EDWARD M. KENNEDY ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW WITH ANTHONY LEWIS

June 18, 2009
Cambridge, Massachusetts

Interviewer

James Sterling Young

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TRANSCRIPT

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Young: This is a June 18 interview with Anthony Lewis in Cambridge. We've been talking a bit about the nature of the project. We've gone over the ground rules. We were just getting to the point of talking about why we've asked him to do this interview.

Because Senator [Edward M.] Kennedy has mentioned both you and your wife [Margaret Hilary Marshall] quite favorably, we might start out by saying how you came to observe or become acquainted with him.

Lewis: I think the real reason I'm here doing this is my friendship with and reportorial association with his older brother Robert [Kennedy]. The first I ever had anything to do with Edward Kennedy was in a clash with his brother. I was on a trip around the world with Bobby, which is what I called him and I'll call him here, in 1962, very shortly after he became [U.S.] Attorney General. We spent a month going around the world and we ended up in Berlin. We went west to go east; we went to Japan, Vietnam, India, and so on—maybe four or five journalists and Bobby and his family.

It was at the time when there was just beginning to be talk about Edward Kennedy running for the Senate. I thought that was a terrible idea. I suppose many right-thinking people did. [*laughing]* I meant that sarcastically. I said something about it, and Bobby was *furious*. I remember him saying, "I suppose you think that Eddie McCormack"—who was the opponent for the Senate—"would make a better Senator than my brother." He really got angry. That was my introduction to the subject of Edward Kennedy. I had never met him, but I knew him by reputation and it wasn't good. He'd had the Spanish exam taken for him and all of that stuff.

Well, it was a lesson in the truth about the Kennedys. They had a mysterious way of growing beyond what you'd imagine. That was certainly true of the President [John Fitzgerald Kennedy]. It was glaringly true of Robert Kennedy, who was my classmate at Harvard. I didn't know him then, but I followed him—

[BREAK]

Lewis: Robert Kennedy began with this reputation as ruthless; that was the popular adjective. I soon discovered that that wasn't true. He was a very interesting, deep, thoughtful—He hated to be considered liberal. He would say things like, "Oh, you liberals want me to do" so-and-so, but he was profoundly liberal in the best sense. We don't want to go on talking about him, but—

Young: No, to know the Kennedy brothers, or to find out about the Kennedy brothers and the relations between them and the differences between them and the similarities—the fact that you knew Bobby well is important.

Lewis: Again, I thought his appointment as Attorney General was a terrible idea. He began by appointing assistants who were of the most remarkable quality: Byron White as deputy, Nicholas Katzenbach in the Office of Legal Counsel, Burke Marshall, the Assistant Attorney General for Civil Rights, and so on. I don't want to leave anyone out. They were all at a very high level, and I knew several of them. They were anything but tokens or owed anything to Robert Kennedy. He picked people who were more experienced than he was, who had a high reputation in the law, and were wonderful. It was a stellar group of people. That wised me up.

He once said to me, apropos of something to do with the origins of his views on civil rights, that as a family they never had thought about the racial question; it just didn't arise in one of their unending conversations. I asked him how he communicated with his brother, the President, about it. He said something like, "We don't need formal communications. It happens between us." It was an invisible communication, and of course they talked all time, all day and every day.

Young: That was his brother. The disturbances of the early years at Selma and in Mississippi, and so forth were the eyeopener for all the Kennedys about this.

Lewis: Oh, undoubtedly, but it was even before that. Robert Kennedy famously made a trip down south—I think before the main disturbances you just mentioned—in which he saw hungry, starving children in Mississippi with distended stomachs, and he held them and cried. He loved children of any kind. I saw him with children in Japan, in the South, and so on. He woke up to the reality of race relations in the United States and communicated that to the President. Then of course, you couldn't live through Oxford, Mississippi, or Selma, the death of Medgar Evers. The killing of Medgar Evers had a profound effect, it was just—For Burke Marshall, it was as if his brother had been killed—because they felt powerless to prevent these things happening.

But that doesn't bring us to Edward Kennedy, with whom I had very little relationship. He became a Senator, and it was sort of—Well, I had to do it for Teddy, and gradually he became—

Young: And for his father, I've heard, over all of the objections of some of John's staff, who said he didn't need another Kennedy in Washington.

Lewis: Joe Kennedy didn't always get his way, but he got his way much of the time. There's this story about Clark Clifford and Joe Kennedy. Do you know that story?

Young: No, I don't.

