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Selections from
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Graduate Study and "The Chicago School of Politics"

Gabriel A. Almond

David B. Truman

Richard A. Brody, Stanford University, interviewer

Donald E. Stokes, Princeton University, interviewer

MR. BRODY: When did you attend the University of Chicago, and did you go in with the intention of being a political scientist?

MR. ALMOND: Well, I got to the university in 1928, and my aspiration was to be a journalist, a writer. Right in the middle of my undergraduate career, the depression hit — 1929 — I had been putting myself through college and it began to get more and more difficult to get any kind of job, and the career of a journalist and writer was much more chancy than the career of a teacher, so I began to think in terms of teaching. And around that time I happened to take a couple of courses — this would be in my junior year, in other words, in 1930 — I took a couple of courses, one with Fred Schuman in international politics and one with Merriam, if I'm not mistaken. I got very good grades on my papers, and so, in a sense, that kind of decided me for political science, and I ended up my undergraduate career with two majors: one in English literature and composition and the other in political science.

MR. BRODY: Did you do work with Lasswell when you were an undergraduate?

MR. ALMOND: Yes, I'm just trying to remember whether it was in the end of my junior year or the first quarter of my senior year that I took Harold Lasswell's "Non-Rational Factors in Political Behavior." It was the first time he had given that course and it was organized around the case histories that were then being written up for *Psychopathology and Politics*. As a matter of fact — well, the grades that I got in political science were very encouraging, and I was also given a fellowship, but fellowships for graduate work weren't very big in those days and I had to work for the first year after graduating to accumulate enough money in order to be able to afford to take advantage of that fellowship. But I was at the University of Chicago, then, from 1928 to 1938 when I got my degree — my Ph.D., with one year out for field research.

But that would have been a period of, you might say, the development of the department of political science at Chicago, the flowering period. It would have been the time during which Lasswell's *Psychopathology and Politics* was published, Lasswell's *Politics: Who Gets What, When and How* was published, Schuman's *International Politics* was published. Actually, I worked on Schuman's *International Politics*. Did research for him. As I remember, Gosnell's *Voting Studies* were already underway —

MR. BRODY: *Getting Out the Vote* was published in 1929, I think.

MR. ALMOND: 1929. Well, that would have been when I wasn't really in political science. Gosnell is actually a bit older than Harold Lasswell, and he was already collaborating with Merriam and doing this research before Lasswell hit his high.

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MR. STOKES: Well, coming back to Chicago and your entry into Chicago, I'd be interested just in having you reset that scene for us. What did it feel like as you went there as a new graduate student?

MR. TRUMAN: Terrifying.

MR. STOKES: How did you spend your days, weeks? What was a course? What was the organization of that department? How did it look?

MR. TRUMAN: It was a — well, as I say, it was terrifying because . . . everyone has that experience, that change, when you go from, particularly, a small undergraduate college to a university, a sense that now you're playing for keeps and everybody around you is smarter than you are and you're not going to survive more than a couple of weeks, and nobody would notice if you didn't.

But at the same time there was an enormously challenging kind of atmosphere. You asked how one spent one's time, and I think to a very substantial degree I — I recall, three courses a quarter. But it went awful fast and they had a reading period toward the end so that the lecture portions of it were packed in awfully hard. The biggest disadvantage of it was for an ordinary course if you were to write a paper, there really wasn't time to do a proper job on the paper, even though that was not supposed to be the case.

Some of the courses were really very conventional. It's interesting that Merriam's lecture courses were just in the history of political thought. I think in some ways they were very little more than the notes he'd taken from William Archibald Dunning when he was at Columbia, who in turn had copied them out of a then-untranslated French history of political thought. (It was Paul Janet, *Histoire de la science politique*.) I don't think that's quite fair, but there were certain similarities of points, shall we say, among these books as you look back at them. But he was awfully good at it, although it was a very conventional kind of course. Other people there had unusual things in the way of courses. Harold Lasswell, of course, and Harold had a series of courses that were offbeat in content and strikingly offbeat in title. Non-rational Factors in Political Behavior, for example, I think was a title or something close to that. And Gosnell's studies, which were basically then studies of voting behavior from the aggregate voting statistics, and so on. You don't find many courses like that around in other universities.

MR. STOKES: He was teaching that?

MR. TRUMAN: He was teaching that as a course.

Among the most stimulating teachers in that department was Quincy Wright, whose course in international law I still think is one of the finest courses I ever took from anybody in my life. He had an enormous erudition, historical knowledge, close legal reasoning, and a quiet inspirational sort of quality about him. He was a marvelous teacher.

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