to where they had found the child in the first place. I think a lot of times he'd just as soon stop the whole motorcade and stop the campaigning and just talk to the kids. It was so fundamental with him.

The work that he did with Native Americans was important to him. He went to Mike Mansfield, the majority leader of the Senate, and got him to create a special committee on the education of American Indians. It was then called Native American Children. Sometimes there were issues that came along that one couldn’t plan for. When we went to Mississippi, you saw the pictures in the film, in April of 1967. He saw that there was hunger, near starvation really, in our great, rich country. There were children with sores that wouldn’t heal and with swollen bellies, in the United States of America in 1967. Again, that commitment absolutely to do something about it was there. He always said that, "at the end of the day, when I get up, I'm going to have done something. Every day is a new day and my challenge is to accomplish something that day." That was how he saw his responsibility.

Welfare has become an issue for us again over the last four or five years in particular, although we've really had a struggle about it for a long time. He gave a speech about welfare that, to his surprise and mine, got front-page coverage in the New York Times in 1967. Again, he got into it and worked very hard on it. There was legislation pending which he saw in a way that was different from everybody else. It wasn't liberal or conservative. He understood that even then, in 1967, way ahead of his time, that the idea of asking people to take cash as a handout without helping them to succeed, without helping them to find jobs, was unsatisfactory. But the complicated idea that you had to have a safety net, that you did have to help people who couldn’t find jobs. That was all there. He was also greatly interested in issues of poverty in Latin America and South Africa.

And then at the heart of all of it was the recognition of the intersection of race and poverty. Now that sounds kind of, you know -- not as emotional and passionate and real as it really was. But you know, in the 1960s, there was great concern about urban rebellion or violence. There was violence in Watts, Detroit and Newark. Our country was really coming apart around the fact that we had passed civil rights legislation, historic civil rights legislation, but that didn’t mean that people had the money to purchase the meal or stay in the hotel room that was now legally possible for them to use.

He had that understanding that we had to respond at that intersection. He understood that the next civil rights issue, if you will, was economic. And so he’d worked on poverty really just as civil rights was becoming an issue, as I said. And stayed with it.

Another area of his focus while in the Senate was education. He was strongly committed to bettering the educational prospects of lower income children. Again, he related his work in this arena to employment. He always went back to that intersection of poverty and civil rights. He believed that jobs were at the core of it all. And indeed, the war on poverty, for all the good programs that were part of it, has really failed because President Johnson wasn’t willing to make the investment in jobs that Robert Kennedy knew was necessary. We remember his work in Bedford Stuyvesant as the centerpiece of his work on poverty. He got on the shuttle night after night during 1966 while the planning was going on to go up to Brooklyn, to go up to Bedford Stuyvesant to meet with community leaders to hammer out what this initiative was going to be in Bedford Stuyvesant. He got legislation passed to provide funding for initiatives like that, so he was being a conventional senator and a non-conventional senator at the same time. And always it was done with that same compassion. You know there were really, really so many sides to him. We got a sense, certainly, of the toughness and the strength in our conversation earlier. But there was also the incredible compassion and it was the love of children and beyond that. You saw him touch those children over and over again in the video.

And so finally he came to the 1968 presidential campaign. A key theme of that campaign (along with ending the war in Vietnam) was the question of racial reconciliation at home. What that meant in the terminology of the time, was dealing with what we called the urban crisis and that really was about where race and poverty come together in our country. It is about people of color being in a position where they are disproportionately
denied opportunity and how will we, as a nation will respond to that. His response was three-dimensional; jobs, education, and community building. I learned that from him, and I hope it stays with me. He understood that you had to really bring people together so that where they lived would have a sense of community about it. He had an understanding of the importance of doing something about political powerlessness. When he saw Cesar Chavez and when he went to Mississippi, and when he went to Eastern Kentucky he saw people who, in this country, were really kept apart by the fact that they were powerless and they did not share in the systems that govern them.

He really had a very non-traditional view and he was educating America about that when we lost him. He was a man who had conservative personal values but at the same time somebody who insisted on a role for government, national government, government at all levels in solving these problems. He also saw the value in partnerships with the private sector. And the biggest point is that he cared so much. That he was so determined to make things happen. He believed that we could act together in our communities, in government at all levels to take responsibility for ourselves and to take responsibility for other people. And you know, above all, he was an optimist. He really believed that we can make a difference, and that was at the heart of his vision. Thank you.

Douglas Brinkley:

The great 25-day fast of Cesar Chavez, labor leader, reformer and spiritual teacher, Chicano activist and tragic hero, came to a dramatic end on March 11, 1968, in a public park in Delano, California. His reason for fasting was unambiguous: to reaffirm the United Farm Workers Commitment to non-violence. Hordes of TV cameras and print journalists were on hand to witness the historic arrival of New York Senator Robert Kennedy on the scene there, to break bread with Chavez, to lend his support to the farm workers cause. No individual in American politics had so stirred the poor people in the nation. No one had responded to the white poverty in Appalachia, the Black poverty in the South, in the urban ghettos and now the brown poverty of the farm workers like Bobby.

In fact, to all of the disinherited minorities, he was never Senator Kennedy or sir, but always Bobby. And the poor truly believed that Bobby cared for them. There were about 4,000 farm workers in Delano Park that day. When Bobby arrived, he found them on both sides of a mile long processional path waiting for him, calling his name, waving their baseball caps in salute, blessing themselves as he passed. Clearly they did not view him as merely a politician. He was too generous. He was the brother of John F. Kennedy, who had been senselessly slain in Dallas. He was a hard scrabble liberal who clearly sympathized with the plight of migrant workers and the poor.

But perhaps most importantly, like all of them, he was a Catholic in America run largely by Protestants. As Bobby walked through the throngs of people flanked by aides, a rush of excitement bolted through him. Every farm worker tried to touch him, to kiss him, to shake his hand. They wanted to tangibly feel the Kennedy magic which was in the air, and evident in his tousled hair and toothy smile.

Worried for his life, Bobby's staff men and aides formed a human shield around him. The great Chicano activist Dolores Juerte stayed close to his side, squeezing his arm, later noting that, "It was the most wild moment in my life. All these farm workers really loved Bobby. They called him brother and saw him as more saint than politician. The chants of 'Bobby, Bobby, Bobby' in the air, photographers and TV crews were swept aside. Everybody who could see him wanted a photo of Robert Kennedy or personal greeting."

Delores was calling out for help, worried that Kennedy might get crushed in this great wave of human emotion. Everybody wanted a touch, a look, a word, a nod of recognition. Everybody felt that they were witnesses to history, like being on an assault march with Gandhi, or being with Martin Luther King in an Alabama jail.

"It was hard to keep his feet on the ground as the crowd pushed hard," journalist Ronald Taylor later recalled. Kennedy reached over our arms, smiling, touching, shaking hands." Finally, Bobby arrived at the truck trailer
platform and somebody got him into a small, roped off area in front that was reserved for Cesar Chavez and his family. Sitting there was his wife Helen and his mother and father. Bobby took a seat right next to Cesar. The two men whispered, smiled, and held hands. They saw themselves as brothers in a righteous war to uplift the downtrodden.

Chavez had first met Bobby Kennedy at two a.m. in the morning in Los Angeles way back in 1959 at a voter registration drive. "He was very straightforward, and I was impressed," Chavez later recalled. To Kennedy in 1959, Cesar Chavez was merely a friendly and earnest Democratic activist of Mexican descent. But to Chavez, he was meeting a politician of great national stature whom he wanted to befriend to explain the plight of farm workers to.

At the time Bobby Kennedy first met him in 1959, Chavez had served as the CSO national director. But what he was unable to tell Robert Kennedy at that first meeting was his dream. And that dream was to create an organization to help farm workers whose suffering he had shared. In 1962 after failing to convince the CSO to commit itself to farm worker organizing, he resigned his paid CSO job, the first regular paying job he ever had. He moved his wife and eight young children to Delano, California, where he founded the National Farm Workers Association.

He said at that time if you are outraged at conditions you can’t possibly be free or happy until you can devote all your time to change. But you can’t change anything if you want to hold onto a good job, a good way of life and avoid sacrifice. In September of 1965, Cesar Chavez’ union group joined with the AFL-CIO and against great odds, Cesar Chavez led a successful five-year strike boycott that rallied millions of supporters to the United Farm Workers. He used Robert Kennedy and Martin Luther King, Jr., as inspiration, particularly Dr. King’s role in the Montgomery bus boycott of 1955.

Chavez began forming a national support, a coalition of unions, church groups, students, minorities and consumers and these two groups, unions, merged in 1966. It was in 1966, three years after JFK was assassinated, that Bobby and Cesar Chavez next met. "This was a time when nearly everybody was against us," Chavez recalled. "About the only people for us were ourselves. Then Bobby came and did something heroic. He endorsed us, but in a clear cut manner." Kennedy was attracted to the common sense clarity and magnitude of the Mexican American farm workers and their struggle against rich and powerful agri-businesses. RFK saw in the Chavez struggle something more. He felt that the farm workers’ plight was related to all of America’s most serious afflictions: racism, poverty, environmental degradation and urban crowding and decay. The waste of the Vietnam War compounded all of these.

Decades later, I now think it’s clear that Robert Kennedy understood that Cesar Chavez was really a prism of the 1960s. One saw in Chavez’ championship of the farm workers what they wanted to see. To the religious clergy, he was a Christian movement. For youth, it was a communal mystical movement. For political radicals, it was a labor class struggle. For liberal intellectuals and politicians, it was the movement of hope in the American essence. And for others, Chavez was the American Gandhi. But to Bobby Kennedy, Chavez was all these things, and something more. He was a friend. He was a political ally.

RFK saw Chavez as a person you could trust, a man with strong personal and family values. He loved his country and the ideals of love, equality, freedom and justice. Robert Kennedy saw Chavez as a man of dignity who respected differences. He stood for community and work and grassroots organizing. He led a simple life. He loved God and the Catholic saints. Above all, he fought against oppression by the rich.

It only confirmed RFK’s sense that the Republican right was off center, because they believed Chavez was part of a communist plot. RFK understood in the world of the 1960s, when many traditional values were being questioned, Chavez appealed to the majority of Americans. He was the curia of universal rather than radical change. For Americans to support Chavez was to support themselves against the politics of change.

Well, going back to that day, March 11, 1968, so it was. Kennedy sat next to Chavez and whispered to him in that park in California. And there was a Mass, and the minister spoke, the rabbi spoke. Priests participated.
There were speeches. And finally that ceremonial breaking of the bread between Chavez and Robert Kennedy. That photograph still strikes me as one of the great iconographic moments of the 1960s, a photograph one never gets tired of looking at.