Lewis: This is a Bobby story, not a Teddy story. Before his appointment as Attorney General, Clark Clifford, this Washington *éminence grise*, went to see Joe Kennedy and gave him all the

reasons why it wasn't a good idea to make Bobby Attorney General: bad for the Kennedy family, bad for President-elect Kennedy, and so on. When he was all through, Joe Kennedy said, "Mr. Clifford, that was a wonderful presentation, and I'm really grateful to you for coming to see me. Bobby's going to be Attorney General. But I'm still glad that you came to see me." [*laughing*]

Ask me some questions about Teddy, because I don't have much to volunteer.

Young: I'll ask if you have anything more to say about Joseph Kennedy. It's very difficult to come to grips with Ted without understanding the family and his relations with his family, his father, his mother, the fact that he was the last of the lot, so to speak.

Lewis: Yes.

Young: And it was a very competitive family, a very achievement-oriented family.

Lewis: It must have been terrible to be the youngest child in that family. Bobby, the smallest of the sons, had a tough time in that regard, with touch football and all that. Teddy's survival and recovery from his beginning at Harvard, and of course Chappaquiddick, is absolutely amazing. To have such a demanding father, an overbearing father, and to come through it all and be held, by everybody's reckoning, a very grown-up man, is something.

Young: Did you interview him?

Lewis: I probably did.

Young: You don't have any clear recollection or observation of—

Lewis: No, I've seen him more since I've left Washington. [*laughing*]

[BREAK]

Lewis: Unlike his two older brothers, he remained active, in his very special way, in Massachusetts. He picked judges. No Kennedy has ever become involved in the nitty-gritty of Massachusetts politics, which is pretty awful, like politics in most states nowadays. We've just had a recently retired speaker of the house indicted. His two predecessors as speaker of the state House of Representatives were convicted. [*laughing*] I never know about politicians. Why don't they learn? If you become speaker of the house and your two predecessors went to jail, wouldn't you think you'd watch out for it? I don't understand it.

Anyway, he has never been involved in any of that. The Kennedys have always been above that, and very successfully so, but they've picked judges, federal judges. Teddy controls the federal judges completely, and has done so brilliantly. There's an example of Edward Kennedy at work: selecting federal judges for Massachusetts. He's chosen all different kinds of judges, but superb

ones, maybe the top in the country, merits of all kinds: racial diversity, gender diversity, diversity of experience, defense lawyers, prosecutors—

[BREAK]

Lewis: He did something very unusual: he had a committee that helped him select judges. My wife served on the committee at one point—I can't remember when. It was all very high-toned; there was no politics in it—Of course there's always, in the end, the choice; that has political elements. What they forwarded to the Senator was strictly on merit. There was one ceremony where four or five new judges were sworn in here in Boston. One of them was Nancy Gertner, who had been a very hot defense lawyer and political liberal. Her husband was and is director of the local ACLU [American Civil Liberties Union], Reg Lindsay, who was a black lawyer in a wheelchair because of treatment for some injury, and others. It was very thrilling to see this group of people. It was unusual. That's Edward Kennedy. That's what he's done for this state.

He had a test when Mitt Romney ran against him. I watched the debate in Faneuil Hall. It was a question of whether Teddy was going to get through it. Some people thought, *Oh, he's not up to it*, but he was. He just wiped the floor with Romney and that was it.

Young: That was the comeback. He was sort of in trouble, wasn't he?

Lewis: Yes, people thought he was in trouble.

Young: What was the secret of his success over these many years in Massachusetts? Do you have any insights about that?

Lewis: I have a simple answer. He was somebody who, unlike many insufficiently confident leaders, didn't hesitate to pick the best people for himself. Some leaders are afraid of having strong men and women around them. They'd rather shine amongst a bunch of second-raters. That's never been the case with Ted Kennedy. He's had the best staff in the capital of the United States by far. Gregory Craig—you've undoubtedly talked to him—was his foreign policy man. He's had all the best. I've dealt a few times with his immigration person. He has a woman who deals with immigration cases here in Boston. She's like a one-woman court, and gets things done with a phenomenal talent, Emily Winterson.

Young: I've met her. I haven't interviewed her, but I have met her.

Lewis: She's phenomenal, just the best there is, and that's typical of Kennedy's staff.

Young: His Washington staff in the Senate certainly is, in the eyes of most people I've talked to—other Senators—by far the best staff.

Lewis: That's what I mean. He picks the best people. That sounds simple, but it isn't simple, because other people don't do it. [*laughing*]

Young: People have talked about how they came to join Kennedy on the staff. It's still mysterious how he identifies them, but he does have a system for identifying people.

