

*The*  
PRESIDENTIAL  
RECORDINGS  
  
JOHN F. KENNEDY

➔➔➔➔ *THE GREAT CRISES, VOLUME TWO* ➔➔➔➔

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SEPTEMBER–OCTOBER 21, 1962

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## Monday, October 1, 1962

The President managed to get about three hours' sleep after the previous night's vigil. Still in the family quarters, he called Governor Ross Barnett to press for some local assistance in keeping order. Concerned that a large number of outsiders would be in the area, the President believed that local officials would be especially useful in helping to keep the peace.

8:46 A.M.

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*And I think that doesn't change your position on the issue, but at least it helps maintain order, which is what we've got to do today.*

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### Conversation with Ross Barnett<sup>1</sup>

*Begins in midconversation.*

**Ross Barnett:** . . . let the public know we've talked so many times, don't you think?

**President Kennedy:** That's correct. Now here's what I'm going to . . .

**Barnett:** Now, I can tell you . . . I think you said it mighty well last night, that "tried to reach the conclusion and couldn't," or words to that effect.

**President Kennedy:** Now, I was very . . . As you know in my speech, I didn't even mention [*unclear*] . . .

**Barnett:** "[*Unclear*] fail," I believe you said.<sup>2</sup>

**President Kennedy:** That's right, you know, and I didn't go into . . .

**Barnett:** You made a wonderful statement there.

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1. Dictabelt 4G3, Cassette B, John F. Kennedy Library, President's Office Files, Presidential Recordings Collection.

2. The text of Kennedy's 30 September 1962 radio and television speech on the situation at the University of Mississippi can be found in the *Public Papers of the Presidents: John F. Kennedy, 1962* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1963), pp. 726–28.

**President Kennedy:** Well, now, the thing is, Governor, I want your help in getting these state police to continue to help during the day because they're their own people. And we are going to have a lot of strange troops in there, and we are going to have paratroopers in and all the rest. And I think the state police should be the key, and that depends on you.

**Barnett:** Oh, I . . . You'll have, you'll have the whole force that we have.

**President Kennedy:** Well, now, you tell them . . .

**Barnett:** The [*unclear*] men are not equipped like yours.

**President Kennedy:** I understand that. But during the daytime they can help keep order on these roads and keep a lot of people from coming in. And I think that doesn't change your position on the issue, but at least it helps maintain order, which is what we've got to do today.

**Barnett:** All right, Mr. President.

**President Kennedy:** Thank you, Governor.

**Barnett:** I'll stay here now.

**President Kennedy:** Thank you very much.

**Barnett:** Thank you so much.

**President Kennedy:** And keep after your state police now.

**Barnett:** I will.

**President Kennedy:** Thanks.

**Barnett:** I'll call him as soon as we hang up . . .

**President Kennedy:** Thanks.

**Barnett:** . . . n' tell him to do all he can to keep peace.

**President Kennedy:** OK, thanks, Governor.

**Barnett:** And when'll I hear from you again?

**President Kennedy:** I'll be talking to you about noon, my time.

**Barnett:** OK. Thank you so much. Good-bye.

**President Kennedy:** OK, Governor.

*President Kennedy hangs up.*

Still upstairs at the White House, the President called the solicitor general, Archibald Cox, to discuss some legal issues raised by the Oxford riot. In particular, the President was considering seeking the arrest of Governor Barnett and Major General Edwin Walker. The President was due to see Cox at the Supreme Court in less than a half hour at the swearing in of Arthur Goldberg as associate justice. He was giving the Solicitor General some warning as to what was on his mind.

9:31 A.M.

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*I wonder if we can get more precise information on where we are legally on arresting people, including the Governor if necessary and others?*

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### Conversation with Archibald Cox<sup>3</sup>

*Phone rings.*

**Evelyn Lincoln:** Hello.

**Unidentified:** I have Mr. Archibald Cox, the solicitor general, returning the President's call.

**Lincoln:** OK.

**President Kennedy:** Hello.

**Archibald Cox:** Good morning, Mr. President.

**President Kennedy:** Good morning, I'm just on my way up there.<sup>4</sup> Now, the only question I had was whether there are any additional proclamations or powers, et cetera, that we might need in the Mississippi matter if it gets worse, for arresting people, and under what charge and what legal penalties they face, and so on. For example, we want to arrest General Walker, and I don't know whether we just arrest him under disturbing the peace or whether we arrest him for more than that.<sup>5</sup> I wonder if . . . How long are you going to be at the court this morning?

**Cox:** Not beyond half past ten.

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3. Dictabelt 4G4, Cassette B, John F. Kennedy Library, President's Office Files, Presidential Recordings Collection.

4. The President was on his way to the Supreme Court to attend the swearing in of Arthur J. Goldberg as associate justice.

5. Major General Edwin A. Walker, U.S. Army, retired, was on the scene in Oxford and was present in the crowd on the night of the riot. On 1 October, he was arrested on four charges, including insurrection, and was held in lieu of \$100,000 bail. After his arrest, Walker asserted, "They don't have a thing on me." He also issued a statement to Governor Ross Barnett, claiming his (Walker's) efforts had been undertaken on behalf of the "stand for freedom everywhere." While Walker apparently played more of an observer's role in the melee, prior to the riot, he had issued a call from his home in Dallas, urging "patriotic" Americans to join him in Mississippi to oppose the federal government and the integration of the campus. Worth noting is that in 1957, Walker had commanded federal troops in Little Rock, Arkansas, in a celebrated event in the history of the civil rights movement; in 1962, he observed, he would be on the right side. After resigning from the Army in 1961, Walker had devoted himself to public affairs; his activities often centered on the claim that Communists had infiltrated the U.S. Government and the country generally. On 6 October, Walker was released on \$50,000 bail, and returned to Texas the next day, where he was greeted by some 200 supporters. He was never tried.

