



**Tanaya Tauber:** [00:00:00] I'm Tanaya Tauber, director of town hall programs at the National Constitution Center, and I'm delighted to welcome you back to Live at America's Town Hall, the podcast featuring conversations and debates presented here at the Center across from Independence Hall in Philadelphia. In the weeks to come, we will catch you up on some of our best programs from the past few months. Today, we will hear from Pulitzer prize winning historian, Doris Kearns Goodwin, in conversation with national constitution center, president and CEO, Jeffrey Rosen, as she unveils her newest book leadership in turbulent times. Goodwin shares insights from five decades of presidential scholarship on Lincoln, Theodore Roosevelt, FDR and Lyndon Johnson, and shares some personal stories from her time with LBJ. Joining us from the here's, Jeffrey Rosen.

**Jeffrey Rosen:** [00:00:53] Ladies and gentlemen, please join me in welcoming the great Doris Kearns Goodwin. I've been so looking forward to the conversation, it's such an honor to meet you. I want to just begin with that moment in the LBJ book that I remember as a high school kid, where he's left the White House, you're at the ranch, you get up at 5:30 every morning and get dressed. He comes into your bedroom and gets in your bed because he's cold and afraid. And he wants to talk about what it was like to be president. And what was that experience like? How did that convince you to become a presidential historian?

**Doris Kearns Goodwin:** [00:01:41] Whoa, what a great beginning. Let me go backward first for a minute before he's in the bed, which is that so what happened is I was a 24 year old graduate student at Harvard and was selected as a White House fellow, this fabulous program that still exists today. And we had a big dance at the White House the night we were selected. He did dance with me. Not that peculiar. There were only three women out of the 16 white house fellows, but as he twirled me around the floor, he whispered that he wanted me to be assigned directly to him in the white house. But it was not to be that simple for in the months leading up to my selection, like many young people I'd been active in the anti-Vietnam war movement and had written an article against him with a friend of mine, which we'd sent into the New Republic and they hadn't said anything, but suddenly two days after the dance in the white house, it appears with the title, how to remove Lyndon Johnson from power.

So I was certain he would kick me out of the program, but instead, surprisingly, he said, bring her down here for you. And if I can't win her over, no one can. So I did eventually end up working for him in the white house and then accompanied him to his ranch to help him on his memoirs for the last years of his life.

I'm not sure I ever fully understood why he chose me to spend so many hours with. I like to believe it was because I was a good listener and he was a great storyteller, fabulous, colorful stories. There was a problem with these stories; I later discovered that half of them weren't true, but they were great. But I also worry that part of it was that I was then a young woman. And he had somewhat of a minor league womanizing reputation. So, I was constantly chattering to him about my city boyfriends, even when I had no boyfriends. Everything was fine until one day he said he wanted to discuss our relationship, which sounded ominous, when he took me nearby to the lake, conveniently called Lake Lyndon, Baines Johnson. Wine, cheese, red checked tablecloth, all the romantic trappings. He started



outdoors, more than any other woman I've ever known, and my heart sank. And then he said, you remind me of my mother. So, pretty embarrassing.

So anyway, I worked for him that last year in the white house went to the ranch and he was so sad, those last years at the ranch. He knew that the war in Vietnam had cut his legacy in two. So he'd wake up early in the morning. I would stay at the ranch with him and his wife and he would wake up and he just couldn't go back to sleep and he would be cold, as you say, so he would come in. I knew he would be coming in, so I would get up and sit in the chair and he just needed to talk.

He needed to talk about what he had hoped he would be remembered for, for civil rights, for the great society, for everything else he did: Medicare, Medicaid, aid to education, immigration reform, extraordinary-- higher, lower education, PBS, NPR, but he knew that his legacy had been cut in two. And that sadness just meant he had to talk about it. And that's how we talked in the early morning hours. Not quite as sexy as it sounds. I was in a robe.

**Jeffrey Rosen:** [00:04:16] In the book you say that he was frustrated by the fact that Lincoln's biographers couldn't bring Lincoln to life, but you say that he was inspired by FDR, as FDR was inspired by Theodore Roosevelt, as Theodore Roosevelt was inspired by Lincoln, and Lincoln by Washington. To what degree did Johnson learn from his predecessors lessons of presidential leadership? ,

**Doris Kearns Goodwin:** [00:04:36] You'd really hope that the presidents would look to their previous presidents, not to compete against them, not to feel they have to undo what they've done in the past, but rather to be able to learn from the best parts, even from the triumphs and the tragedies of the previous presidents. No question that FDR, he called him his political daddy. When Johnson first went into public life, it was as a young Congressman during the New Deal. And FDR actually met him when he was a young Congressman and he was so impressed with Johnson's energy. He said, you know if I hadn't gone to Harvard, he said, that's the kind of young dude, almost, the Bronco that I would have been if I had not gone to Harvard and had that elitism. He predicted that maybe someday he might be the first Southern president. So, he saw that way back in 1937. Sadly, you know, you wish he had learned from Eisenhower or from Truman or from FDR himself about the importance of talking to the public when a war is going on and sharing with them the fate and the fortunes of that war. And that's what he could have learned. But, they they're a small club. It's 45 people and they should learn from each other, like we learned from our parents and grandparents.

**Jeffrey Rosen:** [00:05:41] You have the amazing scene where FDR is trying to be lobbied by Johnson to give money for a non-profitable dam and Johnson just gets his attention by telling stories.

**Doris Kearns Goodwin:** [00:05:53] It's amazing. He, so he wanted-- the Hill country where he lived, they didn't have enough people per mile to be able to get the federal money to have electricity, brought rural electricity into the area. So, the first time he went in to see FDR, FDR had a way when he didn't want to do something of just talking. So he started talking to him about, did you know that naked Russian women look different from American women?



And poor LBJ doesn't know what to do and before you know it, the time is up. So, he then asks somebody, what should I do the next time I go in? They said, bring maps, bring charts. He likes to see things. So he brings in these charts. And then he says to him, look, let me tell you what those women in-- and it's like, his mother, in that area have to do. And he talks about them having to wash things by hand, the men having to go out at night, and there's no milk machine because there's no electricity. And he's so impressive that FDR says, okay, let me see what I can do.

So, he calls the head of the rural electrification company. He says, I've got Lyndon Johnson here. I know he's been turned down. They don't have enough people per mile. So, FDR says look, I know those people down there, they breed really quickly. They'll have enough people soon. He gives Johnson a loan. Johnson walks out of there, he says it was the happiest day of his life, and he brings electricity to the Hill country.

**Jeffrey Rosen:** [00:07:05] Great. Here's a thought experiment. You're the young Doris Kearns then, and you're advising LBJ about the lessons of his hero, FDR, and he's in the middle of the Vietnam War. And you now know all these lessons about FDR and his conduct in the war. How would you distill them for Johnson and how could they be useful for them?

**Doris Kearns Goodwin:** [00:07:26] Well, I think part of the problem was that he didn't feel confident about his understanding of world affairs. He thought he could extrapolate from his experience with the Congress, where if he would meet with Ho Chi Minh, he could persuade him that somehow he could have a Mekong river television -- TVA, Tennessee Valley authority. And that would make him want to end the war. And FDR would understand, I think to him that you're fighting ideology, as he was in World War II, you're fighting nationalism, you're fighting much larger issues and there may not be in this instance, a compromise, I think Johnson thought, which was a good thing, he thought in domestic affairs that you could somehow get people to bargain with something, but maybe you can't. And obviously there was no way that FDR could bargain with Hitler or with Mussolini. And I think he would have told him that, that you have to understand that, and maybe this is not a war that needs to be fought. What are, what are you doing in trying to change people's feelings about nationalism in Vietnam? But most importantly, as I suggested, I think what he would say to him, is if you're going to go into this war, you have to go into it and educate the American people because the citizens are going to be sending their sons and daughters into battle.