Lewis: Evidently.

Young: He does. His former staff people who've worked out very well suggest people.

Lewis: My wife has a theory. She says, "Once you're a Kennedy staffer, you're always a Kennedy staffer," because he calls you for advice and the loyalties remain. It's true.

Young: It's quite remarkable. He also reaches out on issues to many people on the outside who are not staffers, who wouldn't be staffers of his, experts. He's quite famous for his issues dinners, to get himself educated about health care and so forth.

Lewis: That's another aspect of the same thing I mentioned: self-confidence, never to be too late to learn, and willing to listen to others. That requires a certain degree of confidence, and he has it.

Young: That even started, I understand, when he was running his first campaign here in 1962 and then again in '64 for the Senate. Bob Wood and a number of people here in Boston, who were initially of the same mind that I think you were, who didn't think it was a good idea, volunteered to educate him. At that time, he was interested in the street politics, I think less interested in the issues. But as he became a Senator, particularly after Chappaquiddick, but even before that, he wanted to know more than anybody else knew in the Senate about a particular issue that he had made his own issue.

Lewis: Like health.

Young: Health care, immigration. All kinds of aspects of health care: hospitals, medical devices, cancer research, the whole bit. We have a great many people to interview, because he's been in touch with them about helping him out.

You wrote a little piece about the '94 Senate campaign, about health care and the debate.

Lewis: I don't remember. I should have looked up my columns, but I didn't.

Young: There were so many I couldn't read them all, but that one I have read. You wrote many columns on subjects of interest to him. Why don't you tell me about certain of his federal bench nominations, other than the selection of appellate and district judges. You certainly covered the Supreme Court, and he was an important player, going back to [G. Harrold] Carswell.

Lewis: I was in London during the Carswell nomination. I wrote about it, but I wrote about it from London. [Clement] Haynsworth and Carswell were the two nominees. I've thought, in retrospect, that I was unfair to Haynsworth. He was a good judge and an honorable one.

Young: Haynsworth, by the way, was one of the judges on Kennedy's moot court at the University of Virginia Law School.

Lewis: Is that right? I never knew that. That's really interesting.

Young: [*laughing*]

Lewis: And did he oppose the nomination? Yes, of course.

Young: Yes. I think reluctantly, but he came to do it. He was convinced after a while. It didn't occur to him to take a stand on this.

Lewis: The ground on which he was rejected, his ownership of some shares, was pretty thin. In retrospect, I didn't call it right the first time.

Young: You did cover the [Robert] Bork nomination—

Lewis: Yes, I wrote about Bork.

Young: And he was a big player on that one.

Lewis: He was big player, and he's been much criticized for his quick-off-the-mark comments. I thought it was a very shrewd thing to do. It laid down the issues. It was exaggerated, but not terribly exaggerated. The statement was couched in emotional terms, "In Bork's America." It was a shrewd, if crude, statement of disagreement with Bork's views. Well, Bork's views, as it turns out, were pretty extreme. We know that now. If it wasn't evident then, it has become evident since, with his extremely one-sided book and all that. I don't need to spell it out. I wrote quite a few things on the Bork nomination. Some time later, maybe a year later, I was at some occasion where he and I were on the same panel. Before the panel, when we met, I put out my hand and he wouldn't shake it. [*laughing*] I guess he was entitled.

Young: He's accused by a number of people, a number of my colleagues—

Lewis: Who?

Young: Henry Abraham and others—of having politicized the nomination process for the Supreme Court. He has an answer to that, the Senator does, but I'd like to know what your take on that is.

Lewis: I feel awful about the politicization of the confirmation process, and we're going through it right now. It's so ludicrous, with the Republicans scratching for something—anything—that they can use to stop Judge [Sonia] Sotomayor.

Young: At the time, did you see this as a turning point for which he's to be held accountable?

Lewis: I felt very strongly it would be a disaster for Bob Bork to be on the Supreme Court, and I believe that today. I haven't changed my mind. Many things would be different if Bork had been on the Supreme Court, because he's very strong, very dogged. If you put Bork where [Anthony] Kennedy is now—and it was Kennedy who filled the vacancy—many things would be different. The gay rights case would be different. You don't have to speculate, because Bork has said so. I thought the opposition to Bork was justified and wise.

That it left Republicans with an angry feeling is understandable, but this country has been through highly politicized Supreme Court confirmation battles before. In the 19th century, quite a few nominees were rejected. You probably know that. What's the alternative? I don't know. I regret what's happened, and I think a lot of it is getting even for Bork, still, but does that make me think the Bork nomination should have been handled differently? No, because I think it was still important.