After Chavez and Kennedy had broken the bread, the Senator mounted the platform and talked to the workers. He advocated inclusion of farm labor under the NLRA. He urged a crackdown on the green card aliens and illegal aliens as strike breaking workers. He brought wild cheers when he said, "Farm workers need equal rights under the law." Several times, Bobby attempted to speak in Spanish, but his Boston Irish accent was too strong and it didn’t work. Dolores Juerte peering over his shoulder to see his text translated his Boston Irish Spanish into a much softer Mexican version, and everybody laughed. Bobby clearly enjoyed the moment. Looking down at Cesar Chavez, he asked, "Am I destroying the Spanish language?"

Chavez had prepared a statement, but he was too weak to read it himself. His hair was falling out. His nails were falling off. He had trouble even lifting his arms, but he continued to smile. An aide read his words. And those words were, "Our lives are really all that belong to us. Only by giving our lives do we find light. I am convinced that the truest act of courage, the strongest act of manliness is to sacrifice ourselves for others in a totally non-violent struggle for justice. To be a man is to suffer for others. God help us be men."

Robert Kennedy was assassinated three months after he celebrated Chavez breaking of his 25-day fast. He, of course, had worked between March and June to be elected as President. In fact, Chavez was selected as a Kennedy delegate to the Democratic National Convention after successfully registering many Chicano voters. But after RFK's assassination, he didn't have the stomach to go to Chicago. Chavez decided to stay at home. Like RFK, he was a pure warrior. He wanted nothing to do with the media hounds like the Yippies and the Black Panthers and the Brown Power People that were more into antics than true social policy causes.

He did, however, in 1970, give an oral history interview, which is here at the Kennedy Library. I just want to end my oration here by reading just a little line of it. Here’s what Chavez says about Bobby Kennedy. "We all had this tremendous respect, (meaning Chicanos) for John Kennedy. There were a lot of reasons for it. He was young, and he came across real well. He was Catholic. Every time that he got put down for being Catholic, that made a point for the Mexicans, who were all Catholic. But they looked at Robert Kennedy as something different. I don’t know, maybe I’m wrong. But with Bobby, it was an entirely different thing. With Senator Kennedy, it was like he was ours. I think, for instance, we never would have dreamed of making a demand on President Kennedy the kind we wouldn't have thought twice about making on Senator Kennedy. It would have been that kind of close, this closeness that we created towards him. We liked him very much. We loved him. It’s that line that you very seldom cross, and I’d never as a politician cross that line, and I don’t think I’ll ever see another politician or public figure do it. It was a mixture of … It’s probably all wrapped up. It’s strange. I can’t quite explain it. It wasn’t only our group because I did a lot of speaking for Robert Kennedy. People who were with him really had this kind of … Well, to give you an idea, he spent more money on the get out the vote campaign for President Kennedy; he had fewer people working for him. He spent on the group that I worked with about a tenth of the money for Bobby Kennedy. But for every man working for John Kennedy, we must have had 50 men working for Bobby. It was electrifying. I mean, like, just everybody was out there. The polls will show you. That line is very seldom crossed. It was like respect, admiration, love, and idolization. God, I can’t explain it."

And then his interview trailed off. Cesar Chavez died in his sleep on April 23, 1993, after a seven-day fast. Before Chavez body was laid in the ground, the California land he loved so much, the Catholic priest quoted Robert Kennedy, "Chavez was a true hero of modern times." In this regard, Robert Kennedy was clearly right. Chavez was a true hero. He was a sustainable hero whose name is synonymous with justice.

Mr. Guthman:

One quick anecdote. Bob called me up and he said Cesar Chavez was asking him to come "What do you think about that?" I said, "Well, the people who like you will think swell of you and the people that don’t like
you will curse you. So I think it’s a wash.” But I said, "Let me ask you a question. Why do you want to haul your ass all the way across the country on a weekend to break the fast with Cesar Chavez?" Silence from the phone. Then he said brightly, "Well, I like Cesar." And the point is, he was the only public official, federal, state, or local, to be invited to that ceremony.

**Mr. Seigenthaler:**

Well, it was a great day. They broke the bread of social justice together.

**Mr. Jeff Shesol:**

I just want to first say that it is a great privilege for me, as it is for all the others here. I also should say that as a speechwriter, it’s a particular privilege to share the stage with Mr. Sorensen and all the others that contributed so much to the words of both John Kennedy and Robert Kennedy. Those words inspire all of us and make us speechwriters feel very, very humble indeed.

I suppose I do enjoy the distinction of being the only person on this panel who was born after 1968. So I probably should spend a couple of minutes explaining what it is that I’m doing here. I was in college in 1988 when Mr. Guthman’s collection of world history interviews with Robert Kennedy was published, Robert Kennedy: In His Own Words. I picked it up as vacation reading, not for class. I was struck by the difficulties, to put it mildly, of the relationship between Robert Kennedy and Lyndon Johnson. It was something that really leaped up off the pages for me. Robert Kennedy would, in these closed interviews, describe Lyndon Johnson as mean, bitter and vicious. They were strong words indeed for two people who were so closely associated in the history of that decade and of our country.

So I spent a number of years looking into that. As Mr. Seigenthaler said, I wrote my senior thesis on that in college and decided I hadn’t quite said my peace about it. I spent about the next five years digging deeper into that relationship. The reason I did that is because I felt then, and I feel still, that it is a prism through which to understand that decade. Because the fault lines between Robert Kennedy and Lyndon Johnson were in many ways the major lines of division of the 1960s, the lines of division over Vietnam, over matters of race and poverty and the problems of the cities.

The division between Robert Kennedy and Lyndon Johnson not only mirrored the lines of division within the party and within the country as a whole, but in many ways contributed to building two distinct schools of thought during that period of time and the decades since.

I undertook this with a certain hesitance. As Mr. Guthman has written, there are only partisans along this line, on the matter of the relationship between RFK and LBJ. I endeavored to be as unbiased as one possibly could. But it’s difficult because this was such a contentious relationship and what I want to do in just a few minutes is to talk about why that was and what the impact of that was during that decade and in the decades to follow.

It was, first of all, as Lyndon Johnson describes in his memoirs, a matter of chemistry. It was almost as if these two men were genetically engineered to disagree. Lyndon Johnson was a very large man. He used his physical size as part of his political power to bend people backwards, literally, in what we all know to be called the Johnson treatment. He would grab people by the lapels and massage their shoulders. He was a very tactile politician. And as Mr. Dolan is quoted as saying in Evan Thomas’s book, “Robert Kennedy would often recoil when touched, particularly by men like Lyndon Johnson.”

Johnson was given to telling tall Texas tales, and he had that ability of the finest political storytellers, which is to actually believe what you’re saying while you’re saying it. Robert Kennedy had a widely known contempt for liars, as he would put it very bluntly. He said, "The thing about Lyndon is that he lies even when he doesn’t
Lyndon Johnson was also a very sort of old-school style of politician. He grew up in a very different era than Robert Kennedy did. Johnson grew up following his father through the halls of the state legislature in Austin and loved the sort of sweaty, personal tangle of politics. The backslapping and the logrolling -- all that was never the sort of politics that Robert Kennedy enjoyed. It wasn't the kind of politics that his family or his brother had practiced, and he recoiled at that. He was often blunt in his feelings about it.

So it was really a matter of chemistry. These two men were never going to get along. The division between the two of them was widened considerably by, secondly, the political conflict between the two of them and the contest that they waged over the course of the 1960s on a number of fronts. Firstly, in years following President Kennedy's assassination over the Kennedy legacy. Who was the true heir? Was it Johnson, who inherited the Presidency, or was it Robert Kennedy who sounded much more like his brother than Lyndon Johnson ever could? He spoke very deeply and personally and passionately about that legacy and what it meant to him. So each had an important claim to that legacy. But as the decade progressed, each had a very different vision of what that legacy actually was on a range of issues.

They waged a battle over the loyalty of what had been Kennedy cabinet and Kennedy advisors. Later, in 1968, as others will discuss, they of course waged a battle over the presidency itself. Robert Kennedy understood very early on that it was essentially a zero sum game in the eyes of the public between himself and President Johnson. It was a fascinating chart of polls that I found at the Johnson Library. And if you watched the poll numbers of Robert Kennedy and the poll numbers of Lyndon Johnson, they track exactly the opposite. One went down, the other went up. And so on over the course of the Senate years.

At the beginning of my book, I found a quote from Shakespeare that seemed to say so much about this relationship. It's from *Henry IV*. "Two stars keep not their motion in the same sphere." And in that political universe of the mid-1960s, these two men were competing centers of gravity. It was a wholly different universe than it had been in the 1950s when John Kennedy emerged from a much more crowded field of Democratic politicians including Hubert Humphrey, Adlai Stevenson, and Lyndon Johnson. There were a lot of contenders for that nomination early on in 1960, but by 1963, 1964, people understood that there were really only two politicians that mattered in this country, and they were the President Johnson and Senator Kennedy.

The contest mattered not so much because it was personal or political, but because it really came down, in the end, to the issues. Mr. Edelman spoke very personally and movingly about race and poverty, and I'd like to talk to you very briefly about the other issue that divided them, Vietnam. As one of the Senator's advisors later said, it was the main text, the rest was prologue. That may be a bit of an overstatement, but it is true that in the end, it really came down to the war, as well as the war on poverty. There was a significant difference that emerged between President Johnson and RFK during his Senate years.

The Johnson people believed to the end, and many believe to this day, that Robert Kennedy cultivated the Vietnam issue because it allowed him to establish a base that was distinct from the President's. What they neglect to point out is that every time Robert Kennedy spoke out on the war, his poll numbers dropped. It wasn't exactly helping him politically and any time he made a strong statement, he suffered a severe political backlash, not just from the administration, but in the polls as well.

There is some general historical question about the evolution of Robert Kennedy's views on Vietnam. He stood in the airport in Saigon in 1962 and made a very strong affirmation of the administration's policies and the Vietnam commitment there in 1962, when the administration didn't quite have it all, you know, down yet.