And there's nothing more important than understanding why they're there. Johnson so wanted to keep the great society going that he didn't want to talk about the war. And he hid the appropriations. He didn't have the national guard come out and he just thought, maybe I can run these two things together. And then what he was afraid of was not so much winning the war, he was afraid of losing the war. So he kept putting more troops in to prevent the loss of the war, instead of having a philosophy of whether, is this war worth winning or not. But it lost him his presidency. It lost him his place in history. And he was, as I say, he suffered from that as well. So even though I was so angry with them, when I first knew about him when I was in the war, being with him just made me feel more empathetic toward somebody who I believe this isn't what he wanted when I used to yell, "How many kids did



you kill today, LBJ? Hey, Hey!" That's not what it was about. And I came to feel sad about him and sad about the heartbreak of the country that this guy could have been and was in many ways, an FDR, except for this failure of leadership, epic in the war.

One last question

**Jeffrey Rosen:** [00:09:40] on LBJ. You talk about the qualities that the great leaders you described had, and empathy is a crucial one and the ability to listen. If Johnson had more of that, would he have been a better leader?

**Doris Kearns Goodwin:** [00:09:52] Well, he certainly had empathy in the domestic affairs. I mean, one of the most important experiences he had, when he was young, he had to leave college for a year in order to get money cause they couldn't afford to stay in. And he worked as a principal in a Mexican American school in Cotulla and he saw the pain of prejudice, he said, on the faces of these kids. And he did everything. He was the principal, he was the teacher. He organized the soccer games. He organized basketball games. Those kids said they've never been in the presence of such an energy and the oral histories of those kids say he changed their lives. And then much, much later, in 1965, when he's giving the we shall overcome speech for the voting rights after the Selma demonstrations, which I'm proud to say my husband, Richard Goodwin, worked on that speech and he was working. He only had that day to write the speech because Johnson decided on the Sunday night that on the Monday night he was going to give a joint session of Congress speech.

So my husband came in that morning and he said, you got to write the speech. And somebody had assigned it to a different person the night before. So, John says it how's Goodwin doing on the speech. I couldn't have done this in my heart dependent on from nine in the morning until six at night, he wrote that speech.

If you look it up, it's so beautiful. You know, every now and then history and fate meet at a certain time and a certain place. So it was in Lexington and Concord. So it was at Appomattox. So it was in Selma, Alabama. And then at a certain point, this is not a Negro problem, not a white problem, an American problem. It's going to take us a long time, but we shall overcome. The moment when a president connects to an outside movement, and the two of them joined forces together, that's the critical moment. But the only time Johnson interrupted my husband working on that speech that day was to call him up and say, I'd like to talk about Cotulla. And he told my husband the story. So, in the speech he says, he remembered being there in 1928 and he saw the prejudice on their face and he didn't know what he could do about it. But now he had the power to do something and by God he was going to do it. I'm going to use it. So, those are the moments that Lindon Johnson should be remembered for as well.

**Jeffrey Rosen:** [00:11:48] You lost your beloved husband, Richard last May and we do have all of our thoughts and prayers and you've found though, his notes for that speech and for others, what was that like to discover that?

**Doris Kearns Goodwin:** [00:12:00] Oh my God. He had kept evidently in those days you could just take your papers out of the White House. So all these boxes came with us for



years and years. They were in basements. And finally about six or seven years ago, we decided, let's bring them up. And we started going through all the boxes. And it was amazing just to see the first draft. Of not only that speech, the great society speech, the Howard university speech, Bobby's ripple of hope speech, which is on his grave. Al Gore's concession speech. JFK's Alliance for private speech and you see the draft and you see these little edits. It's amazing. It's the only thing we have in a safe deposit box. That was our most valuable possession. I just didn't want to lose it, whatever.

**Jeffrey Rosen:** [00:12:39] Well, this wonderful book has such a clear and compelling structure. And you begin with chapters on the youth and then the formative experiences of each of your presidents and talk about how they were formed by their parents and early experiences with certain ambition and qualities, and then had a traumatic event, which altered their perspective and gave them an empathy and ability to listen that shored them up as leaders. And I think we just need to go through them and talk about those formative experiences. And we have to begin with our greatest president, Lincoln, and his drama wouldn't seem that traumatic in the scheme of things --a depression that made it impossible for him to fund the internal improvements that he hoped for, but it had a tremendous effect on him. Describe that and how it formed him.

**Doris Kearns Goodwin:** [00:13:27] I mean, what happens to Lincoln as he runs for the state legislature, when he's 23 years old, he just puts himself forward. Even though he's only been in this little town of new Salem for six months and he writes this amazing handbill, which you have to do to put yourself forward in those days, saying every man has his peculiar ambition. Mine is to be esteemed of by my fellow man and to be worthy of their esteem. And then in this handbill, he promised the constituents that he would fight for infrastructure projects that could allow poor farmers to bring their goods to market, dredging harbors, widening rivers, building roads. And then he becomes, when he gets in the state legislature, the chief architect of this infrastructure plan. The wonderful thing about his 23 year old statement, he says, I've been so much by disappointment, if you don't vote me in, I'll be okay because I'm used to this disappointment. But then he says, but if I lose, I promise you I'll come back five or six times to try to win until it's so humiliating I promise you I'll never try again. Amazing, right.

So anyway, what happens is the state goes into a recession. The projects aren't finished, they remain half finished. The state loses its debt rating. People aren't coming into Illinois, and he feels like it's his failure. And the fact that he hadn't kept his word, what he said, the chief gem of his character was to keep his word. That same winter he had broken his engagement with Mary Todd, not certain that he really loved her enough to marry her, but he humiliated her and he felt he'd broken his word to her. So he went into this depression so deep that his friends took all knives and razors and scissors from his room fearing that he would kill himself. And his best friend, Joshua Speed, came to his side and said, Lincoln, you must rally, or you will die. He said, I would just as soon die now, but I've not yet accomplished anything to make any human being remember that I have lived.

So, it was fueled by that worthy ambition that he goes back and finishes his term. He has a single term in Congress. He tries for the Senate, he loses, he tries again, he loses and then



he's a dark horse candidate for the presidency and the rest is history. But that resilience through adversity is one of the things that leadership scholars say is critical for not just a leader, but for any of us. Ernest Hemingway said, "everyone is broken by life, but some people are strong in the broken places." And that was true of him.

**Jeffrey Rosen:** [00:15:38] His extraordinary humanity and empathy comes through throughout his early career. He picks up drunk men from the gutter and he's sad at the killing of a pig. He believes that even harming animals is hurtful. What was the role of his spiritual beliefs informing his character?

**Doris Kearns Goodwin:** [00:16:02] Well, he didn't belong to an organized church. He was like so many, I think, of the founding people were deists who believed there was a God, but he wasn't interfering in daily life. And I think what happened is however, and Mary belonged to a church, he didn't go to church, but once he got into the presidency and with what was the turmoil of the Civil War, God became much more a part of his speeches, much more a part of his thought. That somehow, you know, things were being out there. There was a destiny. And I think he became a very spiritual man, whether it was an organized religious man or not.

His humanity is almost unexampled in my mind. I kept thinking if I could be more like him, I'd be a better person. I don't feel that way about the other leaders. They may have been a great leader, but he was the kind of person who said, if you allow the emotions like envy or or jealousy or anger to fester, they'll poison a part of you.

And he just said you don't have time for those kinds of emotions. And he was able to forgive people who'd hurt him. He, I mean, he had extraordinary human qualities that the people around him saw, even when he ran for office that first time, he wins the second time, because they'd seen this young guy trying to educate himself scouring for books, wherever he could find them, helping people in carriages, just doing things naturally.

And his cabinet, who first underestimated him, they saw that he was a leader in their midst in a way that before the country saw, anybody who saw him saw it. So I think it is human nature, his leadership underneath it all. It's applies, whether you're a community leader, a presidential leader you know, a governor, a Senator or a business leader, it's all the same, if you understand human nature and you treat people the way they should be treated.

**Jeffrey Rosen:** [00:17:46] Those words of Lincoln that you just use mastering anger and envy because they're not productive emotions were spoken by Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg about a year sitting in the very seat that you were sitting in.