Young: You know the Supreme Court. I'm not a student of the Court and the nominations, but one aspect, certainly, of Kennedy's project on Bork, involved the activation of and coordination of many outside groups that became very importantly involved in it. That's one thing people mean by "politicization." It seems to me, in retrospect, that the [Ronald] Reagan folks never anticipated that there would be such well-organized and -orchestrated opposition to him. Do you have any insights on that?

Lewis: I don't. I know only tangentially about some of those efforts, one of them to win Arlen Specter's vote, which was very important at the time. He voted against Bork, but that was a scholarly effort. Law professors talked to Specter; it wasn't anything illegitimate. It was organized, but I can't see that it was wrong

Young: There was no counter-organization, it seems to me.

Lewis: No, I think they were totally taken by surprise. Bork was certainly taken by surprise.

Young: That's remarkable. Is that an example of misplaced confidence in one's ability to prevail? [*laughing*] In retrospect it seems so predictable that there would be a major effort to prevent his nomination.

Lewis: Most nominees' views are not really understood, or if understood, there are reasons not to make the fight. Take Clarence Thomas; nobody could have been in any doubt as to what Clarence Thomas's real views were on the issues that people cared about. He said he'd never spent a minute thinking about abortion—that was a joke—and had no views on the subject. Well, his views were pretty well known in general. Similarly, with Justice [Samuel] Alito or Chief Justice [John] Roberts, I had no doubt how they were going to vote on every issue, but my view of the matter is that Presidents have the right to nominate Supreme Court Justices; that's the connection with the democratic system we have. The appointment process is part of the democratic process, and I accept it. I would oppose it, but not expect to be able to stop those whose views I might regard as unacceptable.

Young: There was the view that the Senate has a political obligation to support the President's nominees.

Lewis: Historically, that's not true.

Young: But you've heard it, this opposition, that the benefit of the doubt should be given to the President on this.

Lewis: Yes, and I understand that and I guess I agree with it. It was certainly given in the case of George W. Bush's nominees. He got the benefit of the doubt with some very doubtful nominees.

It was the conservatives who stopped the nomination of Harriet Miers. Maybe Harriet Miers wouldn't have been a bad Supreme Court Justice. I don't know. I didn't know anything about her views, but it was an insulting nomination. She had no experience to boast of and no qualifications for the job.

Young: Well, with the Clarence Thomas nomination, Senator [John] Danforth—

Lewis: His sponsor.

Young: He was not only his sponsor, but he was a very active supporter for the Thomas nomination, almost the way Kennedy was a very active opponent of Bork. *That* nomination, on the other hand, seemed to be extremely well sponsored, well organized, well orchestrated.

Lewis: I always thought the Thomas nomination succeeded, that the confirmation occurred, because of one Senator, and that is Senator Sam Nunn. Sam Nunn voted to confirm Clarence Thomas. I think he did so largely because of the racial issue. Had Sam Nunn voted against, one or two other Senators from the South would have voted against and the nomination would have been stopped. The vote was very close. I forget how close, but a few votes. How much of that was due to the organization that you're talking about, I don't know, but probably some.

Young: I've heard a lot about the Federalist Society [*laughing*] from the people who were not happy with its role. This was organized in the Reagan years, wasn't it? Do you see that as an important new element?

Lewis: Yes, I think it is. I grew up at a time when, as somebody said, there was no conservative philosophy in the United States. You can say it began with [William F.] Buckley [Jr.] and the gradual construction of a conservative view of life, view of politics, which became quite dominant. The Federalist Society was simply a legal arm of that, and a highly successful one. You have people like Chief Justice Roberts and Sam Alito; that speaks for itself.

Young: As I understand it, there was a concerted effort to put forward conservative candidates, starting in the Reagan years, for the lower bench—

Lewis: Oh, yes. And a very determined effort to check out their qualifications, to make sure they would do exactly what was wanted of them, and a very successful effort, though not entirely. Every once in a while a judge fools you. I have a high opinion of judges as such, and I think they—not including Chief Justice Roberts in this praise—on the whole try to act like judges and escape their partisan or ideological past. Chief Justice Roberts has a program and he hasn't parted from it for a microsecond.

Young: Alito is the same, isn't he?

Lewis: Not quite the same, but close.