But by 1964, there was a remarkable telephone conversation that was recorded. I'm sure many of you have heard or read the Johnson telephone tapes. There's a remarkable conversation in May 1964, in which Robert Kennedy speaks to the President very frankly about Vietnam, and he says, and this is a direct quote. He said, "You know, we're not going to win that conflict militarily." He really believed then, as he believed to the end
that it would have to be a combination. He certainly didn’t believe that there should be no American military presence in Vietnam, but he believed, as he said in 1965, that the solution was political first, political last, political always. We would need to work to build democracy in Vietnam at the same time that we were bombing the North.

By the end of his life, Robert Kennedy had come much further down that road in questioning the soundness of the Domino theory. He questioned the morality of the bombing and of the intervention itself. He questioned the logic of containment, which put him very, very far from the Johnson administration as well.

Just briefly, there are two things that we can learn about Robert Kennedy from this conflict. One is the sort of paradoxical nature, the paradoxical impact that it had on him, his career in those years. President Johnson on the telephone once said that it was just a series of little potshots, and that it was just a series of relentless and uncoordinated attacks on the administration. I think anybody who worked for RFK knows that it was not that, but that it was an expression of genuine concern and moral outrage at what was happening in Vietnam. As others have suggested, it had a sort of inhibiting effect on Robert Kennedy in that period. Because Robert Kennedy found himself in the unfortunate box of having been characterized early on as ruthless, he knew that his genuine differences with Johnson on the issues would be portrayed in the press as pure vindictiveness and a campaign to remove Johnson from the White House. This was something that impacted his every move during his Senate years. Everything he did and said was perceived through a prism of dispute with Lyndon Johnson. As early as 1965, you had headlines in newspapers like these, "Will Bobby's friends trip up LBJ in '68?" "Is Robert Kennedy trying to upset Lyndon Johnson in 1968?;" "If it narrows to Johnson and Kennedy in 1968?;" No sooner had he become a Senator than others were assuming it was all part of the campaign to unseat Lyndon Johnson.

The conflict with LBJ would continue to be portrayed in the press as a personal vendetta. It was really about much, much more than that. It was really a very substantive conflict on the issues. Indicative of the kind of Democrat that Robert Kennedy was becoming when his life was cut short is the certainty he felt that there was a significant role for government in bettering people's lives. He saw this as an essential role for government. He had also begun to voice his suspicions about bureaucracy and the effectiveness of heaping federal money onto these problems. He felt that there was an important role, as Peter said, for the private sector in lifting lives and helping the cities around the country and in rural areas as well.

This doesn’t strike us today as a particularly radical idea. Except that there has to be some marriage of public and private efforts to solve any of those problems. Right at the time, it earned Robert Kennedy comparisons to Ronald Reagan. It was seen as something approaching heresy from the Democratic Party of that day. It was a real break from tradition. It pointed in the direction that many Democrats have since gone.

So in the end, my feeling is it’s not so much that Robert Kennedy toppled Lyndon Johnson or contributed to him not running for the Presidency in 1968 but that, in many ways, he had transcended Lyndon Johnson. He pointed toward a new direction for the Democratic Party and for the nation. As Harris mentioned, we’re not nearly so far down the road as we’d like to be. But at least I think he gave us some direction. There are many of us who are, in our various capacities, trying to keep our eyes focused on that point in the future.

Mr. Seigenthaler:

I wonder if I could take you back to the 1964 campaign which it seems to me was a watershed moment for Robert Kennedy as he looked to the future. And Peter, I know you worked on that campaign. Joe, you and Ed did. Ted, you were in New York maybe? Perhaps it might not be bad to reminisce about that because it was a very tough campaign against Senator Keating. Keating, an incumbent Republican, who sort of looked like Robert Kennedy’s grandfather. Maybe he looked like James Michael Curley’s grandfather. He was a handsome, silver haired, silver tongued United States Senator. How tough was that campaign, Peter? You begin. Others may have brief recollections about it?
Mr. Edelman:

Well, it was very tough. And there certainly are a lot of us here who were connected to that campaign. But he, Robert Kennedy, was on his own for the first time. He had been associated his entire professional life with pursuing and promoting the interests of his brother, and here he was out there on his own and still dealing with the tragedy that had happened, I’m sure.

He liked Keating. He didn’t want to say anything nasty about Keating, so what was the attraction? He really was having difficulty giving voice to what he would do as a Senator. The whole carpetbagger question had been raised. But he gradually did find his voice as the fall went on. Partly he just was learning how to stand up for himself as a speaker. There was a tremendous occasion at Columbia University that I think all of us remember. There were student questions. He started off pretty lukewarm. As the questions got a little bit confrontational, he got warmed up. And he got very, very passionate in explaining what his commitment was to all the things that we know. That was really kind of a turning point. Senator Keating engaged, along the way, in some incorrect, to say the least, and unwise attacks which made RFK realize that he had to respond. There was nothing especially kind about this man that he was running against.

And so by the end of it, he had found his voice. He became a very different candidate and a successful one. I think he better understood at the end, really why he was there and how he was going to carry on.

Mr. Seigenthaler:

Am I right about this? We saw him stutter and start, stutter and start, seeking to get that commercial down?

Mr. Edelman:

Yes.

Mr. Seigenthaler:

It is my recollection that the Columbia meeting, about which you just talked where the students engaged him, was indeed filmed. And that it was decided that excerpt from those exchanges would really provide the basis for commercials that finally played a role in turning the campaign?

Mr. Edelman:

Exactly right. The filming of that occasion produced material that was drawn on for really powerful television--

Mr. Seigenthaler:

I think the point of that is that he was not comfortable standing in front of the camera, making a speech to an audience he could not see. But in the presence of these young people who were asking some pretty penetrating questions, the natural response and the give and take really made compelling television.

Mr. Edelman:

He was a very spontaneous person and the scripted commercial, that just wasn't his thing.
Ted, do you or Joe or Ed have anything to add to that 1964 campaign?

**Ted Sorensen:**

I was at the Cape writing my book on John Kennedy at the time, so the only involvement I remember was being twice asked by Bobby to come into the state and have a little speaking tour on his behalf. I thought everybody loved and admired Bobby Kennedy until I arrived in New York and found there were some very bitter divisions, even among Democrats. You may recall Congressman Sam Stratton thought he was going to be the Democratic nominee against Keating.

**Mr. Seigenthaler:**

He also had been a friend of Robert Kennedy when he was in Congress and Bob was Attorney General. They’d had a great relationship.

**Mr. Sorensen:**

And he was on the conservative side. There was also opposition on the liberal side.

**Mr. Seigenthaler:**

Right. Joe?

**Mr. Dolan:**

Well, I didn’t come into the New York campaign until October. He had said nice things about Senator Keating who was a nice, white-haired old man. And Steve Smith, who hasn’t been mentioned here, Steve has made tremendous contributions to the entire career of Robert Kennedy, Steve Smith said, “Well, we have got to go after him. So what can you do to go after him?” I had worked in the House, and I recalled the old game in the House when you voted twice on a bill, once to recommit and once on final passage. And you split your vote. You voted one way on your recommit, and you voted the other way on final passage. There were a lot of people who had made their reputations that way. Keating was outstanding in his devotion to that principle. We put together a piece that was called “Keating Against.” We went back to his House days and we put out a thing that looked like a grocery flier. Cheap paper, no pictures, and it just said, “Did you know Keating was against veterans?” We gave his split vote on the Veterans’ bill. “Did you know he was against widows?” You know, we had about ten … Peter should remember all those …

**Mr. Edelman:**

Oh, I was one of the original practitioners of opposition research in America. (Laughter)

**Mr. Dolan:**

Well, Peter can tell us what the issues were. I just said, “Peter, go do it,” and he came back with this stuff. And we put it out. Keating reacted, you know, and he said, “No, I wasn’t against veterans.” And you know, that drew a lot of public attention-- And so then we just said, “That’s what we’re saying. He votes both ways. Do you want that man in the United States Senate?”

**Mr. Guthman:**

Well, I just want to tell one story about … Dolan, who was still back in DC at the time. Every night we would come back at one, two o’clock in the morning and go to Bob’s room where we talked about what had gone
wrong and what were the errors and so forth and so on. On this particular night we had been in Brooklyn and there hadn’t been any campaign literature throughout, there hadn’t been any. When we got back, we got to talking and Bob said, "You know, Joe Dolan could take care of it. Call him up and see if he’ll come up and help us." I got on the phone at two o’clock in the morning, woke Joe up. I said, "Joe, Bob needs you. Can you come?" He said, "I'll be up by noon."

He resigned from the Department of Justice, and that afternoon, Joe Dolan appeared on the scene. It wasn’t very long before we had that situation straightened out. That was true. (Applause)

Mr. Seigenthaler:

Before we break for lunch, I want to mention to all of you that we received a very special letter from Simon Wiesenthal who unfortunately could not travel to be with us today. Sam Rubin can elaborate. He has the letter for those of you who’d like to view it during lunch.

In it, Mr. Wiesenthal recounts his struggle in the 1960s to extend statute of limitation in West Germany and Austria for the prosecution of war time crimes including mass murder. In response to the letter from Simon Wiesenthal, Robert Kennedy sent a telegram stating only, "Moral duties have no terms." Which became the motto used in Mr. Wiesenthal’s successful campaign to change the statute of limitations. Today, murder no longer falls under any statute of limitations in Germany and Austria, and Simon Wiesenthal credits Robert Kennedy with that.

Mr. Seigenthaler:

I begin our third session with Ted Sorensen, who needs no introduction, but I will introduce him nonetheless. He served for 11 years as policy advisor, legal counsel and speechwriter for Senator and President John F. Kennedy. While he was working the White House, Ted Sorensen was intimately involved in such matters as the Cuban Missile Crisis, the civil rights legislation, and the decision to send a man to the moon. Since 1966, he has practiced with one of New York’s most prestigious law firms, Paul, Weiss, Rifkind, Wharton & Garrison. Now Senior Counsel for the firm, his practice focuses on international business and governmental transactions in all parts of the world.


Joe Dolan served as Deputy Attorney General in the U.S. Department of Justice from 1961 to 1965 and then as Administrative Assistant to Robert F. Kennedy from 1965 to 1968. In 1968 he became Director of the Administrative Planning Section of the Great Western United Corporation. On two occasions he served in the government of Colorado’s cabinet, overseeing the Department of Revenue and the Department of Highway Transportation. He has written a new novel entitled, *Hail to the Chief*, which promotes the abolishment of the Electoral College and promotes electing future presidents through the popular vote. (Applause) As Ed Guthman said a few minutes ago, Dolan has always been on the cutting edge, it seems, right ahead of the curve.