**Doris Kearns Goodwin:** [00:17:57] No Kidding!

**Jeffrey Rosen:** [00:17:57] She said precisely the same thing in the same words. I talked about what a good listener she was. And she said that she learned to think before she spoke and that anger and jealousy are not productive and it's important to achieve self-mastery. So essentially then you can serve others. To what degree is, that's a spirit, a lesson of many of the great wisdom traditions and it's also an important lesson of leadership. How did Lincoln



exercise it? He advised people to write angry letters, right, and then throw them away. Other examples of that?

**Doris Kearns Goodwin:** [00:18:26] I mean, he had what he called a hot letter. When he'd be angry with somebody, he would write everything down in the letter. And then he would put it aside, hoping he would cool down psychologically and never need to send it. So when General Mead failed to follow up with General Lee's army after the victory at Gettysburg, he wrote him a long letter saying, we asked you to get his army. Now the war is going to go on month after month, year after year. I'm immeasurably distressed. That just didn't happen. But then he knew it would paralyze the general in the field. So, he put the letter aside. And it was never even seen until the 20th century, when his papers were opened and underneath was the notation, never sent and never signed. And he did that time and time again. When I went to interview president Obama for an exit interview for Vanity Fair, we talked about these hot letters and I said, do you ever do this?

And he said, what do you mean? He said, I do it all the time. I said, what do you mean? He said, I write letters all the time to people I'm mad at and then I crumble them up and I put them in the basket. How much better it would be if our current leadership would do the same thing?

Everybody! Not just the presidency. Look how many people get in trouble by writing these emails and then, or saying things on Twitter, and then letting it go out, instead of thinking, before you say something hurtful to somebody else.

**Jeffrey Rosen:** [00:19:39] Well, the idea of thinking before you speak and that only through slow thoughtful deliberation can reason prevail was central to the framers. Could Lincoln and Theodore Roosevelt and Franklin Roosevelt have thrived in the age of Twitter?

**Doris Kearns Goodwin:** [00:19:53] I have to believe they could. I mean, I think the one who would be the most at home in the age of Twitter would be Theodore Roosevelt because he had these short, punchy phrases. He was colorful. He liked to be the center of attention, just like our current leadership does. And they said, in fact that he was so liking to be the center of attention that he wanted to be the baby at the baptism and the bride at the wedding and the corpse at the funeral. But he had all these punchy sayings, speak softly and carry a big stick. You know, don't hit until you have to, but then hit him hard. I can picture him, he had a very quick mind that he could have done that, but he also had a reserve on that mind. There was one time when he was in the middle of this coal strike and he got so mad at the coal barons because they were yelling at him for even having him in a meeting with the miners -- he didn't think they should be in a meeting -- that he had to grab the edge of his chair. He said he wanted to throw them out the window. But he held that anger in bay. I think he could have done it.

Franklin Roosevelt had a similar situation to the hot letters. When he got mad at somebody, his fireside chats used to go through five or six drafts, and then he'd read them aloud to the speech writers and in the first draft he would say terrible things about an isolationist congressman. He might say, the guys a traitor, he would name his name. He said, what's he doing to the country? And a young speech writer was there as he's reading this first draft,



and he says, what's he doing? This is terrible! The oldest speech writer said, don't worry, wait till the second draft, by the second draft that guy's name is not mentioned, by the third draft he's a good guy, by the fourth draft everything is fine. But he got it out of his system. Somehow we all have to figure our way to get it out of your system because you feel it, the anger of frustration, without losing the dignity of the office, without losing the presidency and without losing yourself.

**Jeffrey Rosen:** [00:21:30] The centrality of the first and second and third draft is crucial to democracy and to writing. Let's talk about Theodore Roosevelt. Inspired by your book, I did a short biography of William Howard Taft as well, and understood Taft's criticism of Roosevelt, that he was a sort of proto demagogue in the election of 1912, who insisted the president was a steward of the people who directly channeled popular will. Was that an excess after he left the presidency or did he show some of that a tendency toward populism in the presidency itself? And how did it affect his leadership?

**Doris Kearns Goodwin:** [00:22:03] I think he showed it right from the beginning, actually. I mean, the time at the turn of the 20th century is very similar to today in many ways. The industrial revolution had shaken up the economy, much like the tech revolution and globalization have done today. You had people in the rural areas feeling left out of the cities. You had a gap between the rich and the poor for the first time, you had a lot of immigrants coming in from abroad, and you had people in the working class feeling that they were under siege. And it was almost a revolutionary feeling in the country. Lots of strikes, violent strikes, between labor and capital.

And he came in. But even though he was appealing to the people by saying I'm the steward of the people. I'm not on labor's side. I'm not on management's side. I'm on both sides because I represent the people and that's what the square deal was about. And it was a very moderate set of reforms that were absolutely centrist that most people could agree with.

I'm not for the capitalist. I'm not for the wage worker. I'm not for the rich. I'm not for the poor, but if either one of them screws up, I'm going to go against them. If they play fairly, I'll be for them. And it was the right, for the moment, the right time. And when there was this big coal strike, he said, I represent the people on either, both sides are at loggerheads, I'm the steward of the people. And he said, he got that from Abraham Lincoln, that he was the steward of the people and that the kinds of presidents who are powerful see that they're not just the steward of Congress, they're the steward of the people. But it's true, once he ran against Taft in 1912, he had so loved being in the office.

He should never have said he wouldn't run again. After two terms, he said he would have cut off risk not to have written that statement. And then he goes against his great friend Taft. He did believe the Taft was more conservative than he as a progressive should be. So he believed in what he was doing, but it turned out that it split the Republican party in two, it hurt the progressive cause that he cared about, and it destroyed their friendship.

I was so glad only to find at the very end that just before Teddy Roosevelt died, the two of them met each other at a hotel, and then they came together and they both felt that their





lives were better for having forgiven each other for that terrible 1912 campaign. That's what I always want at the end, some sort of happy ending to all of it.

**Jeffrey Rosen:** [00:24:12] And people applauded in the dining room.

**Doris Kearns Goodwin:** [00:24:14] Exactly.

**Jeffrey Rosen:** [00:24:15] Well, this is the National Constitution Center. So, I have to ask, was Teddy Roosevelt's idea that the president was a steward of the people who could rule by executive order rather than going through Congress, as Taft insisted, at odds with the Constitution as Taft believed? What is the connection between a devotion to the Constitution and the devotion to popular leadership?

**Doris Kearns Goodwin:** [00:24:34] I mean, it's a really good question. I mean, clearly the checks and balances is an important part in the Constitution. That's why there's these three institutions that can balance each other. And Teddy Roosevelt when he was on a tear would argue that he as president had the powers as the steward of the people that oversees either one of those two things.

At one point, he even wanted the Supreme Court, if they passed a law that the people themselves could reject, could undo the law. So I mean, that's pretty scary. What was happening there. When he was moving in the right direction and the country where it was, where he wanted to be, then it's fine.

But, I think you're right. And he would argue that the emancipation proclamation was an executive order. And Lincoln worried about issuing that, whether that was constitutional to do, until he could finally come up with arguing that as a military necessity, he had to do it because the slaves were helping the Southern cause. So he could use as commander and chief powers, but that's why he wanted to have the 13th amendment, so that it could be legitimized by the Constitution, by an amendment eventually.

**Jeffrey Rosen:** [00:25:35] Absolutely Lincoln was a much greater constitutional lawyer than Roosevelt. And when he had to act by emergency, always asked for congressional or constitutional authorization after the fact. We have downstairs at the constitution center, I don't know if you came up through the lobby, but a quotation from Theodore Roosevelt, "the people alone are the makers of their own Constitution." And this is 1912. My predecessor left out the next line, "and as a result, they should be able to overturn judicial decisions by popular vote."

It's a crazy quotation to have at the national constitution center. So I'm now issuing a call to you, dear, dear friends, we must come up with an alternative. So scour the works of James Madison, Alexander Hamilton, and send me an alternative to that quotation because as much as we love Roosevelt, that's not right quotation for the constitution center.