Young: But opposition to them was going nowhere—

Lewis: Nowhere, because there was the presumption of correctness in the President, as you said, to give the President some weight. There was no sense of a possibility of winning, which takes the steam out of the opposition. You want to have a chance to win.

Young: Sure, sure. Do you want to dial ahead to the Sotomayor nomination?

Lewis: I don't know what all this has to do with Ted Kennedy, but I'm enjoying the conversation anyway.

Young: I have not yet talked with his people about this nomination, so I guess he will not be playing a big part in it. But it resonates—It's now something on the other side, isn't it?

Lewis: Yes.

Young: A new President. Is it a nonideologically determined nomination, or what? How do you see it?

Lewis: She's a rather middle-ground figure. She's hardly a raving radical in the law. She's a sound choice. She's very smart. She has a long record of legal accomplishment. [*laughing*] I don't really see what there is to argue about. She's middle of the road; she's as close to the middle as the Republicans are likely to get.

Young: The doubts about her that—There is a new source of doubt every week, it seems, coming from the conservative wing—she's not experienced enough, or she's not this, and then Newt Gingrich and so forth get into it. I'm wondering, historically, whether as you track through the years—Kennedy has been involved in Supreme Court nominations a long time, maybe not now, but tracking the path of historical experience on these nominations—whether you see the heyday of the Federalist Society as now over and that something else is going to take its place.

Lewis: I don't think the heyday is over, because there are a lot of members and they meet and have very successful meetings. They get top-notch speakers and they're well organized. No, I don't think that the heyday is over, except in the sense that they don't control the political system anymore.

Young: That's what I meant, the political—

Lewis: That's true. We have a President of another view, and a majority in the Senate and House.

The thing that the Federalist Society and its supporters have done—This is a serious point now; it's not to do with Senator Kennedy—They've done something that I regard as quite awful: they have made the public believe that conservative legal views are the norm, and that if you don't agree with them you're an activist, or you're a radical, or you're something. They've made the public believe that there is some abstract "law," and that departure from that is displaying the word they've used to criticize Sotomayor, "empathy." You're bad if you have empathy.

Well, if you know anything about judges and the law, you know that there is no such thing as an abstract, always-right answer—that's why we have judges—and that what judges decide comes

in part out of what Justice [Oliver Wendell] Holmes [Jr.] called his "can't-helps": your life, your birth, your family, your education. People are what they are. They're not abstractions, and judges bring to the job their life. Judge Sotomayor will bring to her job her life, and it will be a different life from that of John Roberts, brought up in a rich household, never having to think for a moment of struggle, and committed to the right from birth. The notion that judges are just abstract accounting machines has somehow been sold by the right as a truth, and it's rubbish.

Holmes said in a dissent, "Law is not a brooding omnipresence in the sky." Well, it isn't. There is no such abstraction as "the law," as the right answer automatically. I hardly need to convince you of this, I'm sure, but cases that get to the Supreme Court don't have an obvious right answer. That's why they're there!

Young: Except that the answer is original intent.

Lewis: Yes, but that isn't easy either, because how do you find what the original intent was? Who tells you? There's very little material as to the intent of most clauses of the Constitution. Due process of law? Who could possibly read out what [James] Madison thought "due process of law" meant? You can't. Then you might go to the ratifying conventions of the Constitution. Please.

Young: I used to make fun of original intent, but then I saw that many of my students took it very seriously. [*laughing*]

Lewis: It answers itself, and [Antonin] Scalia has hardly been a faithful applier of the doctrine of original intent. When he wants to decide something, he decides it.

Young: It's the unwritten ink of the Constitution.

Lewis: Scalia cast the deciding vote in the flag-burning case, that burning the flag was speech, protected by the First Amendment. Find that in the original intent.

Young: Do you have any comments on Kennedy on the international scene? As I've been through this project—He's apparently much more consistently and widely involved in what you might call foreign affairs than he's usually recognized as being.

Lewis: That's true. And there's very little in it for him politically. That's strictly what seems to him to be what's demanded by right, correct thinking, or decency or wisdom, but not politics. There's no political gain, usually. I don't know about South Africa, a prominent example. The struggle against apartheid—Maybe with black voters it had a certain. . . .

Young: You weren't with him on that trip, were you? In '85—

Lewis: No.

Young: When he was there? Ted was comparing his trip there with his brother's, and it was a different time.

Lewis: There can be no doubt that he went to South Africa because his brother went to South Africa. Bobby's speech had such repercussions. It had an enormous impact on the country, the trip did, and particularly the Cape Town speech. You know the speech? The "ripple speech," they call it.