Michael Sandel, Professor Sandel, is a Professor of Government at Harvard, where he’s been on the faculty of Arts and Sciences since 1980. He teaches courses in contemporary political philosophy and the history of political thought. His undergraduate course, "Justice," typically enrolls some seven to eight hundred students. In 1985, he was awarded the Harvard Radcliffe Phi Beta Kappa teaching prize. And in 1999 was named the Harvard College Professor, in recognition of his contributions to undergraduate teaching. Professor Sandel is the author of *Democracy’s Discontent: America in Search of a Public Philosophy*, a book that has sparked much discussion about American politics, philosophy, and law. It includes numerous references to such leaders as Martin Luther King, and Robert F. Kennedy and their attempts to change the nature of American
Mr. Sorensen:

Thank you, John, and ladies and gentlemen. I'm very pleased that the John F. Kennedy Library is devoting this day and this conference to Robert F. Kennedy who played such an important part in John F. Kennedy's success in the Senate, in the campaign, and in the Presidency. I loved Bobby Kennedy. He was, particularly after JFK's death, my friend. He'd previously been my colleague in government. He was always a source of strength and advice and ideas. The very first time I met him, I wasn't so crazy about him. The *Saturday Evening Post* or *Life*, I forget which magazine, wanted a picture series on John F. Kennedy, and Bobby wanted us to stage a touch football game. So JFK arranged for Bobby — and you'll have to forgive me, I only knew him as Bobby. I know there are those who say it's undignified, but that's what Jack called him. There's no way I can call him anything else.

JFK arranged for Bobby and me to, you know, throw a football around out where that mall is in front of the Capitol and across from the Old Senate Office Building. And actually, you know, he staged the play. He faded back, I went out for a pass, Bobby defended. And we're playing in our good suits, for Christ sake (probably in those days my only suit). As I went up and made this spectacular catch, I felt somebody hitting me, elbowing me in the back, kneeing me in the back of my leg, and of course it was Bobby. I tumbled down in the mud with my good suit on. That's how I met Bobby Kennedy.

But we got to be a little closer after that. When I was first asked by Chuck Daly if I would talk at this conference, I said of course I would. I said that I'd talk about the 1968 campaign, and I've been kicking myself ever since. I find it hard to talk about the '68 campaign for many reasons, and I'm sure some of them are reasons of guilt. It's not a secret that I was opposed to Bobby running. I could go into all those reasons later if you want. I simply thought that it would harm his chances of becoming president in a relatively short time, but not that year. I have since worried and wondered as to whether or not that delayed his entry into the presidential race. I have wondered whether that delay made the race that much more frantic and difficult and whether something better might have come out of it all.

Maybe I should have made one more trip or swayed one more politician. As a couple of people know, maybe if I wasn't at the same time falling in love with my wife of 31 years, who's here today -- that was 32 years ago -- maybe I could have done more. So I have these conflicted questions and a lot of the books, the most recent one by Evan Thomas, raised questions about the campaign that are not easily answered. I'm going to try to answer three of them today, but I'm not at all sure I've got the answers either.

First, there was the question of RFK's late post-New Hampshire entry into that campaign, running against anti-war candidate Eugene McCarthy, who had been willing earlier to step up to the Vietnam War question and step into the race against Johnson. There is, as well, the question of running against his brother's chosen successor, Lyndon Johnson. Was that, as so many said at the time, an act of ruthless selfishness? For that I answer very clearly and loudly, no. The conservative, hawkish wings of the Democratic Party were already committed to LBJ and later to Hubert Humphrey. The liberal, reform, and dove-ish wings of the party, including many of the most active anti-war students in the electoral, were largely committed to Gene McCarthy. Many of Bob's best friends and allies in Washington, including virtually every single Democratic Senator, and his best friends and allies both in New York and Boston were already committed to one or the other of those candidates. They were urging him not to divide the party and not to divide the anti-war movement.

Actually, Bobby later said, "I'm the only candidate who has ever united business and labor, liberals and Southerners, party bosses and intellectuals. They're all against me." (Laughter) He was trailing LBJ in the national polls at that time. He had no real national organization. He didn't have a campaign plan or a campaign schedule. He didn't have endorsements of the national party leaders or labor leaders. He didn't really have any delegates. There were not enough primaries that still had a filing date that he could enter to
give him a chance to get enough delegates for a majority.

In other words, the task that he was undertaking for himself was so daunting, so lacking in prospect, so difficult and clearly going to be so wearisome that it could hardly be called self assured or ruthless. I remember once John F. Kennedy talking about his younger brother. He was talking about the time when they were both a lot younger, and Bobby was small and jumping off the family sailboat. JFK said, and I quote, "It showed either a lot of guts or no sense at all, depending on how you look at it." I think you can say that about Bobby's entry into the 1968 presidential race. It either showed no sense at all, or a lot of guts. I think there were some of both of those factors present. But certainly it was not a selfishness or ruthlessness.

Some have asked whether the 1968 campaign was RFK's finest hour. Was it the one moment of his life above all others for which he should be remembered? That's a closer question. Unlike the campaign of 2000, it was a serious campaign, a high-minded campaign. It was a campaign on the issues, particularly foreign policy, and race, poverty, and community self-determination. All of which were largely unmentioned this year. And not because those problems have all been solved.

But instead of pandering to voter booths, Bobby was challenging them. Instead of appealing to their pocketbooks, he was appealing to their sense of duty and responsibility. Instead of trimming on his commitment to peaceful international solutions and arms reductions, and risking being labeled soft by the other side, he campaigned strongly against not only the Vietnam War, but the very concept and instruments of war and the U.S. government's role in it. Instead of soft-pedaling his concerns for the poor and for racial and ethnic minorities, he spoke out, as no candidate before or after, on behalf of those very groups, stressing the importance of changing their lot in life. His speeches were not five-point programs for this tax assessment or that educational assessment. They were, you know, not about incremental matters but stirring visions of the future. They were demonstrations of leadership, the articulation of high ideals and even dreams for a better country, a better world and better days. His speeches included eloquence and humor. His actions and words sent a message of pure love and dedication to this country and its people and the causes of peace and justice. There was great emphasis on Blacks and Spanish-speaking Americans and Native Americans, as well as the young, the poor, those who needed hope and help. Both his words and actions seemed to go against the grain of a country that was increasingly militant and conservative.

And yet, he carried the suburban as well as the urban areas and Indiana and California. He carried rural states like Nebraska and South Dakota. Many of those to whom he spoke, the underprivileged and underrepresented, the downtrodden and dispossessed, were among those least likely to turn out to vote. Many of them weren't even registered. Those were the issues he wanted to address and those were the people who came to hear him address those issues.

But at the same time, in conversations off the platform, Bobby acknowledged that the crowd and sometimes his own speeches also had a sense of bitterness and fear, as well as love. That his audiences were sometimes charged up, disorganized, and unruly. Even all of the touching and the grabbing and the leaping, the shouting, the running after the car produced an energy that was more physical than intellectual, sometimes frightening as well as pardoning.

He was frequently fatigued and often behind schedule, resulting, on occasion, in speeches that seemed disorganized. As the campaign wore on, they sometimes were more negative and less optimistic than his usual approach to life. I'm the first to acknowledge that his campaign organization in Washington, and in the field, was often disorganized rather than organized. It was divided. There were factions, and factions within factions.

Then it all ended in terrible, unbelievable tragedy.

So it's a tough question as to whether the campaign of 1968 would be the defining moment. Or was it his role in the Cuban Missile Crises that others on the previous panel have noted? His trip to South Africa is still remembered and treasured by the people there. Was it his leadership on civil rights as Attorney General and
a Senator? For all of that, I think I’d rather remember him than 1968.

And the final question I want to answer, did the tragedy in Los Angeles avoid the likelihood of a crushing political failure, which would have marred his place in history? Would he have faced defeat at the convention, or a defeat in the election in November or possibly a failure even as President of such a bitterly divided country? I know that there are all kinds of what-ifs involved in that question and there’s probably never going to be a consensus among the historians and the experts on that answer. I always believed the answer to be no. Had his life not been prematurely and savagely ended in Los Angeles in June of ’68, I think he would have become one of the great Presidents of the United States. I really believe that.

Despite the divisions in the party, I believe the momentum from his California and South Dakota primary victories that day would have carried him on to the convention. There were no more primaries left. He would have gone to New York. He knew all the political leaders there better than anybody else. He would have gone to Illinois where friends of Jack and Mayor Daley’s, I believe, would have come to his support. He would have gone from state to state picking off delegates and supporters from other candidates for the Presidency because he deserved it.

I believe that the McCarthy forces would have paved the way in recognizing that McCarthy had no chance of being elected president. I think the Humphrey delegates would have been picked off from those who recognized that the trend now was against the war, against Johnson and ultimately a Humphrey position. And no doubt it would still have been a stormy convention in Chicago.

But I think that Bobby would have won that race. Then would he have won the election against Richard Nixon and George Wallace? I believe he would. I believe he was the only person who could have united the country behind his candidacy. Look how closely Hubert Humphrey came. He was within a fraction of winning that contest, and I can assure you, with all due respect to Hubert, the Kennedys campaign a lot more effectively and successfully than Hubert Humphrey ever did. I believe that Bobby would have been elected President. I believe that he would have been an extraordinary President. I believe that he would have been controversial. The passions of the campaign would have continued. He would have brought Black and White together. He would have gotten this country out of Vietnam, on an honorable basis, years earlier and tens of thousands of casualties and fatalities earlier. Instead of riots and disorder in the early ’70s in the inner cities and university campuses, there would have been hope because there would have been someone in the White House listening. They would have known that there was someone who cared, that their problems were at least being understood and addressed. I think it would have been a different country.

So how do I sum up 1968 and Robert F. Kennedy’s campaign? Early in his Presidency, President Kennedy went to a luncheon celebrating the publication of the Adams Family papers. I think it was the first edition of a long collection. He summed up the family of John Adams and John Quincy Adams and Charles Quincy Adams and Henry Adams. He said there were really two themes that run throughout the history of that remarkable family: courage and conscience. I think those are the two words that come most to my mind when I think about Bobby in 1968. Thank you.

Mr. Seigenthaler:

Thank you very much, Ted, and we’ll try to come back to the missile crisis a little bit later on our panel. Joe Dolan?

Joe Dolan:

Thank you. First I want you all to know that I’m smarter than Ted Sorensen. I always refused to play touch football with the Kennedy family.

It’s an honor and a privilege for me to have worked nine years with Robert Kennedy. I’m going to talk about
the primary campaign.