**President Kennedy:** Yeah, well then I wonder if we can get more precise information on where we are legally on arresting people, including the governor if necessary and others?<sup>6</sup>

**Cox:** Right.

**President Kennedy:** And what the penalties are because we might want to announce that on the radio and television that anyone involved in any demonstration or anything would be subject to this penalty, and maybe the General could announce it.<sup>7</sup>

**Cox:** Right. Good-bye.

**President Kennedy:** All right. OK. Thank you.

**Cox:** Thank you.

After returning from the Supreme Court, the President met with David Bell and Elmer Staats on the federal budget. At 11:30 A.M., the President would be presenting the Distinguished Service Medal to General Lyman Lemnitzer, the outgoing Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Cyrus Vance, the secretary of the Army, was expected to be in attendance. Before Vance came to the White House, Kennedy wanted to be sure that the U.S. Army contingent in Mississippi was going to be large enough for any contingency.

11:12 A.M.

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*Now how are we doing on our schedule?*

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### **Conversation with Cyrus Vance and Robert McNamara<sup>8</sup>**

**President Kennedy:** Hello.

**Cyrus Vance:** Yes, Mr. President.

**President Kennedy:** Oh, yeah, I understood they're having some riot-

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6. Barnett was never arrested because the Kennedy administration believed the potential costs outweighed any possible gains that might accrue from his arrest and prosecution. According to a January 1963 White House memorandum [see Victor S. Navasky, *Kennedy Justice* (pbk. ed.; New York: Atheneum, 1977, pp. 237-38], there was little point in arresting and trying the governor, which would have made him a "hero."

7. Attorney General Robert Kennedy.

8. Dictabelt H, Cassette B, John F. Kennedy Library, President's Office Files, Presidential Recordings Collection.

ing downtown, and so on, and throwing rocks, and so on, at the troops. Now how are we doing on our schedule?

**Vance:** Our schedule is still proceeding as I gave it to you [*seems to be sound of hanging up a telephone*], sir.

**President Kennedy:** Yeah, well, you don't know . . . Has anybody arrived this morning?

**Vance:** [*speaking off the telephone to someone in the room*] Has anybody arrived this morning from those 1,700?

[*speaking to President Kennedy*] Not yet, due in earliest at, what [*speaking off the phone to someone in the room*], ten o'clock their time is it? Let's see, what's their time?

**President Kennedy:** Midnight. That'd be midday.

**Vance:** 11:20.

**President Kennedy:** 11:20 their time?

**Vance:** Yep.

**President Kennedy:** That's 1:20 our time, isn't it?

**Vance:** Yes.

**President Kennedy:** Now that is what, 1,700 more?

**Vance:** Yeah. That's, let's see, that first increment is 900. Yeah.

**President Kennedy:** And they're due in at 1:20? What group is that?

**Vance:** 1:20. Yeah, 1:20 our time.

**President Kennedy:** What group is . . . ?

**Vance:** That is the 82nd Airborne.

**President Kennedy:** Right. I see. OK. Fine. All right. Are you going to come over to this ceremony . . . ?<sup>9</sup>

**Vance:** No, I thought I'd better stay here, sir.

**President Kennedy:** I see. Well, now I talked to Secretary McNamara; he said something about you might be able to have 20,000 troops by midnight. Is . . . ?

**Vance:** That's right. We are taking steps to get them in. The orders have been given. The only limiting factor may be the weather, which is closing in. But we're developing alternates so that we can get them in some way or other.

**President Kennedy:** I see. You mean you might send them to Memphis and then what?

**Vance:** If we can't get into Memphis, we'll try Columbus. Now this may add a little bit of time in getting them back, so we may not be able

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9. The Distinguished Service Medal was presented to General Lyman Lemnitzer in the White House Rose Garden on 1 October 1962.

to finally make it by twelve, but we'll do everything we can to get them in as soon as possible.

**President Kennedy:** I see. OK. Fine.

**Vance:** Just a second; Bob [McNamara] is here.

**Robert McNamara:** Hello, Bobby.

**President Kennedy:** Yes. Oh, this is . . . No, this is the President.

**McNamara:** [*Unclear*], oh, Mr. President.

**President Kennedy:** Yeah.

**McNamara:** I think that with the priority the Air Force is giving this and we're diverting all our MATS aircraft and our troop carrier aircraft, we can get them there by midnight.<sup>10</sup>

**President Kennedy:** Right. I see. You coming over for this . . . ?

**McNamara:** No, sir. I just gave my citation to Ros and he will read it. I thought I'd stay here . . .

**President Kennedy:** I see. OK.

**McNamara:** . . . and follow this.

**President Kennedy:** Righto. Fine. Thank you.

**McNamara:** Thank you.

*President Kennedy hangs up.*

By late in the day, a force of nearly 5,000 National Guardsmen and soldiers were in Oxford, Mississippi. As of the next morning, 8,735 troops would have reached the town.

After the ceremony for General Lemnitzer, the same group witnessed the swearing in of Maxwell Taylor as Lemnitzer's replacement. The President then went for a swim and his lunch. In the afternoon, he had an unrecorded conversation with George Ball, Ralph Dungan, and Carl Kaysen. This brought the President's official day to an end.

## Tuesday, October 2, 1962

The legislative tide was turning in the administration's favor. In July it had seemed President Kennedy would achieve very little of his domestic agenda due to congressional obstruction. But in two months, what was

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10. The acronym MATS stands for Military Air Transport Service.