Young: Yes, the ripple speech.

Lewis: A wonderful speech. He stopped off in London on his way to South Africa and asked me to get together some people who knew about South Africa, and they came to lunch. It was a very good group. He started out by saying, "I don't want you to tell me things to do that would make me look good but would endanger anybody, or give the government an excuse to crack down on people. I want some suggestions that would be constructive and helpful." That was the tone of it. That was what was always so amazing about Robert Kennedy. I don't know that he followed any of the advice. The speech was written by Adam Walinsky—I think he wrote the speech, but I'm not sure; I wasn't there—and it had a profound effect. There was a Nieman Fellow from South Africa, Percy Qoboza, who named his son Robert Kennedy Qoboza because of his trip. Other people ran down the street after him. It had a profound effect.

Young: Ted's trip in '85—I'm not sure he was *eager* to go, actually, but Desmond Tutu and [Allan] Boesak were very strong in their requests that he come. It was a bad time—

Lewis: A terrible time, awful. That's the significance of Bobby's visit too. It made people feel that there was someone out there who cared about them.

Young: That's what he said when the other Kennedys were gone and Teddy was the other voice of America—of course Reagan was President at that time.

Lewis: I forget whether the sanctions bill had passed—

Young: No, that was after. When he came back, he was working on that. It passed, over Reagan's veto. But the trip itself probably could not have had the effect, because of the internal situation then prevailing, that Bobby's could.

Lewis: That's absolutely true. After all, we know now, with the wisdom of retrospect, that apartheid was in its death throes and the government was completely savage in its attempt to preserve itself.

When was [Stephen] Biko killed? Around then? Stephen Biko was the black nationalist leader who was imprisoned and then beaten to death in prison. That was a terrible episode—

Young: Yes. I don't know.

Lewis: That was about the worst episode.

Young: There was a black nationalist group that was demonstrating against [Edward M.] Kennedy.

Lewis: I didn't know that.

Young: "Go home, go home." They prevented him from giving a major speech. They didn't want apartheid and they didn't want. . . .

Lewis: It makes the denouement all the more miraculous.

Young: Yes, it does.

Lewis: Nelson Mandela—Wow, were they lucky to have him.

Young: You were in London still when the busing controversy occurred in Boston?

Lewis: Yes.

Young: So you didn't see that up close.

Lewis: No, although I'd have been wrong about that, too, I think.

Young: What would you have thought about that?

Lewis: I'd have thought that the judge was probably right. There had been a long, dogged opposition to doing anything to break up white supremacy in the Boston schooling situation, especially from South Boston, and Judge Arthur Garrity—He came up through the Irish political system, but was an honest, modest, decent character. The South Boston Irish hated him, and really gave him a hard time, but he was only trying to do the right thing. I have no doubt of that. I'd have been in favor of him. But in retrospect, it didn't work. It just drove people to the suburbs. But we're over that now. The famous picture of the man attacking Ted Landsmark with a flagpole, do you remember that?

Young: No.

Lewis: Well, that's what it was like.

Young: They were really after him too. He gave a speech in Quincy, a Knights of Columbus breakfast, I think it was, and they laid for him outside. They slashed the tires of his car—

Lewis: Is that right?

Young: Smeared feces on the door handles. A crowd followed him and his party. They said, "Jeez, I don't know anybody in this area or we could go to a house." They made it to a subway—and the subway was stoned—to get on a train to come back to Boston. It was really hairy.

Lewis: I had forgotten that. That's typical of Kennedy to do that, to go despite the difficulty. He's really been committed on race. Not to take anything away from his natural instincts, but again Bobby's example must have been very powerful for him.

Young: Yes. He just appeared in the Senate at the beginning of Jack's effort to get a civil rights bill through, which he never got through—[Lyndon] Johnson did—but that was the third brother coming—

Lewis: He inherited the issue, no doubt.

Young: He inherited the issue, but could not play a leading role. He was too junior, but played a symbolic role maybe; Lyndon Johnson was the one. It was an interesting start for one's career: after just a few months in office, his brother was assassinated, and four years later he was the only one left.

Lewis: If you think of these things, Teddy and Bobby—I don't know about the President, he's another fish—naturally identified with the underdog. Of all the other elements that went into their considerations, that was one, the victims, whether in South Africa or South Boston.

Young: Do you think that came from an early age, or from experience once they got into public life?

Lewis: Historically there probably was something with the Kennedys, from Joe onward, of the Irish experience in this country, starting out as a hated minority and having to claw past the Yankees. Joe certainly never forgot it, and some of that must have rubbed off on his children, although they were privileged and had—

Young: They were *very* privileged.