The California primary was the second most important after New York. Steve Smith in Los Angeles and John Seigenthaler in San Francisco ran the California organizations. The Indiana primary was an exercise in serendipity. I didn’t know anything about Indiana. And it was the second in the country in UAW membership nationally, primarily because of all the school bus manufacturing. Jerry Bruno found town centers near railroad stations of the Wabash Railroad. He suggested we call it the Wabash Cannonball. I said, “Jerry, no. That was in Mississippi.” Jerry said, “Who’s going to know?” (Laughter) Ethel found a guitarist to play “The Wabash Cannonball” and it was a big hit. The press joined in. They wrote a parody of it called “The Ruthless Cannonball.” Guess who was the ruthless cannonball? The campaign in Indiana got screwed up. Larry O’Brien, Kenny ODonnell, others were in and out for half a day. There wasn’t any continuity. Bob’s aunt, Polly Fitzgerald, who’s here today, was running teas and made the same complaint. I wrote a memorandum to back her up.

We weren’t always totally candid with Robert Kennedy. RFK then sent John Douglas to “put it all together,” but told no one else. Douglas rescued me from putting STOL aircraft, that’s short takeoff and landing aircraft, in Southern Indiana, which is big Klan neighborhood. We had the support of the first Black mayor in the U.S. We talked about it, Bob and I talked about it, and said, “Who could go in there and help out the first Black mayor in Indiana.” And it might help in Chicago and other places.

Other aspects of the Indiana campaign, the poet James Whitcomb Riley was the most popular arts figure in Indiana. We went everywhere he had spoken and some places where he had just used the bathroom. McCarthy made a huge mistake by not following us or trying to beat us to some spots. After the primary, McCarthy was asked why he lost Indiana. He said, "They asked me about the poet when I got off the plane. I thought they meant Shakespeare."

I remember that we booked RFK into the State Medical School at noon. Filled it with low-wage employees, some nurses, some med students. During the question and answer session, somebody asked, who will pay for the social programs that Bob had outlined. "You will" he responded. Then he asked the med students, "Who favors the draft?" All hands went up. Then he asked, "How many of you have medical school draft deferments?" Ashamedly, most of their hands went up.

Once, long before the campaign, he called me in, told me to close the door, and said, "I was thinking of running for President. What do you think?" I turned around and looked at the wall and said, "What--" And he said, "What are you doing?" I said, "Looking for Candid Camera." That was when Alan Funk had a camera program. I recall that I did not know what to say because I had assumed that he knew that everything we did was geared to make it easy for him to run for President in 68. For example, we were the only Senate office that answered out of state mail, which we did because we had friends all over the country, etc.

Mr. Michael Sandel:

These are not easy acts to follow. Unlike so many people on these panels, I was not privileged to know Robert Kennedy. I was 15 years old in 1968, and I speak here really just as a student of the American political tradition. And I’d like to talk about some of the political themes, the moral and political themes that animated Robert Kennedy’s campaign in 1968. Because it seems to me, those themes have a special place in the American political tradition, and they’re ones for which we still have a great deal to learn.

As he campaigned for the Presidency, maybe without fully realizing it, Robert Kennedy was finding a way to a political vision that challenged the complacency of post-war American liberalism. And if you look back at the themes about which he spoke in 1968, from the standpoint of the present, from the standpoint of our current impoverished national political debates, what’s striking is that American politics, including the Democratic Party, have failed to recover the moral energy and the bold public purpose to which Robert Kennedy gave
And what I would like to try to analyze is why that's the case. What was it in the political themes and in the implicit political philosophy that Robert Kennedy articulated in that campaign that are at odds with the assumptions of so much of contemporary politics in both parties? Now, the answer that I would like to propose may not be as popular here as the general idea. Because it seems to me that the key to the resonance and the power and the moral force of Robert Kennedy's politics is that, in many ways, it amounted to a critique of contemporary liberalism. Despite his commitment to the poor and his opposition to the war in Vietnam, Robert Kennedy was not by temperament or ideology a liberal, at least, not in the familiar sense of that term in 20th century American politics.

In some ways his political outlook was more conservative, and in other ways more radical than the mainstream of the Democratic Party before or since. Unlike most liberals, for example, in 1968, he worried about the remoteness of big government. He argued for decentralized power. He criticized welfare as our greatest domestic failure. He challenged the faith in economic growth as a panacea for social ills, and he took a hard line on crime.

What gave his message its resonance was that it drew on a vision of citizenship and a community that the managerial or procedural politics of the modern age had largely crowded from view. What RFK articulated as he tried to find a public philosophy adequate to the turmoil of those times, what he began to articulate was an older, more demanding vision of civic life. According to this older ideal, and here's where we have to look back to the American political tradition, reaching all the way back to Jefferson, according to the ideal on which he managed to draw, freedom. Freedom doesn't just consist in fair access to the bounty of a consumer society. Freedom requires that citizens share in self-rule and that they participate in shaping the courses that govern their collective destiny.

Now why is this emphasis on the civic strand of the American political tradition intentioned with contemporary liberalism? Because on the civic strand, in politics you have to be concerned with things like civic virtue. You have to be concerned with the character of citizens. This older civic tradition -- some would call it a republican tradition -- of picking citizens for self-rule requires that public life attend to their character. Now these days we shrink from that topic of character and virtue because it comes so often from cultural conservatives. Virtue talks. But what's striking is if you look at 200 years of American political discourse, this older, more demanding idea of citizenship and of freedom depends on seeing politics as partly a formative project concerned with forming, with shaping, with cultivating, the moral and civic character of citizens.

Robert Kennedy drew on this older tradition. And it was this civic strand of his political vision that enabled him to address anxieties of the late 60s and yet persist in these times. Those anxieties include mistrust of government, a growing sense of disempowerment, and a widespread fear from families to neighborhoods to the nation, that the moral fabric of community is unraveling around us. These are the themes, the anxieties and the worries that continue to beset American public life and public culture. What is so striking about our politics today, is its impoverishment and its inability to speak to those worries. Robert Kennedy did.

Liberals often evoke the idea of national community. But Robert Kennedy doubted that the nation was a sufficient arena for the kind of civic engagement that genuine self-government requires. The world beyond the neighborhood, he said, has become more impersonal and abstract. Cities in their tumbling spread are obliterating neighborhoods and precincts. Housing units go up, but there is no place for people to walk or for women and their children to meet, for common activities. Their place of work is far away through blackened tunnels, or over impersonal highways. In far too many places, in pleasant suburbs as well as in city streets, the home is a place to sleep and eat and watch television. But the community is not where we live. We live in many places, and so we live nowhere.

He described the ways in which crime and joblessness plague life in the urban ghetto. He spoke primarily of the civic consequences of those ills. One of the tragedies of crime is that it has destroyed the public spaces like neighborhoods and communities that are essential to self-government. No nation hiding behind locked
doors is free, he said, for it is imprisoned by its own fear. No nation whose citizens fear to walk down their own streets is healthy, for in isolation lies the poisoning of public participation. This ultimately was the civic cost of crime.

Likewise with unemployment, it wasn't just that unemployment leads to low incomes. It cut the poor off from access to the bounty of consumer society. That wasn't the primary sin of joblessness. Unemployment, he said, means having nothing to do, which means having nothing to do with the rest of us. To be without work, to be without use to one's fellow citizens, is, to be in truth, the invisible man of whom Ralph Ellison wrote.

These were differences of emphasis, you might say, of rhetorical emphasis. But his clearest difference with mainstream liberal opinion was on the issue of welfare. Unlike conservatives who opposed federal spending for the poor, Robert Kennedy criticized welfare on the grounds that it corrupted the civic capacity of recipients. And there you'll see the worry about character, about the formative project. It rendered millions of our people slaves to dependency and poverty, he said. Waiting on the favor of their fellow citizens to write them checks. Fellowship, unity, shared patriotism -- these don't come from just buying and consuming goods together. They come, he said, from a shared sense of individual independence and personal effort. The solution to poverty is not a guaranteed income, but dignified employment at decent pay. The kind of employment that lets a person say to his community, to his family, to his country and most importantly to himself, I helped to build this country. I am a participant in its great public ventures. So here again you see a concern for character and civic character.

Now, how might it have been different if this way of thinking and talking about public life had persisted? And if subsequent democratic candidates had learned the lessons that Robert Kennedy was beginning to suggest in 1968? I think he would have made a tremendous difference. Had Democrats taken up Robert Kennedy's toughness on crime, they would have deprived a whole generation of Republicans from Richard Nixon up through George Bush, of one of its most effective issues. Had Democrats heeded Robert Kennedy's words about welfare, there might have been a chance to reform it without abandoning the poor, and there might have been a chance to avoid decades of public resentment toward welfare that fed a broader hostility toward government.

Had Democrats learned from Robert Kennedy the importance of community and self government and character formation and civic virtue, they would not have conceded these powerful ideals to cultural conservatives, from Falwell to Pat Robertson, William Bennett to Ronald Reagan, conservatives who invoked these ideas rhetorically while at the same time promoting an unfettered capitalism that does so much to disempower neighborhoods and communities.

So this seems to me what was really distinctive in the voice and in the moral and political vision that was beginning to find expression in Robert Kennedy’s politics in 1968. What we find three decades later is the progressive impulse in American public life has yet to recover its civic voice. What Robert Kennedy offered in 1968 was a strenuous idealism that recalls us to a citizenship that offers something more than basic training for a consumer society. And three decades later, we still await a political agenda that recalls us to that moral and civic project. Thank you.

Mr. Seigenthaler:

I think, Michael Sandel, you've just demonstrated that you did not have to know Robert Kennedy to know Robert Kennedy.

I think that in the framework of this segment of time, there was that moment when the lives of all of us and perhaps even the survival of the Southern part of the United States, perhaps other parts, was subject to real terror. And that is that moment that brought us to the Cuban Missile Crisis. Robert Kennedy played a dynamic role in that crises. The movie “Thirteen Days” demonstrates that. I think that, without question, it will demonstrate that. But you were there. It was a moment in which leadership was needed and independent thought was vital. Will you just give us your insight into the inner sanctum of the White House during those
Mr. Sorensen:

They were desperate hours. The movie is just coming out. I’ve seen the preview and it is a timely reminder of the importance of leadership at the highest levels in the United States government. Fortunately, John and Robert Kennedy had that kind of experience and demonstrated that kind of leadership that was able to bring us to a successful resolution. You’re right, they were desperate hours, and the frank answer is that because it was so unprecedented (this first nuclear confrontation between the two super powers) I hope it will have been the last nuclear confrontation in the history of the planet. No one knew what the right answer was in our first meeting. The intelligence reports were clear enough. Soviet nuclear missile sites were being built on the island of Cuba which were capable of reaching, not only the southern United States, but really all of the United States, except perhaps, the northern most, northwest corner. Virtually all of Latin America was at risk as well.