**Doris Kearns Goodwin:** [00:26:19] How interesting, of course.

**Jeffrey Rosen:** [00:26:21] No, it's just, you know, you have to read the next sentence. Nevertheless, Roosevelt, well, back to Lincoln and the Constitution, for me, one of the most



inspiring of the extraordinarily inspiring things you talk about with Lincoln was his speech to the Lyceum, where he talks about the importance of the rule of law and gives the most eloquent defense of civic education and need to study history in the Constitution, ever. Describe it.

**Doris Kearns Goodwin:** [00:26:46] No, it's an amazing thing. So he's a young guy and he gives this speech to the Lyceum. And the context of it is that there's a lot of violence in the country at that time. Abolitionists are being killed by pro-slavery people. Blacks are being lynched in the South. And he's worried that the rule of law is not being followed. So he gives a speech and he says, he's worried that in such a time of concern like this anxiety, that people will put somebody in power who wants to tear down rather than build up. And he warns us against a Julius Caesar or some sort of autocrat that might come into our being. And the answer is for the people of the United States to keep reading about the Constitution, keep reading about the Declaration of Independence. He said that the scenes of the Revolution were fading and he worried that we were forgetting what we fought for and the ideals of our country's founding. So he said people should be reading these things.

Like you read the Bible to your kids, read them every night, you know, just make people understand what it is that we as a people are. And then that's the way we'll be able to tear down that kind of dictator should he arise. It's an incredible statement. And it really is talking about civic education and the importance of our remembering as citizens what this extraordinary beacon of hope is that we were founded on. I mean, what he kept arguing always was that it wasn't just that he was fighting for the North and the South to remain together as physical entities. That what the Constitution and the Declaration meant, was that ordinary people could govern themselves. We didn't need a King, we didn't need a dictator. And if the South could siphon off from the North and maybe someday the West would leave the East. And it would prove to the world that ordinary people can't govern themselves, that you need that larger authority. And that was what he was fighting the revolution for -- I mean, the Civil War for. It was that big, that idea. And he wanted everybody to remember that idea. He was the best.

**Jeffrey Rosen:** [00:28:39] I think we've solved the alternative to our Theodore Roosevelt quotation. We must. This is a very serious thing. It's the most eloquent sentence defending the need to study the Constitution ever in American history. Thank you so much for coming.

**Doris Kearns Goodwin:** [00:28:52] Yes, exactly.

**Jeffrey Rosen:** [00:28:53] You're now an honorary member of our exhibits team. Lincoln read Madison, before he gave a speech at the Cooper Hewitt, insisting that the Constitution took no position on slavery. He found in Madison's notes recently published in 1840, that the Constitution wasn't supposed to take a position on whether there could be a property in man. Shawn Mullins told us that last week when he was here and when Lincoln stood at Independence Hall behind us, he said, I'd rather be assassinated on this spot, right, then abandon the principles of the Declaration of Independence. What did the founders--you say Washington was his hero--but what did the founders Madison and Jefferson mean to him?



**Doris Kearns Goodwin:** [00:29:32] Well, I think what they meant to him and that's right, when he gave this famous speech at Cooper Union, he studied the founders and what they said. And what he was trying to say was that slavery was just something that they, you know this probably far better than I, that slavery was something they had to deal with because it was there, but it wasn't that they thought of it in any idealistic way. And that if he could understand what they were saying, and if he could look at what was happening right then, mainly he wasn't arguing then about ending slavery. He didn't think he could at that point because it was in ensconced in the property definition. But what the main thing the Republican party fighting against was don't let the slavery go into the Western territories because those are not states yet.

There's a freedom to decide what we want to do about slavery. And if we could undo it there, it would eventually die out. That was his hope. And then obviously that hope was not realized and the civil war had to be fought.

**Jeffrey Rosen:** [00:30:28] And the war came.

**Doris Kearns Goodwin:** [00:30:29] And the war came, as he said, and the war came. Amazing talk.

**Jeffrey Rosen:** [00:30:33] Amazing, amazing, inspired. The issuance of the emancipation proclamation is your case study for Lincoln's virtues of leadership and it's a riveting chapter and you draw lots of lessons. Tell us about some of them.

**Doris Kearns Goodwin:** [00:30:48] Well, I mean, mainly what he, when he finally decided that he had to think through the question, right from the start, there were some people in his cabinet more radical than he, who thought he should have ended slavery from the beginning, there were conservatives in his cabinet that told him if you ever touch slavery, then the war will never end. There'll be no peace talks. Only three out of 10 soldiers at the beginning of the war were fighting for ending slavery. Seven out of 10 were just fighting for union. They didn't want to do anything about slavery. So, he knew that if he was going to do something, he had to be able to persuade the cabinet. He had to persuade the army and the country. And he had to think. So, the first lesson is he went away from Washington. He went to the soldier's home three miles from Washington because he couldn't think.

.In those days, anybody who wanted to see the president could come in in the morning and ask for a job, you know, can I be a postmaster? Can I be a clerk? And he would have long lines of people coming in and he couldn't think. And so I think one of the things he teaches a leader is you sometimes have to get away to think he also teaches leaders, I think, that in order to get rid of the terrible anxiety or to soothe it that you're in the middle of, he went to the theater actually a hundred times during the war. He said, when the lights came on and a Shakespeare play came on for a few precious hours, he could forget the war that was raging. And while he was trying to sort out what to do about slavery and the emancipation, he said, people think my theater going strange, but if I couldn't go, it would kill me.

So, he goes to the soldier's home, he comes up with a whole draft of the emancipation proclamation and he presents it to his cabinet, but he doesn't say I'm coming to talk about it



with you. He talked about it with them from months. He now said I've made a decision and I want to tell you my decision. I will listen to your ideas about its implementation and its timing, but I am taking responsibility for this. And when he first presents it to them, several of the cabinet members, still, one of them says, he'll resign. Another one says I'm going to write written objections. And he said, well, you'll have to do that if you can. But I want you to think about this. And by the time he in July presented the draft and when he's going to present it to the country in September, he had persuaded all of them that they had to stick together. That even if they had private reservations, the same thing, I'm just seeing in the founder's hall there. And Ben Franklin is saying, even if you reservations, we have to stick together. And they did by God, not a single one of them said anything against it. The guy didn't resign. And it meant that the cabinet went before the country as a whole, which was critical.

And then, because he had seen the soldiers every time there was a battle, he would go and visit the soldiers. He told any of them, if you have any complaints, come see me in the White House. He knew them. So when he decided to transform the meaning of the war into ending slavery, not just union, they went along with him because they trusted him. And then he had to fight the country. Northern legislatures were so upset by the emancipation proclamation. They passed decrees saying sometimes they were going to succeed from New England, that terrible radical place, but eventually the elections were won and he was able to convince the country as well. So, it was this enormous persuasive power that was because he believed in it and conviction is what produces persuasion.

**Jeffrey Rosen:** [00:33:46] Hmm. How much did he listen to competing arguments before deciding to issue it? And how much did he figure out on his own?

**Doris Kearns Goodwin:** [00:33:55] I think listened to all the people in his cabinet for months, he listened to the different points of view. And when he finally came to the decision, it was like a huge relief. Wrestling thought with him was almost a physical exercise. He would get exhausted. And in fact, when he went to sign the emancipation proclamation, finally, that morning he had signed, he had shaken a thousand hands at a new year's reception in January of 1863. So when he went to sign the proclamation, his own hand was numb and shaking. He put the pen aside. He said, if ever my soul went in an act, it is in this act. But if I sign with a shaking hand, posterity will say he hesitated. So he waited and waited until he could sign with a bold hand. And then not long after he signed it, his old friend, Joshua Speed would have been by his side and that serious depression came to the White House. And he said to Joshua Speed, maybe in this act, my fondest dreams will be realized. Maybe I will be remembered over time for having done something worthy. And so he has been.