Lewis: Yes, they were very privileged, but the historical recollection—You can't think of them as angry outsiders, because they were insiders, but I think it's there in their memory. That's one element, the identification with the underdog, but also because that was the thing facing the country. You do your duty. Robert Kennedy became Attorney General without any—As he said to me, "I had no history on the subject. We never talked about it. I didn't know"—but there he was, confronted with this thing. That was his job.

Young: The same was true of his brother John. This wasn't on his particular agenda when he was elected.

Lewis: Not at all. He tried to avoid it, because he knew that he'd been elected narrowly, with the support of southern Democrats, and he didn't want to—Some of the leading figures, the Governor of Georgia, [S. Ernest] Vandiver, and others who had supported him didn't want him to do anything.

Young: He also had the southerners in the House of Representatives and in the Senate.

Lewis: That was the southern Democrats' heyday. Now they are Republicans.

Young: Yes.

Lewis: No, his speech in June of 1963 was the turning point. I remember that speech so well. You can trace it all back to Bobby and his experiences in the South. Not that you'd have been able to ignore it, but how could a President of the United States ignore the bus boycott or the [James] Meredith clash or all the things you've mentioned? Medgar Evers? John Kennedy was slow to come to it, but when he came to it, he came to it. I was in the House when Johnson delivered his speech there—

Young: You were?

Lewis: Which was at the end of the thing. It took a minute to realize what he'd said. At the end of the speech he said, more or less, "There will be enormous opposition to overcome, but we shall overcome." He stopped and I thought, My God, he just said, "We shall overcome." [*laughing*] And he did.

Young: Yes. Did you have any thoughts about Kennedy in Northern Ireland and the peace process?

Lewis: Just admiring ones. I don't know this because I had no intimate contact with it, but my impression is that he was largely responsible for getting the visa for Gerry Adams.

Young: And Joe Cahill after that.

Lewis: Yes. And those visas made the eventual solution possible—

Young: That was a tough call for him, but he had been involved in the peace process for many, many years—

Lewis: Oh, yes.

Young: Often behind the scenes. It's a remarkable story, how he met John Hume and came to work along the ideas of the process rather than the fighting Irish, being pro-IRA [Irish Republican Army], anti-Brit. His sister [Jean Kennedy Smith] was very much involved in Gerry Adams's decision. She was Ambassador there at the time.

Lewis: I met her there. She was very good. Yes, it was quite something in domestic political terms for him to get out as far as he did in favor of the peace process, because so much of the American Irish history has been this knee-jerk "Brits out" sentiment.

Young: Brits out. And you know about what was called the "four horsemen"? Kennedy, Pat Moynihan, [Thomas P.] Tip O'Neill, and [Hugh] Carey, who was a Congressman from New York and later Governor, formed the four horsemen, a group to take a stand against guns and to try to turn the Irish-American sentiment in favor of working for the peace process, and to not send money for guns to Ireland—

Lewis: It would be like Chuck Schumer joining a similar group on Israel today. Unlikely.

Young: Yes, but it was a very interesting story. I went over to Ireland and interviewed some of the older Prime Ministers and John Hume and others who were crucial at that time. What's remarkable is how his fingerprints are on everything having to do with the process.

Lewis: Isn't that interesting?

Young: Yes, it's remarkable. It's a story about a very long, arduous involvement in a very uncertain process. Every step forward they'd make, there'd be an effort to blow it up.

Lewis: And it was a process that you would have thought at the beginning was a no-win for him. That's what's so gutsy about him, taking that on. Think, at the beginning, of the dominance of the IRA view in the Irish community in this country. That's pretty brave.

Young: I wonder if he ever thinks, *This is a losing cause*, of anything that he believes in very strongly.

Is he a liberal? Would you call Ted Kennedy a liberal?

Lewis: Oh, yes. Absolutely. Why, do you doubt it?

Young: No, but I asked Ken Galbraith that question and he said [*laughing*] after he thought a while, "Well, as liberal as he can be and still get something done."

Lewis: Well, he gets a lot done. After all, he sees eye-to-eye sometimes with Orrin Hatch.

Young: Oh, yes, a lot. When I started this project, I talked with some of the people who were also in the running to get the project. He did due diligence; Kennedy and some of his friends, Dave Burke, did a lot of canvassing to figure out who might do the oral history. I asked one of the people at Columbia who was one of the leaders in the oral history profession, "What would you have done? How do you see the project?" He said, "What you're doing is the story of the rise and fall of liberalism in America." That really struck me. I decided that that was not what this project was going to be about. [*laughing*]

Lewis: That's what this man said?