The President was mindful that if we took too strong a move it would precipitate a war, a nuclear war, the final war, perhaps. But if we had too weak a response, the Europeans would say, "Well, you’re not doing anything about this kind of a threat to the United States, clearly he’ll never come to help us when we’re threatened." And the Latin Americans would say, "Well, it sounds like the Soviet Union is on the move, not the West. So if we’re going to throw our lot in with someone, we’ll throw our lot in with the Soviet Union," thus eroding all of our alliances.

In that first meeting, there were a number of options discussed, but no one had much confidence in any of them doing any good, including diplomacy, handing Khrushchev a note. Other options discussed were an all-out war, bombing the missile sites, bombing the island, invading Cuba and a variety of combinations and options in between. It’s interesting that the President called together, not the National Security Council as such, which had a statutory membership, he called together those whose judgment he wanted to hear. And that obviously included his brother, Bob.

Bob played a key role throughout. He particularly played a key role in the very early series of meetings. He believed that a United States air strike against missile sites on Cuba (without any warning) would likely be regarded by the world and by history as a super power attacking a small island neighbor without warning. And it would, as he said, be a Pearl Harbor in reverse.

But on the other hand, he acknowledged that it was very difficult to formulate such a warning. In fact, I was given the assignment (which I could not do) to formulate a warning that would prevent Khrushchev from either giving the order to fire the missiles, or hiding the missiles in shrubs and woods, before we could do anything. Either of those outcomes would have defeated the whole purpose.

He then was instrumental when the quarantine solution, or the Naval blockade around Cuba, was decided upon with additional warnings attached to it, as we’ve seen in the film clip. When a message came in from Khrushchev which had at least the semblance of a reciprocal solution; namely that he would take the missiles out of Cuba and we would withdraw the blockade and agree not to invade Cuba. He and I had the responsibility of drafting the response to that letter. In a separate meeting, not even with our whole group, he was then instructed to deliver that letter to the Soviet ambassador in Washington. Two other messages accompanied that letter. One of which was the frustration and dissatisfaction with the blockade approach that was now arising once again within our group. The so-called Hawks were pressing for an early air strike and invasion. As a result, we needed an immediate response from Chairman Khrushchev.

The other oral message was, and this was kept secret for ten years, of Khrushchev having sent a second letter saying, “No, instead of my letter of last night, let’s make a deal. You take the NATO missile bases out of Turkey and we’ll take our bases out of Cuba.” Bobby’s response to this was, “We can’t make a deal with a gun to our head. We can’t simply abandon Turkey, abandon NATO, and make a unilateral decision of that kind. So if that’s what you insist upon, then there’s no agreement at all. But we want you to know that
President Kennedy regards those bases-- those NATO bases in Turkey as being anachronistic, outmoded, and ineffective. He’s going to take them out, and they’ll be gone in a matter of months. We can give that assurance to Chairman Khrushchev if that makes him feel better about it, but we’re not going to agree on any public deal along those lines."

Bobby sold that double message, along with the letter, so effectively to Doybrynin, who then conveyed it to Khrushchev. For those reasons and perhaps others of his own, Khrushchev decided that his gamble had not paid off. He did take the missiles out of Cuba. He did agree to an inspection of the dismantlement and withdrawal process. And we now know that that saved a terrible war. Because we now know that the Soviets had tactical nuclear weapons on the island of Cuba. We did not know that at the time, although we heard rumors about it. Had we gone ahead with the air strike and the invasion, there’s not the slightest doubt that the Soviet commanders who had the authority to use tactical nuclear weapons against any American attack would have used them. I haven’t the slightest doubt that we would have responded to a Soviet nuclear attack by getting on that terrible nuclear escalation ladder ourselves and I doubt very much that we would be here talking about this today, if it had not been for the work of both John and Robert Kennedy.

Congressman John Lewis, by video:

Robert Kennedy, the man, the Attorney General, the Senator that I got to know, was a man of compassion, a man who believed in the cause of simple justice. I saw him, as the Attorney General, come to the point where he believed deeply in his heart, in his very gut, in the cause of civil rights and social justice.

Through his action, he inspired a whole generation of us stand up to fight for social justice, and for civil rights. Under his leadership with John Dorr, Burke Marshall and others, he lent more than a sympathetic ear. In a real sense, Robert Kennedy was not just a sympathetic referee. He became a doer of civil rights. I remember the most difficult time during the early days of the Kennedy administration. In May of 1961, during the Freedom Ride, we had been beaten, and left for dead in Montgomery. Our bus was burned in Anniston. People had been mobbed in both Birmingham and Montgomery. Some of us were arrested and jailed in Mississippi. Robert Kennedy had the courage, the raw courage, to intervene, to get the Interstate Commerce Commission to issue a ruling banning segregation and racial discrimination in places of public transportation.

I remember meeting with him on more than one occasion when he provided us with a great deal of support. In April of 1968, I was campaigning with Robert Kennedy for the Democratic nomination for the Presidency. We had heard that Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. had been assassinated. Someone asked me, "What will we do?" And I said, "We still have Robert Kennedy." This one man made a difference, not just for one segment of our population, but for all Americans. We are a better nation. We are a better people because of what he did and what he said. He had the ability and the capacity, to inspire people to do good and to help build a truly interracial democracy in America.

Mr. Seigenthaler:

John Lewis, not only understands the legacy of Robert Kennedy, he continues to work for what he has long called the beloved community, a community that Robert Kennedy sought to establish. Well, this segment is dedicated to the legacy of Robert Kennedy and it’s highly appropriate, I think, after listening to John Lewis that Anthony Lewis and Marian Edelman provide a prelude to the address of Kathleen Kennedy Townsend, which will follow. Everyone knows Tony’s columns from the New York Times. He is a two-time winner of the Pulitzer Prize in Journalism. He joined the Washington bureau of the Times in 1955 to cover the Supreme Court, the Justice Department and other legal subjects. In the following years, he reported among other things, the Warren Court and the federal government’s responses to the civil rights movement. He won the second Pulitzer in 1963 for his coverage of the Supreme Court.

Marian Wright Edelman is founder and president of the Children’s Defense Fund. She has been an advocate for disadvantaged Americans for her entire professional career. Under her leadership, the Children’s Defense Fund has become a strong national voice for children and families. She’s the author of several books,
including *Lanterns: A Memoir of Mentors* in which she pays tribute to personal mentors who helped light her way including Dr. King, Fanny Lou Hamer and Robert F. Kennedy.

**Mr. Anthony Lewis:**

I would like to begin by saying a word about our moderator. When Congressman Lewis spoke about Robert Kennedy’s courage in connection with the Freedom Rides, this man (John Seigenthaler) was an exemplar of courage. Really, he barely came away with his life. (Applause)

Ladies and gentlemen, these are just going to be a few very personal words. On my wall at home, there is a photograph of Robert Kennedy at his desk in the Attorney General’s office. He had a shy, self-mocking style, a *Peck's Bad Boy* look. Under the picture, he wrote a cartoonist balloon for himself which said, "New York Times wrote another unfriendly editorial. And I just called you in to tell you I have this investigative report here in my hand."

But if he was self deprecatingly funny, he was, of course, also grave. In this, as in so many things, he was a combination of opposites. He was a gregarious person famous for playing touch football and wanting crowds of friends around. But he was also lonely. He was forceful and vulnerable. He was tender and determined never to be seen as soft.

[An example of the last] While I was covering the Justice Department, Telford Taylor, the great Columbia University law professor visited the department to seek clemency for Junior Scales. Scales was one of the last men convicted under the Smith Act for being a member of the Communist party. The Supreme Court had affirmed his conviction by a vote of 5-4, despite the lack of any evidence showing that Scales had done anything dangerous.

When I next saw the Attorney General, I asked him what he was going to do about Telford Taylor’s plea for Scales. "You liberals," he said. "You don’t understand. If we do something for Scales, Pat Walter" -- who was then a leading conservative Democrat in the House -- "will punish us." I just backed off.

Sometime later I was at a social occasion with Bobby. He took me aside and said, almost as if with embarrassment, "We’re going to let your friend Scales out." He did not like to look soft. But in the best sense, the sense of caring about human beings, he was.

That story shows something else about Robert Kennedy. When he made his extraordinary run for President in 1968, people responded to his exhilarating, philosophical, caring candidacy. Many commentators have said that he had changed, that this was a new Bobby Kennedy replacing the old, ruthless character. Ruthless, as you’ve already heard today, was their favorite adjective.

But the episode with Junior Scales occurred five years before the 1968 campaign. Of course, it is true that Robert Kennedy changed. This was true not only in 1968, but all the time. He learned from experiences more dramatically than anyone I have known. But I think Evan Thomas has it exactly right in his extraordinary book when he rejects the notion of a transformation from one kind of person to another. Yes, the President’s death had a heavy impact on Bobby. But the essential sensitivity of his character was there all along, if just hidden, as Evan Thomas says, under a layer of toughness.

Think about what he did when he became Attorney General. He was young and inexperienced. He would not have said himself that he was learned in the law. The first thing he had to do was pick his top assistants in the Justice Department. Whom did he pick? To name a few, Byron White, Nicholas Katzenbach, Burke Marshall, John Douglas, Lou Oberdorfer, Archibald Cox. The only one of those with any political connection was Byron White. They were simply the best people he could find and history has ratified the wisdom of his choices.
I said a moment ago that he learned from experience. The most powerful and best-known example of that was his attitude toward the racial issue. I asked him once, soon after he became Attorney General, what role civil rights had played in his earlier years. His answer was that he had not thought much about racial discrimination. It was not a subject that had figured in the famous debates around his family’s dining table. I asked him why he focused on it so intently as Attorney General, bringing dozens of cases and going into areas that earlier attorneys general had not touched?

He replied, "There are injustices, and they are flagrant, and I have the power and the responsibility to do something about them, so I intend to do it. It's quite simple." It was not simple. It was unbelievably difficult, complicated, politically challenging, and dangerous. The kind of resistance that was raised in the South in those years against something as obvious as allowing Black Americans to vote is hard to believe now. That resistance had to be ground down by legal action and political commitment. Others had failed what Bobby called the Attorney General’s responsibility. He did not.