**Jeffrey Rosen:** [00:34:53] What for Lincoln was the relation between a sensitivity to what public opinion would bear and a willingness to do what he thought the Constitution and law compelled?

**Doris Kearns Goodwin:** [00:35:02] He was very sensitive to public opinion. I mean, he would read newspapers. He would talk to the people who was coming in. He'd talked to the newspaper reporters. He understood that in a democracy, public sentiment is everything. He



said without public sentiment, nothing can be accomplished, with public sentiment, anything can be accomplished. So he was constantly educating the country about what he wanted to do. He was figuring out not public opinion polls, but where public sentiment was. And he knew that the timing was right. He said, if he had issued the emancipation proclamation six months earlier, he would have lost the border states and lost the war. If he'd waited any longer would have lost the morale boost it provided. So he was very clear about the importance of bringing the country along on major issues like that.

**Jeffrey Rosen:** [00:35:45] I think it's time to turn to our next president Franklin Roosevelt Well, first off, I was so delighted by the answer to the question I asked you upstairs and I'll ask you again what your favorite book is.

**Doris Kearns Goodwin:** [00:35:57] No, I think, you know, I think probably "No ordinary time." There was just something about Franklin and Eleanor's relationship. And it had a woman at the center of the book, which made it really special. I mean, her relationship with him during the home front, during world war II was just astonishing. I mean, she, she could be the person who told truth to power. She could be, as he said, a welcome thorn in his side. She was always willing to argue with him, always willing to question his assumptions. And he was such a powerful guy that he needed somebody like that. I mean, she sent so many memos to General Marshall during world war II about discrimination in the army that he had to assign a separate general whose only task was to deal with Eleanor Roosevelt.

She had a weekly press conference every week where the rule was only female reporters would come to our press conferences. So all over the country, stuffy publishers had to hire their first female reporters. An entire generation got their start because of Eleanor Roosevelt. And I think writing about the home front rather than the war front, seeing what America could do. It's a terrific lesson for today. There had been this great division in the country between the isolationists and the interventionists. And the war came. You just got to hope you don't need a crisis to bring the country together. There've been huge fights between business and in labor in the 1930s, the business community hated Roosevelt in a lot of ways.

And then he talks to them about the importance of building the ships, the planes, the tanks, and the weapons. We were so far behind Germany. We were on the 18th in military power. We became 17th when Holland surrendered to Germany. He gets the factories going. And actually 60% of the factories eventually by 1943, the jobs are held by women, of course, because the men are in the armed forces and they had worried the factory owners before the women came in and they said we can't have a social revolution in the middle of the war. These women will never learn how to operate these machines. The productivity will go down, but of course, once they got in there, productivity went up. So they decided we'd better do a study and figure out how these women learn to operate these complex machines so well, and so quickly. I love the answer on the study form. It said when a woman, unlike a man was asked to operate a new species of machinery, she would ask directions. Any of us who were in a drove with you guys in the old days.



But anyway, I think what I loved about working on that book was that the whole focus was on the second floor of the white house because Roosevelt couldn't go easily outside. He needed the world brought to him. So his way of relaxing during world war II was to have a cocktail hour every night in the White House. And he wanted everybody who was going to come to the cocktail hour to live in the White House with him. So his foreign policy advisor, Harry Hopkins came for dinner one night, slept over, never left until the war came to an end.

Missy Lohand, his secretary, lived with the family in the white house, the princess from Norway is there on the weekends. Loreena Hickock, who's got an emotional relationship with Eleanor's there. And Winston Churchill came and spent weeks at a time in a bedroom diagonally across from Roosevelt's. So when I was working on the book, I just became obsessed with the thought I was up there with Lyndon Johnson. Why didn't I ask him? Where did Eleanor sleep? Where was Franklin? Where was Churchill? But I wasn't thinking in those terms then. So I mentioned this on a radio program in Washington and it happened Hillary Clinton, then in the white house, was listening. So she called me up the radio station. She invited me to sleep overnight in the White House so that we could wander the corridors together and figure out where everyone had slept 50 years earlier.

So two weeks later, she followed up with an invitation to a state dinner, after which between midnight and two, with my map in hand, the president, Mrs. Clinton, my husband and I went through every room up there and figured out, yes. Chelsea Clinton is sleeping where Harry Hopkins was, the Clintons are sleeping where FDR was and we were given Winston Churchill's bedroom. There was no way I could sleep. I was certain, he was in the corner, drinking his Brandy, smoking is ever present cigar. I was in the presence of the greatness of the past.

**Jeffrey Rosen:** [00:39:32] What a story and what a book. And I just read it. And re-read it because of the stories stick in the mind and their relationship you bring to life so vividly. And during that famous cocktail hour, as you recount, Franklin Roosevelt became infuriated because Eleanor was lobbying him and he threw his papers down. But then there's that wonderful moment when her brother Hall died and he just sidled up to her and tenderly embraced her and consoled her.

**Doris Kearns Goodwin:** [00:39:55] I'm convinced that they really had a deep relationship with one another. When my kids were little, they used to hear me in the study when I'd be writing the book. And I'd be saying, Eleanor, just forgive him for that affair he had so long ago. He's with you now. And I'd say to Franklin, just be nice to her. She loves you. And they wondered what in the world is going on in this book. But, there's no question that when he died, I mean, Eleanor realized that he had given her a platform she never would've had that. She had become after he died a much more honest politician, because before she could be the agitator and he had to be the one who had to concern himself with public opinion, but then when he was gone, she became this extraordinary political figure, as well as a moral figure.

**Jeffrey Rosen:** [00:40:39] They together, and he separately, are such towering figures and of course his life-changing trauma was polio. He'd had this sheltered life with the smothering



devoted but much loved mother. And he was an aristocrat and he learned, well, you describe what he learned from polio and how it affected and transformed his leadership style.

**Doris Kearns Goodwin:** [00:41:03] Oh, without a question. I mean, he was a natural political figure before that. He was charming. He was well-spoken. But somehow when the polio came, it did change him. I mean, when he went to Warm Springs, He made himself vulnerable to his other polio victims. And he taught them that there could be joy in life again, before-- he wasn't just simply giving them that giant pool to swim in. He was saying, let's play water tag. Let's have polo. Let's have dances in our wheelchairs. Let's play poker at night. We'll have cocktail hours at night. He taught them that their lives could be filled with pleasure as well. And he took out years to learn to try and learn to walk again.

It was said that at the beginning, he was told that nothing would come back from the waist down, but if he could strengthen his arms and his chest and his back, then he could probably manipulate a wheelchair and appear to be stronger than he was. So he would get on his library floor. He would ask to be moved from his wheelchair to the floor so that he could crawl around the floor for hours learning to strengthen his back.

Then he would go up the steps one at a time, sweat pouring down him and make it to the top. And then he would celebrate getting up there. Each little triumph was a celebration and people who knew him said he emerged completely warm-hearted from this experience, he was vulnerable. He learned humility. He said, if you've tried to move your big toe for two years and you finally do, then you learn humility and he became closer to other people to whom fate had dealt an unkind hand, because he understood what he himself had gone through his vulnerability. And I'm convinced that it changed the kind of leader-- he would have been a leader, but not the great leader he became.

**Jeffrey Rosen:** [00:42:41] And such a transformation from the glib, callow, rather snobby aristocrat, who had been much pampered up, but there were elements of his character, his optimism, his determination to conceal unpleasant news because he was afraid of hurting his father who was ill and his fierce ambition that mellowed and forged by the polio created one of the greatest presidents of all time.