Young: That was the general view. He loved him and all that, but felt his day was gone. It was four or five years ago that I did this.

You would say liberalism isn't dead?

Lewis: No, it's a constrained kind of liberalism today. When you look at—This morning's *New York Times* had a very good financial column on page one by Joe Nocera about [Barack] Obama's financial regulatory message and proposal; it just tore it apart. It said, "It's not [Franklin] Roosevelt." That was the headline. And that's right, it's not Roosevelt.

Young: No, it couldn't be.

Lewis: I guess it couldn't be. It would be nice if it were, but it probably couldn't be. Obama is not a man of the left naturally. The conservative portrait of him as a wrecker of institutions is the opposite of the truth. He's afraid to tamper with any institutions. That's okay. I like him a lot. I wish him well, and I accept his judgments—

Young: Why do you suppose Kennedy declared for him early? That's the first time Kennedy has done that, declared when a primary race was shaping up.

Lewis: I haven't the faintest idea. That was a brave thing, too. Think of the relationships with [Hillary] Clinton. Maybe it's as simple as thinking he had the best chance to win, although why

he'd have thought that at the time, I don't know. It wasn't the popular wisdom, was it? Black man running for President?

Young: No, it wasn't. But he certainly invoked the Kennedy spirit when he did it.

Lewis: Yes. I guess Hillary Clinton had no choice but to forgive Ted Kennedy quickly, but some others she hasn't altogether forgiven, like Bill Richardson. [*laughing*]

Young: I wouldn't know about that.

Lewis: I know only from reading the newspaper and talking to people.

Young: Do you have any insights on Kennedy and [Jimmy] Carter? You wrote a fair amount about Kennedy's Presidential plans and ambitions over the years, but what was it between Kennedy and Carter that didn't work? You pointed out in one of your pieces that they're not all that far apart on many issues of policy.

Lewis: No, look at today; look at Carter today. He looks better all the time. Did you see his remarks in Gaza?

Young: Yes.

Lewis: Pretty good! I don't think it was personal. I don't really know. The only column I remember writing was one when I traveled on Kennedy's plane, after he'd lost the primaries and had no chance, but he still kept going and was very cheerful. The headline on the column was, "Why is this man smiling?"

Young: Yes, that's the column. Why is he still running?

Lewis: Why is he still running? I can't answer that question any more than I can answer the one about coming out for Obama. At the start, he may have thought he had a chance to be the nominee and to win—his last chance. There was a general discontent with Carter that I didn't agree with. Many Democrats didn't like Jimmy Carter. The public didn't like Jimmy Carter. I never understood it; maybe that's because I didn't agree with it. I thought he was a pretty good President, but he's universally rated a failure, so I'm not a good source on that subject.

Young: The conflict is styled sometimes as a conflict between the liberal part of the Democratic Party and the electorate against the Carter move, which only partially adopted the liberal stance on things. The labor movement was apparently very strong in support of Kennedy, and not at all happy with Carter.

Lewis: You're absolutely right. Many Democrats, both in the labor movement and elsewhere, just didn't like Jimmy Carter, thought he was a sell-out and so on. I thought he did what he could, given the reality of American political attitudes, which are by nature very conservative, at least in modern times—

Young: Which he said a number of times, but not in that way. To some of the liberals his view was, There's a train wreck coming and you don't see the train coming. There was a conservative train coming.

Lewis: That wasn't wrong.

Young: No, that wasn't wrong. It didn't do him a hell of a lot of good, though. Okay, I guess we can wind up.

Lewis: You've been very patient with me. We've had a discussion about life, and I warned you that I wouldn't know anything about Ted Kennedy.

Young: Well, the view of Kennedy from different vantage points, from the vantage point of liberals and people who weren't close to him, is also important for the project.

A last question: When we're all dead and gone, what do you think history should pay attention to with regard to his work in the Senate and the kind of figure he cut in American political history in this last almost half-century now?

Lewis: If you look at the regard of his colleagues of all ideologies and at his impact on so many things, the historical lesson is the importance of commitment. Ted Kennedy was committed to a number of propositions that he faithfully maintained with extraordinary wisdom and resourcefulness, compromising a lot to get legislation through and to get things done, but never yielding in his basic outlook on issues. He made a great difference doing that.

Thank you.

Young: Thank you.