He was a leader in a way that is missing from our lives today. It’s a theme that we’ve heard before this meeting. I wrote this before I heard those remarks and I agree with them entirely. He had a force of personality that made it impossible to ignore him or take him for granted. He was both dreamer and realist; he knew, as few did, the depth of the difficulties that faced our society. But, he insisted that somehow those difficulties had to be met.

Evan Thomas describes how he was when he came back from a trip to Mississippi where he saw children without food, their bodies covered with sores. He told his own children what he had seen and then said to them, "Do you know how lucky you are? Do something for your country." Maybe what was so different from our present leadership was that Robert Kennedy was authentic. No one could doubt that he said what he felt about Mississippi or other things. He did not have to call himself compassionate, his compassion, his passion, was unmistakable. (Applause)

So I agree with Ted Sorensen and the others when they say that this would be a different country if he were here. I could put it in somewhat more personal terms as I close. The year after he died, I wrote a column about him. "Time," I wrote, "does not diminish the sense that life without him is incomplete." Thirty-one years later, I feel the same way. (Applause)

Marion Wright Edelman:

Robert Kennedy died 32 years ago on my birthday, and I think of him a lot. I think about his legacy in the way in which I have tried and many others have tried to respond. You and I must keep planting the seeds for the next movement that was begun by him and Dr. King. We saw a very moving clip on his announcing Dr. King’s death in the inner city in Cleveland. We saw him speak about the "mindless menace of violence" in America, which continues to stain our land and every one of our lives. He reminded us that it was not the concern of any one race. The victims are old and young, white and black, rich and poor, famous and unknown. But most importantly, the victims of violence, then and now, are human beings who were loved and needed. He told us that no one, no matter where he lived or what he did, can be certain who will suffer next in some senseless action of bloodshed. Yet, this "mindless menace of violence" goes on and on and on in this country of ours.

Since Robert Kennedy spoke these words in Cleveland after Dr. King’s assassination, he, and almost one million additional American men, women, and children, have been killed by guns. More than a half million other Americans have died violent deaths by other means in America’s undeclared spiritual and civil war. Most shamefully, since 1979, when we began to keep figures on child gun deaths, we have lost nearly 84,000 children under 19 to guns. It’s safer to be an on-duty police officer in America today than a child under ten. What is it going to take for us to hear his voice from 32 years ago? What is it going to take for us to see what has been going on now, even in Columbine and to have others pick up the challenge? What would he be saying today to stop the violence against our children?

He came to Mississippi. I met him in April 1967, and I had a very different image of a ruthless whatever. But
he came, and he heard what the Senate sub-committee with Senator Joe Clark and Senator Jacob Javits said about hunger. He responded immediately by coming up into the belt where we went and saw the poor shacks and people without food in their refrigerators. I was most moved by a particular scene out of the range of television cameras, where a baby with a bloated belly was sitting on a dirt floor. He walked through there and sat next to that baby, trying to get the baby to respond. I watched the rage, the passionate rage. It was his passionate perseverance and anger that I remember. I remember his commitment to do something. He promised he'd get help to hungry children, and he kept his promise. He came back to Washington and he sent (my now) husband back down with the agriculture official who did not believe there were people in Mississippi with no income. He told Orville Freeman "just get the food down there, Orville". He persisted setting in motion a range of events that led, eventually in 1969, to a select committee in the Senate on nutrition and human needs chaired by Senator McGovern. That committee verified that the very poor and the hard-core poor suffer from poverty-related hunger and malnutrition. They documented that there were 14.4 million Americans who were hungry because they were poor. The nation really didn't want to believe this.

Because of the events he set in place, and his persistent follow up, by 1970, the public outrage over high levels of hunger and malnutrition led to the massive expansion of child and family nutrition programs including food stamps. It began to work. In 1977, a second team of physicians went down, which included people like Bob Coles to follow up on the research on hunger in America. They found "that there can be little doubt that significant change has occurred since 1967," when RFK brought hunger to the attention of the country. "Nowhere," this doctor said, "did I see evidence of malnutrition. Among young children that we saw in 1967, it is not possible anymore to easily find the bloated bellies, the shriveled infants, the gross evidence of vitamin and protein deficiency in children that we identified in the late 1960s," and that’s thanks to Robert Kennedy. He demonstrated that hunger is not an act of God. It is a choice of people, of men, of our political leaders and the political leaders that aren’t held accountable.

But that hunger came back in the ‘90s. Today every fifth person standing in a line seeking food in America, in this most prosperous era, is a child. How do we tolerate continuing hunger and poverty? Here we are, 32 years after I stopped by Hickory Hill to tell him a little bit about my continuing frustrations in Mississippi. I told him I was on my way back, but I was going to stop by and see Dr. King. It was Robert Kennedy who said, "Tell Dr. King to bring the poor to Washington and to launch a poor people’s campaign so that the needs of the poor would not get drowned in the concerns about the Vietnam War".

When I saw Dr. King, he was depressed and not quite sure where he was going to go. He thought that I was a nice angel delivering a message from another angel. He began the very hard work of convincing his staff, including Josea Williams, who we lost this week, to begin the hard work of putting together that poor people’s campaign. And then, you know, Dr. King was lost. And then Robert Kennedy was lost.

But the challenge is still before us to have that campaign and stop the obscenity of an almost $9 trillion economy, in which children are the poorest group in America. Let us look at the figures today. When Robert Kennedy spoke out against poverty and hunger, we had 24 million Americans poor. In 1999, even though we have a smaller percentage of the overall population that is poor, we still have 32 million Americans who are poor, in this era of unprecedented prosperity. Where is our voice to end obscene child poverty in this time of boastful prosperity?

It is time for us to realize that he left us a challenge. He left us an example. He’s not coming back. Dr. King’s not coming back. Gandhi’s not coming back. We’re it. The challenge, for us, is to pick up where they left off. I hope we will continue their efforts to put the moral and social and economic underpinnings beneath the civil and political rights for which so many fought and died. I hope that we will come together in the dawn of the 21st century and make our children, who are the most vulnerable among us, the source of our healing. And to show that this can be a nation where no child is left behind.

We have had lots of political rhetoric on both sides of the aisle, about leaving no child behind. It’s become kind of a bumper sticker for George W. Bush. If he becomes President, I hope we can tell him what it means
to build the political will to leave no child behind. But if we get President Gore, I hope we can do the same.

I’m just going to end with a prayer. I really think we are the answer to the nation’s problems. The way we can honor Robert Kennedy is to accept the challenge that he accepted 32 years ago and to finish the job in the beginning of this new century, which I think really is a magical moment.

We don’t have to have all the gifts that so many of the mentors of this era had. I always feel so lucky to have lived in a time when great leadership and great events converged. So it is both a privilege to watch the struggle and to watch change, to watch people come and rise above themselves, and to watch the extraordinary deeds of ordinary people. We must capture that again.

So I tell myself when I get discouraged that Lord, I can’t preach like Martin Luther King or turn a poetic phrase like Maya Angelou. But I care and I’m willing to serve. I don’t have John Lewis’ courage or Robert Kennedy’s political skill. But I care and I’m willing to serve. Wish I could sing like Fanny Lou Hamer and organize like Bayard Rustin. But I care and I’m willing to serve. I’m not holy like Archbishop Tutu or forgiving like Nelson Mandela or disciplined like Gandhi, but I care and I’m willing to serve. I’m not brilliant like Elizabeth Cady Stanton or as eloquent as Booker T. Washington. But I care and I’m willing to serve. I don’t have Mother Teresa’s saintliness or Dorothy Day’s love or Cesar Chavez’ gentle, tough courage. But I care and I’m willing to serve. It’s not as easy as in the 60s to frame an issue and forge a solution. But I care and I’m willing to serve. My mind and body are not so swift as in youth and my energy comes in spurts. But I care and I’m willing to serve. So many young people today say, "I’m so young, nobody’s going to listen." I’m not sure what to say or do. But I care and I’m willing to serve. And many say I can’t see or hear well, I stutter, I don’t speak good English, and I’m terrified of standing up and being criticized before others. But I care and I’m willing to serve.

Robert Kennedy cared and he stood and he challenged and he persevered. And so can each of us. So I hope on this wonderful day, on this wonderful occasion, that each of us remembering his legacy will ask God to use us, each of us, to save our children and to build a nation at this magical moment in history, that truly makes every child feel safe and healthy and welcome.

That will be worthy of the man we celebrate today. Thank you very much. (Applause)

Mr. Seigenthaler:

I would not for the world follow Marian Edelman, and I am not going to ask Kathleen Kennedy Townsend to do that. Instead, I’m going to ask the other members of this panel if there is any contribution you would like to make to the legacy of Robert Kennedy?

Mr. Seigenthaler:

Ed?

Mr. Guthman:

As I said earlier, that when Robert Kennedy spoke, he meant what he said. I hope, at some point, we get a candidate for some office who does that and who doesn’t just follow what the polls say and what the campaign consultants tell him will win, but is able to share with us his true vision. (Applause)

Mr. Shesol:

I will say we’ve heard a sort of a common lament about a lack of political leadership, certainly political leadership with the moral force of Robert Kennedy or Dr. King. And that is certainly the standard to which we ought to hold all our elected leaders. As one, at least for the next six weeks, who is still ostensibly in the
process, I can say that there are good people out there who are working to get us further down that road. And we have a very long way to go. There’s no question of that. But I think we’re still waiting for that sort of affirming vision to be expressed. And we can only keep trying to assert that.

Mr. Sandel:

I don’t really have anything to add except to emphasize that I think we should not easily accept the terms of political argument that we currently find around us. Robert Kennedy’s career, and especially his 1968 campaign, helps to remind us of some of the reasons that we should be uneasy and resist the complacencies of our politics across the political spectrum.

Mr. Hilty:

I want to thank everyone for being here and thank you quite profoundly for asking me to be a part of this day. It is a very moving day, and particularly in the last few minutes. Congressman Lewis’ comments compel us to remember what it was that Robert Kennedy was all about. It’s important to take this time to pause, to reflect. It’s been emotionally moving for me and I hope it has for the rest of you here, too.