**Doris Kearns Goodwin:** [00:43:11] And what he was able to do, I think, which was so important in a democracy like ours, is he established an intimate relationship with the people. I mean, those fireside chats are really extraordinary when you think about them. I mean, he was talking on a radio. But as he was talking on the radio, people who are listening to him as he's got the microphone in front of him, he would smile. He'd be moving his hands as if he really were talking to individuals, not just the people of the United States, but individual people. And he'd say my friends and they thought he was talking to them. There's a story about a construction worker coming home one night and his partner said, where are you going? He said, well, my president, he's coming to speak to me in my living room. It's only right I be there to greet him when he comes and Saul Bellows said, you could walk down the street on a hot Chicago night, look in and see everybody in their living rooms or their kitchens listening to the radio. He could hear his voice coming out the street and you



could keep walking and not miss a word of what he said. And it was that intimacy that he was able to convince people when the Depression first started, his first day in office. The banks were being bombarded by people taking their deposits out. The banking system was collapsing. He has a bank holiday. He has an emergency banking rule, and then he goes on his first fireside chat to convince people, bring your money back. I've got a system now to shore up the weaker banks.

The stronger banks will have your money. It's safer than keeping it in a mattress. The day after this week long holiday, as there are huge lines forming. And people are thinking, Oh my God, are they going to take their money out, now that the week is over? They were bringing their money back because they trusted him. And in fact, when, when he died, one of the most interesting sentiments was that the person said in the streets, the New York Times was reporting, people would be strangers meeting one another and saying, we've lost our friend. And then one citizen said the greatest tribute to him was that one man died and 130 million people felt lonely.

So it was that connection that he established with the people that he always trusted. If you tell the people what's going on, then there'll be something that they will do for you. So two press conferences a week, rather than the press being the enemies of the people. Two press conferences a week.

**Jeffrey Rosen:** [00:45:15] He respected the people's intelligence. He was a teacher and he shaped public opinion by giving people the facts. That first fireside chat, my friends, I want to talk to about banking. And then he would just run through the details of the banking system so we could slowly lead people to have the confidence. Describe that delicate combination of being sensitive to and guided by public opinion, even as he molded it by public education.

**Doris Kearns Goodwin:** [00:45:40] Absolutely. I mean the same thing happens, he gives this famous speech in 1942, we've lost at Pearl Harbor. We're losing battles in the Pacific and he asks everybody to get a map and have it before them so we can educate them about where the battles are taking place. So there was this great story of the guy who ran CS Hammons map store said he sold more maps that week than he'd sold it in his entire year. And he said, then this real thing he said, even my wife of 50 years who hates maps, asked me to bring a map home. And then of course I'm thinking, what kind of a marriage do they have if he's selling maps and she's hating maps. And I say, no wonder your books take so long. This is totally irrelevant. Anyway, he shows them what's going on with the war. And then he talks about how many times America had been through trouble before, you know, we'd been through Valley Forge. We'd been through the early days of the civil war and the pioneers going over the Rocky mountains. And there's going to be losses before there are victories again.

And we have to remember that he said, but I know we will come through. In fact, if I could take a moment to say, in a certain sense I think the theme I'd like to believe of this book, even though it was written before the current turbulent times, is that each one of these leaders led through really hard times, much harder than what we're going through. People





keep asking me, are we in the worst of times, as if I have an answer because of being an historian. And of course it's not the worst of times. I mean, when Lincoln takes over 600,000 people are about to die. He said, if he'd ever known what he was going to go through, he couldn't have thought he could live through it. As I say, the problems in the industrial era were greater than the problems. Now, FDR is there at that first day of the depression at the bottom level of where it's going to be, and LBJ takes over after the killing of JFK. And there's worry that there's a conspiracy from the mafia or from Cuba or from Russia.

And each one of them had the skills at that time to bring the country through. And I think the lack of moorings we're feeling has to do with where is that leadership that can honor the kind of values here, which are compromise and collaboration, humility, and empathy, and resilience and connection to the people. And if we can just remember, I think that we've been through those times before and reaffirm that America has the strength to do it again. We'll know what we have to do. And each one of these times. It wasn't just the leader. It was the leader's connection to the citizenry, as I'm saying, it was all those movements that I think made the citizens active.

And I think the most important thing, whatever side one's on right now, we can't be spectators anymore in our democracy. And I think the signs of an awakening of young people getting involved in politics, of more people entering public life than before, more women record numbers of women trying to run for office. These are all the signs of an awakening of our system. And it's not just what's happened in the last few years. Something's been broken in Washington for decades, really. No bipartisanship that's really worked for a long period of time. I think it has to do with the campaign finance system. The poison in the system is the money that we have to spend to run for office. Congressional districts have to be redrawn. Everybody should be able to be registered to vote when they're 18 and it should probably be a holiday, the day we vote. There's so many things. FDR said, problems created by man can be solved by man. Whatever situation we feel about our political situation today, it can be changed if we, as citizens get active. And that's what I would hope the founders would want.

**Jeffrey Rosen:** [00:49:06] It's an extremely optimistic message because it suggests that the dystopian scenarios are not right. So by many accounts, we are more polarized today than in any time since just after the civil war. In 1960, there was a 50% overlap between the most conservative Democrat and the most liberal Republican in the Congress today, there is no overlap. Much of that is the result of geographic and virtual self-sorting. Red and blue America just live in different geographic areas and watch different social media. The dystopian story says that this polarization will be exacerbated by social media. And the speed of deliberation will unleash populous forces that will lead as an Athens to demagogues and the mob. Is your story different? Does it suggest that leaders who exhibit the qualities you describe empathy, a willingness to compromise, humility, and a desire to engage in public education can summon our better, better angels and save American democracy?

**Doris Kearns Goodwin:** [00:50:07] Absolutely. I absolutely believe that. I mean, I think about what it was like in the 1850s, we worry about the divisiveness of media today in the 1850s,



you only got your news from your partisan newspaper and they would be completely different set of facts. I mean, if it's the Lincoln Douglas debate. And you're reading the Republican newspaper. It might say Lincoln was so great in the debate. He was so triumphant, carry them out in their arms and triumph. The democratic labor would say he was so embarrassing. He was so terrible that he fell on the floor and they had to sort of carry him out in dejection. And somehow the national newspapers arose after that national radio arose, we had three television networks. It is a problem that we're so divided in the media today. And I think that's a problem. What I keep wishing is that I think part of the bipartisanship that we enjoyed in the sixties, the seventies, the eighties even had to do with a lot of the congressmen and senators had been in world war II together, had been in the Korean war, so they knew what it was like to have a common mission, to go beyond race, class or sectional lines.

And so I keep thinking of my youngest son. He joined the army right after 9/11. He had graduated from Harvard college in June of '01. And he went to Iraq, Afghanistan earned a bronze star and eventually went to Harvard Law School, where he would have gone at the beginning. He said, nothing will equal that experience of having a platoon of kids from all over the country from different sections and races and knowing that they were working together for a common mission. And he's now a huge proponent of national service. And I think if there's some way we could figure out, because military service, the military now is 74% of the people respect the military, more than any other institution. Only 11% approve of Congress right now, even the presidency and the Supreme Court are in the thirties. And somehow if we could get more people from different parts of the country to be joining together in national service, after high school, so that they learn to work with other people in this cultural divide, which is huge now people see each other as the other, it's much more tribal. In fact, Teddy Roosevelt warn that the way democracy would founder would be, is people no longer have a fellow feeling or an empathy for one another as citizens. And we have to hope it's not going to come from a war. And maybe there's some equivalent of that, that we could create in a national service program.

I know Teddy Roosevelt's for it. Eleanor Roosevelt was for it. John McCain was for it, General McChrystal is for it. And my son has been talking about it in lots of places because he knows what that experience was like coming from this elite Harvard, Concord background, to be in that situation. And it does develop empathy and fellow feeling and it would on both sides, all sides of this dilemma. So there's answers out there. We just have to figure them out.

**Jeffrey Rosen:** [00:52:39] Well, that's a word exactly what we're going to do. I've been monopolizing your time because I'm so riveted by the discussion. We have all sorts of great questions from our audience and just a little bit of time for of them. And I will ask, were there presidents that demonstrated great leadership, but aren't recognized as such cause there were no major crises during their administrations?

