

# Title Page & Abstract

An Interview with Newton Minow

This interview was done as a collaboration between the Northwestern Pritzker School of Law, the Illinois Supreme Court Commission on Professionalism and the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library  
*Illinois Statecraft – General Interest Oral History project*

Interview # IS-V-L-2017-040

Newton Minow, Chairman of the FCC during the Kennedy administration and friend and mentor to Barack Obama, was interviewed on the date listed below as part of the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library's *Illinois Statecraft – General Interest Oral History project*.

Interview dates & location:

Date: May 31, 2017      Location: Northwestern Pritzker School of Law, Chicago, IL

Interview Format: Digital video

Interviewer: Mark R. DePue, Director of Oral History, ALPL

Technical Support: David Ettinger, Videographer, Northwestern Pritzker School of Law

Transcription by: Northwestern Pritzker School of Law

Edited by: Roberta Volkmann and Jan Culp, ALPL volunteers

Total Pages: 57 pgs      Total Time: 1:51 + 1:27 / 1.85 + 1.45 = 3.3 hrs

Session 1: Early years, Stevenson campaigns, experiences as FCC Chair, presidential debates and experiences with Northwestern Pritzker School of Law

Session 2: Experiences with Barack Obama, and reflections on law as a career

Accessioned into the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library Archives on December 5, 2017.

The interviews are archived at the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library in Springfield, Illinois.

# Abstract

## Newton Minow, *Illinois Statecraft*, IS-A-L-2017-040

**Biographical Information Overview of Interview:** Newton Minow was born on January 17, 1926 in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, and grew up there. During World War II he served with the U.S. Army in India, and following the war, completed both his undergraduate and law degrees at Northwestern University in only twenty-nine months. He also married Josephine Baskin during this period. Following a clerkship with Supreme Court Chief Justice Fred Vinson, Minow returned to Chicago and a private law practice, but also became involved in the presidential campaigns of Adlai Stevenson II in 1952 and 1956. In 1961, at the age of thirty-four, he was appointed by President John F. Kennedy as the chairman of the Federal Communications Commission.

Early in his tenure at the FCC, Minow gave a speech entitled “Television and the Public Interest,” a speech that included the phrase ‘vast wasteland.’ Mr. Minow thought little about the phrase at the time, but the phrase has been associated with him ever since. There were several important initiatives during his time with the FCC, including the All-Channel Receiver Act of 1961 and Intelsat (International Telecommunications Satellite Organization), which helped usher in the age of communications satellites. Minow was also influential in the movement to create a public television network. Following his time as FCC chair, Minow once again returned to Chicago and joined the law firm of Sidley Austin LLP. He stayed active with Northwestern Pritzker University School of Law and in democratic politics throughout the rest of his life, including his work with presidential debates, beginning with the Ford-Carter debates in 1976. In the 1990s he met Barack Obama when Obama was interning at Minow’s law firm, where Michelle Robinson also worked. Minow maintained a close friendship with the future president thereafter, often offering advice at crucial moments of Obama’s political life.

**Subject Headings/Key Words:** Federal Communications Commission during early 1960s; Barack Obama; John F. Kennedy; Adlai Stevenson II; Judge Abner Mikva; Intelsat (International Telecommunications Satellite Organization); Northwestern Pritzker University School of Law; All-Channel Receiver Act of 1961; presidential debates; Chief Justice Fred Vinson; Michelle (Robinson) Obama;

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