Mr. Seigenthaler:

I would like to embrace every word that has been spoken in this session with regard to the legacy of Robert Kennedy and add just one sentence. And that is that he and Ethel gave us children whose commitment to public service, in a whole variety of ways, enriches the life of this country and enhances his legacy. Joe and Bobby and Courtney and Kerry and Max and Chris and Doug and Rory, each in his or her own way, carry on that legacy. Michael was lost before he fully could make a contribution to that, and David, the man-child who I loved so much, suffered the same fate. But all their children are so great, which brings me to Kathleen Kennedy Townsend, the eldest child of Robert F. Kennedy and Ethel. She served as deputy assistant Attorney General in the U.S. Department of Justice where her father, before her, was Attorney General, before becoming Lieutenant Governor of Maryland, a post to which she was elected by a popular mandate.

She chaired the Robert F. Kennedy Memorial Foundation and founded the Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights Award. She’s the Founder and Executive Director of Maryland Student Service Alliance. She made Maryland the very first state in our country to include a high school community service requirement. For all she’s done, for all she is, and for all she’s going to be, it’s my great pleasure to introduce Kathleen for the closing address.

Kathleen Kennedy Townsend:

Thank you, John. This has just been an extraordinary and meaningful day for me and for all the members of my family. I think each of us is honored that so many of you would come and pay tribute to my father. Many people came from all around the country. I met individuals from California, from Oregon, from Iowa, and, happily, from Maryland. I was particularly pleased about that group.

But so many people who are with us today are really are very special to me. After my father died, many of you would sit down with me and tell me stories about my father, so I got to know him better and to appreciate him even more. I’ve always been very grateful for that. I want to make sure each of you knows my gratitude and I thank you once again.

I’m very grateful for this opportunity to speak about my father’s legacy with so many friends that have kept his legacy alive. Scarcely a day goes by without somebody coming over to tell me how they had worked in that ‘68 campaign or the ‘64 campaign or how my father’s example or inspiration changed their lives. It really is an extraordinary tribute. And it gives me hope that his ideals and his work will continue. I think they will, and I
think that's what we're all about today.

I'd like to focus on just one aspect of my father's legacy that often gets overlooked. There's so much to talk about that I thought I would just focus on one part -- and that is his faith. I believe that much of the reason that my father's work resonated with so many can be drawn back to his spiritual convictions and how they shaped his passion for his pursuit of justice. Religion was a very big part of our lives. Like a lot of families, we said prayers before and after every meal. We went to Mass every Sunday, and when my mother had her way we went to Mass every day. Every night we prayed the Rosary and read a chapter of the Bible. In fact, when I told my grandmother that we read the Bible, she was horrified. She said Catholics didn't read the Bible. Priests did that.

My father's faith was not just a private faith. It wasn't confined to church on Sunday or even just questioning how we should conduct our lives. There was a profound link between my father's religious principles and his political principles. There was a spiritual grounding to his life, which offered him a sharp lens through which he viewed the nation and the world. It gave him a sense of urgency and passion with which he approached the political realm. This strongly affected the words that he used. He spoke to Americans and connected with them through the shared language of faith. It's a language that recognizes right and wrong, the higher aspirations of the soul, and our unbreakable connection to each other as children of God. He saw politics as a way in which he could fill the charge set forth by President Kennedy in the 1960 inaugural address: "To lead the land we love, asking His Blessings and His help, but knowing that here on earth, God's work must truly be our own."

I believe that my father's faith drove his work in two important ways. First, it dramatically sharpened his sense of justice. My father believed that we are children of the same God, created in His image. What that meant to him was that each of us contained a piece of the Divine, and therefore, the potential for greatness. With that potential, we have an obligation to raise ourselves up, to live not basely like animals, but nobly and justly in a manner befitting God's blessing.

It outraged my father when he saw powerful forces placing obstacles in the way of others. It didn't matter if it was oil companies in South America, racist institutions in the American South, or a pervasive indifference to the evils of poverty. To him, each represented a clear threat to the individual's ability to fulfill his or her God-given gifts. No one person had more right to that ability than anyone else.

This was emphasized for my brothers and sisters and myself in very personal ways during our childhood. I remember one day we were driving through the streets of Washington, D.C., and we were going block after block. My father said, "Look, there are no playgrounds. There's no place for these kids to play. There's no place for them to go. They're just like you. They have the same wants and needs, and yet they have no place to go." When he saw this problem, rather than wait for a law to pass, or get a grant from a governing institution, he raised the money and built the playground. I remember the day that we finally went there for the opening of the playground. He said, "Now children can play, just like you. They have the same needs and the same desires."

His conviction, of course, extended beyond playgrounds. It was the foundation for his work for freedom and equality and social justice here in America and throughout the world. In South Africa in 1966, speaking at the University of Capetown, he said, "We must recognize the whole human equality of all our people before God, before the law, before the counsels of government. We must do this not because it is economically advantageous, although it is; not because the laws of God command it, although they do; not because people in other lands wish it so. We must do it for the single and fundamental reason that it is the right thing to do."

Secondly, his faith offered him a moral perspective that enabled him to focus on the big questions. How do we solve the injustice of poverty? How do we make our country more just and more equitable for everyone? What is our obligation to our fellow citizens? These are enduring questions which were asked by our forefathers during the creation of our country and will be asked by our great-grandchildren when they take up the task of renewing American democracy for a fourth century. But even more than being American
questions, they’re essentially human questions. Listen to his words. In a 1968 talk about welfare reform, he drew back to a basic, existential theme:

"Human beings need a purpose. We need it as individuals. We need to sense it in our fellow citizens. And we need it as a society, as a people. We are born. We live. We die. There’s only a moment that we are here. The mystery and ambiguity of life is all around us. As children grow, they start to bombard us with questions and we try to answer. ‘Why do people kill one another?’ ‘Why do we live this way and other children live differently?’ ‘Why do we say one thing outside the house and another thing when we’re alone?’"

In the last analysis, we cannot feel good about ourselves if we have learned to shut out or distance others. To live peacefully and respectfully with each other, we need a certain kind of moral order, a certain kind of social and political order. That will be a nation we will be proud to have built for all of us. His was a politics that sought not just to manage the day-to-day operations of a country. He sought to find a way for people to lead lives of purpose and meaning in the face of life’s mystery and ambiguity. He sought to create a country that truly reflected our best selves and our highest aspirations.

Compare that to the politics of today, which too often trivializes what is important and magnifies what is trivial. We don’t have to look any further than this year’s presidential election, which seemed to hinge solely on how -- not whether, mind you -- but how we should deliver prescription drugs to our senior citizens. Now, it is an important question, to be sure, and Vice President Gore’s proposals, I’m sure, are worthy. But why weren’t we talking about how to insure every American’s access to health care? Millions of young people are growing up today believing violence is a useful tool in their lives. Where was the discussion on how to make our neighborhoods safe?

Where was the call for Americans to serve in the Peace Corps or Americorps? Where was the talk of our responsibility to the nation? Are our imaginations so impoverished that we can no longer, together, dream big dreams? We can’t pin all the blame on the candidates. I know very well, in campaigns you don’t always end up talking about the things that you want to. And certainly in the midst of historically good times, people are not seeking answers in the same way they were in the gray days of 1968. But then and now, Americans look to their leaders, not merely to create and distribute new benefits, but to offer clarity in a muddled world and to shape a nation in which people have an opportunity to come together with their fellow citizens to contribute something meaningful.

There is a question about the degree to which we Democrats are able to link our religious and moral convictions to our political convictions. The Christian right, in fact, does that quite well. The left, I am afraid, does not. And yet there is a nationwide hunger for purpose and for meaning. The bestseller lists are filled with slim volumes offering answers. For those of us who believe that politics has an obligation to reflect our most cherished values, the life of Robert Kennedy offers an example of how we can connect the values of faith and progressivism. When he returned home from South Africa, he wrote an article attacking the legal institutions of racism, both at home and abroad. He titled it, "What if God is Black?"

Benjamin Disraeli once said that duty couldn’t exist without faith. In Robert Kennedy, faith and duty met. I think, in the final analysis, my father’s enduring legacy is this: he challenged our nation to live up to its duty, to be its very best, to remember the people that some might wish to forget, to face up to the challenges that some would rather let lie, to dream big dreams, so big that it took all of us working together to make them real.

As I see it, the meaning of the nation’s lasting embrace of my father is that it does, in fact, hunger for a challenge. It wants to be called to serve, to contribute something to history. As we wait patiently for a new President, we carry impatient hopes for a leadership that will draw out the best in us and in our country. My father’s example shows how hard it is for a leader to break with the old ways of thinking and present a clear, new, moral and political vision. It’s not easy to keep faith. It takes courage and vision to preserve our connection to one another. That is precisely what we need in our national leadership to enable us to focus the direction of our country and to elevate the yearnings and aspirations of our nation. We tend to think in smaller
slices these days. We talk about business leaders and local leaders and state leaders. Each has a distinct constituency and a self-contained agenda. Because of the disintegrative powers of the information age, we need to reaffirm the power of a unifying force, the power of national leadership, a power that my father exemplified.

I believe our nation is ready to be challenged again. So let me conclude with some words from my father that seem particularly relevant this year.

"What we need is a better liberalism and a better conservatism. We need a liberalism and its wish to do good, yet knows that the answers to all problems is not money. Money can’t buy dignity, self respect, or fellow feeling among citizens. We need a conservatism and its wish to preserve the enduring values of the American society, but that recognizes the urgent need to bring opportunity to all citizens. That has the willingness to take action, to meet the needs of the future. What the new politics is, in the last analysis, is a reaffirmation of the best within the great political traditions of our nation. Compassion for those who suffer, determination to right the wrongs in our nation, and a willingness to think and act anew, free from old concepts and old illusions".

That's the kind of politics, that's the kind of leadership that the American people want. I know you want it. Good luck. God bless you.

Mr. Seigenthaler:

Thank you very much, Kathleen. Thank you so much, Kathleen, for those inspiring words about a legacy that is dear to us all. Before we adjourn, I would like to express our appreciation for Tom Putnam and to Charles U. Daley and to Paul Kirk and to Caroline Kennedy Schlossberg for the wonderful reception we’ve had here today in this Library. My deep thanks to each panelist for the compelling, and passionate thoughts about a man who inspired and led us all, enriching the lives of us all.

My thanks to the audience for all of your participation throughout this day. Your presence has meant so much to the people who have come to participate in this day of recollection and the memory.

In conclusion, I would ask each of you to reflect on the violence in our society, the violence in our schools, the conflict in our politics, the hostility in the world, and remember those words that Robert Kennedy so loved to quote, and did that night of Martin Luther King’s death. Let us take them with us and remember them as we remember him, "Let us dedicate ourselves to what the Greeks wrote so many years ago: to tame the savageness of man and make gentle the life of this world."

Thank you all for coming.