**Doris Kearns Goodwin:** [00:53:08] Yeah, it's interesting. I mean, that's a good question because Teddy Roosevelt had said if there's not a war, we wouldn't know Abraham Lincoln's name today. If there's not a war, there wouldn't be a general that was famous and he didn't think it was possible without a national crisis at first to mobilize the country together, to get



through the checks and balances, to be able to get people to work together at all levels of the society. I think he was wrong. I mean, I think even his own presidency and the best days belied that cause he was able to mobilize a national spirit to deal with the worst problems of the industrial order, to break up some of the monopolies that weren't playing by the rules of the game, to regulate the railroads, to do what needed to be done, end child labor. And it got a majority support.

But it's true. I mean, Abigail Adams said, great necessities create great virtues and that you want to live in a time of crisis because that brings people together. And obviously the story that's here is told of that time. But I think we have to believe that with the citizen activism and with leaders, you can -- we're in a crisis now. There are problems in the society that need to be figured out. We still have a lack of mobility in this country. I don't care about the gap between the rich and the poor. What matters is if people have talents and discipline and they can't rise to the level of their talents and discipline, that's what Abraham Lincoln talked about.

He was constantly worried about, there'd be some kid out there who didn't have a chance, and he thought that was the sense of what a democracy was about in our country was about, was giving everybody who had the will to do it a chance. And we have too many people that don't get that chance because of where they come from, from where their situation is. And that's at the key, I mean, Lincoln talked about education in that same handbill where he talked about civic education in the Lyceum address, that it was the key. And we have to do something about our education system. There's still things to do about healthcare. There's so many things we need to do, and we're not focused on any of it right now because we're obsessed with what's going on.

But we'll get back to it. I really think so. I mean, maybe I'm just an optimist because I was originally a Brooklyn Dodger fan and I had to wait for so long and then it was a Red Sox fan and we were waiting 86 years. But I think it's more than that. I think the evidence, the past is telling us that we've been through these worst times. And if you just reaffirm the belief that this is the great country, most of us would never want to live anywhere else, and we just have to keep remembering that when we get distressed at what's happening right now.

**Jeffrey Rosen:** [00:55:26] Since you mentioned it. I have to ask a question on many people's minds, will the Red Sox get past the first round of the playoffs?

You know,

**Doris Kearns Goodwin:** [00:55:34] here's what happens when you get older like me. I no longer am obsessed with what's going to happen in the playoffs and the world series. They've given me so many happy days this summer, when the Red Sox don't win a game, I don't even want to read the paper the next day, which is rather a problem if I have to be on television, talking about the news that night. So I've read the paper happily. Oh, you know, over a hundred games this year and that's good enough for me. I mean, otherwise, if we never won in '04, I would be completely sure now that we would screw up in the playoffs. Cause that's what we would always do. We'd have this best record and then we screw up. I don't know, honestly, I don't know. I mean, maybe it's the old lingering Red Sox feeling that



somehow we've got to have done this great thing all season and something will happen in the end, but it's okay if it does now that I'm so mature.

**Jeffrey Rosen:** [00:56:18] Here's a me too question. Since LBJ was known for his sometimes uncouth behavior. Was there ever a time you can recall where he said or did anything outrageous in your presence?

**Doris Kearns Goodwin:** [00:56:28] Well, he did something outrageous, but it had nothing to do, I realized at the time, with being a woman. When I start to tell you about it, it's going to seem very odd and I think we're this is going somewhere, what we're talking about is other people are seeing it. But anyway, he had this bizarre habit of never wanting a conversation to end. So that if you were talking to him and he had to go to the bathroom, you came into the bathroom while he's going to the bathroom. Now that could be seen as something that's, particularly for me, but I didn't feel that way because he did that with everybody. It wasn't, I felt like I was just one of the gang. And for some crazy reason, I just understood that this was him and so we'd keep talking and I'm not really looking at him and we're just talking. But then he tells a story about McGeorge Bundy, who was the national security advisor. And he was kind of uptight. And so he was in the bathroom, like everybody else was with LBJ and he didn't want to watch him. So he put his back against him and he's looking at the wall and here's LBJ sitting on the toilet and he kept saying Mac, I can't hear you come closer.

So he said he kept backing up. He kept backing up. I thought he was going to sit on my lap. So, I don't know what I would have felt in today's movement, but I know I didn't feel it had to do with me being a woman and felt like I was part of the staff and I was like, all the other guys.

**Jeffrey Rosen:** [00:57:50] Harry Truman sent his hot letters and many historians seem to love him for this. Your thoughts.

**Doris Kearns Goodwin:** [00:57:55] Wait say this again?

**Jeffrey Rosen:** [00:57:56] Harry Truman sent his hot letters, the famous letter about Margaret singing.

**Doris Kearns Goodwin:** [00:57:59] Right. All right. Well, I certainly understand why he would send a hot letter to a critic who had maligned his daughter's piano recital. I mean, everybody could understand that's a father speaking up. I think that's different than sending a letter to a cabinet officer, where you're mad at something they've done and you're humiliating them by the letter becoming public. I think everybody understood when he said he wanted to hit the guy in the face that this is a father speaking, that's different. But he was plain speaking, Harry Truman.

And that was part of his appeal at the time. I don't know how it would play today. I mean, it seems like you can say lots of things today and they don't have consequences, so maybe it would be fine.

**Jeffrey Rosen:** [00:58:37] I don't think it was the face that he wanted to hit him in.



**Doris Kearns Goodwin:** [00:58:39] No, it wasn't. I think you're absolutely right. I'm trying to be delicate, you know, but there's a story that George Busg senior has told that he, somebody screwed up a teleprompter, the engineer who was working on it, and made him fail at what he was doing. And he yelled at the guy and then he leaves, the guy leaves the room and then he goes back and brings them back. And he said, I shouldn't have done that. The dignity of the presidency tells me, even though I felt that I shouldn't have told you that, I'm sorry, something like that, which is great. I mean, when you're a president, there's a dignity to it. When you're a leader, you've got to reign in these emotions and that's part of your responsibility of being a leader.

**Jeffrey Rosen:** [00:59:18] Are good presidents, good people? The smallest interactions, according to Lincoln, the smallest expressions of anger can have consequences. Is it important to be a good person in all of your interactions if you're going to be a great leader?

**Doris Kearns Goodwin:** [00:59:34] I don't know. I wish that were true. I think in Lincoln's case, goodness equaled greatness. And I don't think that always happens in leadership because the things you have to do to become a leader, the things you have to do to stay being a leader may go against some of the things that you'd want to be in terms of kindness or so you've got to fire people. You've got to let people know what you're feeling at times and you can't maybe be the good person that you might want to be at all points. Except for Lincoln. I mean, he's somewhat an outlier in that. I mean, the interesting thing about Lyndon Johnson is that he defied all the normal habits of what you should be to be a good leader, which is an emotional intelligence to helping the people and never humiliating them in public.

I mean, God, he could get mad at people, his people said, you know, he would sometimes if he saw a cluttered desk, he would yell at the person, you're disorganized! If he saw a clean desk, he'd say, what's the matter with you? Are you idle? You know, or you see somebody writing a letter, this is when he's in the NYA to his mother, and he says, can't you do that and take a crap on your own time son? So, but yet the people stayed with him. And the reason is if you have a common mission, which he had when he was in the NYA, they're providing thousands of people jobs, the rural electrification, when he's in the great society and the civil rights stuff, they feel like they're doing something larger than themselves. And I think that's the key to all four of these guys, at some point personal ambition gets transferred into an ambition for something larger than themselves. And they all want it to be remembered over time for having done something worth. And their staff, if they feel that they're part of something, then some of that behavior that you would think is just bad behavior, can be accepted. If there's no common mission that it's impossible, the team will disintegrate.

**Jeffrey Rosen:** [01:01:17] Your last chapter is about death and remembrance. Is it possible, or did these great leaders aspire to be remembered for themselves on an ego basis? Or did they aspire to serve a cause greater than themselves?

**Doris Kearns Goodwin:** [01:01:30] No, I think that is the distinction. I think they did aspire to be remembered for having done something that made people's lives better. And that comes at a certain point in a leader. I mean, Teddy admitted when he first went into public office,



when he was 23, he wasn't going in to make people's lives better. He just liked the adventure of being a politician, but then he went into tenements that he was investigating in the state legislature. He saw when he was police commissioner, what the slums were like in the middle of the night. When he was a soldier in the Spanish American war, he's sharing food and shelter with his soldiers. When he was governor, he saw the corruption that was going on between the political bosses and the business community. So by the time he became president, he'd had this huge winding path where he had learned through political experience, he had learned empathy. I think Lincoln was born with it, as you say, he had to learn it. And I think one of the difficulties of this last election was that political experience or even leadership experience was considered a liability.

And we were looking for somebody outside the system because the political system had failed us. It was understandable, but unless somebody has experience to learn how to deal with all sorts of people, to learn how to lead, to learn how to acknowledge errors and learn from their mistakes, to learn how to shoulder blame for other people, all the things you learn as a leader than by the time you get to the presidency, it's pretty hard to learn that. So I think we have to reevaluate what we're looking for in our leaders. It doesn't have to be political experience. I think you could have a great business leader who's led a huge company and has led that company well, and the company has made a difference in people's lives, and they've learned how to navigate shareholders and customers and people all over the world. But it's just a matter of, are they a leader that we can see these strengths are in? Before Tim Russert died in '08 we used to talk about the fact that if only the media would cover the people who were running for office in a different way, not simply to talk about who zings who in a debate, who raised the most money, who's the most interesting guy at that moment.

Even what they're standing for, because they may not carry out what they're standing for. We should look at their past. They've all been leaders somewhere, usually, as a governor, a mayor, or a Senator or Congressman. You can talk to their staffs, you could do an analysis. What kind of a team builder were they? What kind of traits do they show? What kind of weaknesses do they have? Could they acknowledge error? And it was something Tim and I were planning to hope that we could talk about on his shows and then make that the way journalists covered campaigns. So we got to figure that out too, how we cover campaigns and what the primary system is all about and what these stupid debates are about which aren't debates at all.

You know, there's a moment in one of, in one of Lincoln's debates that I loved, where somebody said to him, Lincoln you're two-faced. And his immediate response was if I had two faces, do you think I'd be wearing this face? He could have done it, but he understood. He understood that there was a difference in campaigning and governing. That once you were governing, you had to worry about your words. He never spoke spontaneously, extemporaneously, really, hardly ever as president, he was afraid. He might say something that would not be taken the right way. So he prepared almost everything he said. When soldiers, when people would come after a victory and they'd want him to serenade him at the white house and they want him to give a speech and he would just thank the soldiers,



thank them for coming. They'd sing some songs and saved his words because he knew that words mattered. That you're setting a tone for the entire country. And I think all of us need to remember that again now in this uncivil climate where people say things and bully each other, even on social media and those words can hurt or those words can inspire. It could be either way.

**Jeffrey Rosen:** [01:05:00] We have unfortunately time for one more question and then I'll ask for a closing thought, how has your understanding of political power and presidential leadership changed over the years, and what do you understand about leadership now that you didn't when you began writing about the presidents?

Well, I

**Doris Kearns Goodwin:** [01:05:14] think it's interesting. The reason I wanted to write this book was that each time I finished one of the other books, I felt like I had to move all that person's study, like FDR's books out of my study and make room for Teddy and Taft, or before that move Lincoln away and make room for FDR. And I felt like I was leaving an old boyfriend behind, that it was kind of disloyal to get rid of the old guy and have a new guy. So I decided, instead of studying a new person this time, I'd just look at them through the lens of leadership. And I think I hadn't thought about a lot of things, like where does ambition come from? When I was in graduate school, we used to talk about these things at night, these big questions.

Where does ambition come from? Does the man make the times, or the times make the man? Are traits born, leadership traits born, or are they developed over time? And it was so much fun to come back and look at these questions, that I saw where did they each feel that they were a leader for the first time. I never thought about that before. I think Lincoln saw it early on, especially when he won that election the second time. Teddy as a young child, I think even felt it leading his siblings, because he would tell them stories all the time and they would listen. FDR didn't feel it until he got on that campaign trail. He'd been a rather indifferent student at Groton, at Harvard, at Columbia. He was working in a wall street law firm. He hadn't impressed them with his work ethic. They come to him and say, run for this office. We'll guarantee you the seat mainly cause his mother could support the campaign, not because he'd shown the makings of a leader.

He gets out on the campaign trail and suddenly he's found, this is what I love. He listened to people, he talked to them, he wasn't a great speaker then. They used to, Eleanor said he used to make so many pauses. She was afraid that he would never go on. But by the end of the campaign, he was talking so long she had to go and get them off the stage because wouldn't leave. But the important thing is he found what William James says, what all of us want to find, the philosopher William James, is that voice within that says, this is the real me. This is what I was meant to do. So they each found that in public life. And I hadn't thought about that before. I just hadn't thought about it in a personal way, or even thought about how they wanted to be remembered. So it was a much more personal look at these leaders, even though I'd shown them with their families and their colleagues and the



historical moments and these big fat biographies, in this one, I think I was just looking inside and trying to answer the questions that I wanted to answer.

And it also came out shorter. I mean, you'll be happy to know that when one woman was reading the bully pulpit, which was the fattest of them all, she read it while she was going to sleep at night and she fell asleep and it broke her nose. So I promise you, this will not break your nose.

**Jeffrey Rosen:** [01:07:45] Or even mine. My foot hasn't even fallen asleep. So incredibly svelt. Well I am loathed to close, cause it's such an honor and a treat, but I have to ask it is the National Constitution Center, you've done so much to increase awareness and understanding of history and the Constitution. All of these great leaders were students of history and read about the Constitution. Why is it important for citizens to study history and learn about the Constitution?

**Doris Kearns Goodwin:** [01:08:15] I mean, I think there's no question that by understanding where we've come from, we understand where we are and where we're going. And that's what Lincoln would always say in almost all of his speeches. He would tell a story. Stories, have beginnings and middles and ends. And so he said, if we're trying to figure out in the middle of the struggle of the civil war, where are we going, you have to know where we came from, where we are now. What is our identity as a people. And I think that's so important for us right now. I mean, to go back to what I was saying about history being able to give us reassurance and perspective, my husband, who was older than I was, used to say in these last months before he died, he said, you know, I've lived through the depression when it was seen that capitalism was undone.

I lived through world war II when people thought that democracy was undon. He said, I remember, of course, those early days of the civil rights movement in the 1960s, when it seemed like the country was going to be split apart on racial grounds. And he said, we came through those things and he said, it reaffirmed his belief that the history and studying the history of this country and remembering the times that we'd been through, remembering what we were created for, remembering an importance of the beacon of hope that America provides to the world at large, that that reaffirms our sense that we can do something now. And I really believe that. He believed that with every fiber of his being and he kept telling me the optimism that I feel was not just me. It was from him as well. And to know how he'd given public service his entire life. I think we have to respect public servants again, look at these people and what the founding fathers did by being public servants and going into political life.

And right now there's a sense that we have to just want people to do that. My husband did that his whole life. He graduates from Harvard college, first in his class, president of the Harvard law review, never practiced law day in his life because he goes to work for the quiz show investigation with John Kennedy, for Bobby Kennedy, for LBJ, and then writes about history for the rest of his life, believing that that is what Americans can do and will do. And all of us have to, just, as I said before, we have to be citizens, first. And more important than partisans. And we, I think we'll do it. I really do. So, I'm just so glad to be with you today.





**Tanaya Tauber:** [01:10:50] Please subscribe to live at America's Town Hall and our companion podcast, We the People on your favorite podcast app. Get the latest constitutional news and continue the conversation on Facebook and Twitter using at constitution CTR. Despite our congressional charter, the National Constitution Center is a private nonprofit. We receive little government support and rely on the generosity of people around the country who are inspired by our non-partisan mission of constitutional debate and education. Please consider becoming a member. To support our work, including this podcast, visit [constitutioncenter.org](http://constitutioncenter.org) to learn more.

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