

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Ready to add a big dose of positivity and empowered perspective to your day? You've come to the right place. Welcome to She Said, She Said podcast. I'm Laura Cox Kaplan. Here we tackle everything from imposter syndrome and confidence building to the best advice on how to lead yourself through life pivots, including the ones that knock you flat. For the past three years, I've talked to hundreds of experts about their stories. Here, you'll find their actionable advice and lessons as well as my own tools that you can put to use in your own life. Stick around. I'll think you'll find this investment in you well worth it.

Hey friends, got such a special show for you today. My guest is Julia Sweig. Julia is a scholar and author who has written award-winning books on Cuba and Latin America and foreign policy. Her latest endeavor is actually a biography on Lady Bird Johnson. It's entitled, Lady Bird Johnson: Hiding in Plain Sight. Eight days after President John F. Kennedy was assassinated, then incoming First Lady, Mrs. Johnson, began recording her audio diaries. These entries continued until the Johnsons left the White House. More than 123 hours and more than a million transcribed pages of largely ignored first hand perspective of what Mrs. Johnson was thinking. It also captures the role that she played in some of the most critical and historic events of the Johnson Administration. This largely ignored treasure trove has been sitting at the LBJ School at the University of Texas since it was made available to the public just a few years ago.

Julia has also produced an incredible podcast using these original audio recordings that are narrated by Lady Bird Johnson herself. The podcast is called In Plain Sight. It is absolutely fantastic. Both the book and the podcast are incredible. I'm a little obsessed with the podcast, as you probably tell. Both revealed details that had not been fully understood about the impact and the leadership of Mrs. Johnson during his administration. If you are a lover of history and always looking to understand more about the role of women in history, you are absolutely going to love this conversation.

We're also going to talk a bit about Julia's own interesting career. As I mentioned before, she is a scholar of Latin America. What was it about the Lady Bird Johnson tapes that really captivated her attention and encouraged her to spend all of these years doing this incredible research? So much to cover in this episode.

Julia, welcome to She Said, She Said.

Julia Sweig:

Laura, I'm so delighted to be here with you. Thanks for having me.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

I'm delighted to have you. As I mentioned to you before we started recording, I am fully obsessed with this podcast that you have created on Lady Bird Johnson. It is truly fantastic.

Julia Sweig:

Thank you, thank you.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

As we get into this, I want you to tell us how you stumbled across these diaries. This was not your area necessarily of expertise, historical figures, former First Ladies. Talk about what happened and what captivated you about these audio tapes, how you even learned about them in the first place.

Julia Sweig:

I love this thread. Let me just take it piece by piece. First of all, my very first book that I wrote was based on unexamined material in archives as well. Although they were Fidel Castro's archives in Havana. Retelling a story that we thought we already knew using the archives of the principal subject I'm writing about, turns out was already sort of in my gray matter. I have put it together as that origin story now. I don't think I thought of it when I stumbled upon and it wasn't really a stumble, of the Lady Bird diaries. There is something really thrilling about being a historian who retells a story that's been told that the received wisdom says is X and de-mythologizes and debunking those mythologies.

I did that with the way that the Cuban Revolution took place and how Fidel Castro took power. I did that 20 years ago or something. Then, as you say, had a long career doing many other things related to Cuba and foreign policy and Latin America. After doing that here in Washington DC and in New York and traveling around Latin America, I just got to a place of stagnation intellectually. I needed to teach myself something new. I also had been working in foreign policy where the gender imbalance is very pronounced. Sitting in rooms full of men, mostly as the only woman, for years and years and years, that's a story we can all tell. Here, I got to the point where I wanted to try to pull back and write about women and power.

To be honest, I didn't have a subject. I started noodling this around.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

How long ago was this?

Julia Sweig:

Okay, this tells you what a long project is. This was in 2012.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Oh wow.

Julia Sweig:

Actually, before I turned 50 years old, when I was 45. I always have a five year plan. I needed to know I was making a pivot by the time I turned 50. I'm not going to exactly what the age and date, how that lines up. The point is, it was quite a while ago at this point, where I started to think, "You need to do something new."

An acquaintance who I was talking with this about, told me, "Lady Bird Johnson kept a diary." That I had no idea. I did know that she is a person who was married to the American president, maybe most associated with the word power in the 20th century. That began a process of finding first, her collected volume of edited diaries that she published in 1970. It was on the New York Times best seller list for 13 weeks. But it's very redacted and very limited. Then I went to the LBJ library in Austin. This was a couple years later, having as much of the secondary literature as I could. In that library, you hear this in the podcast, there's a museum. I don't know if you've been there, or your listeners have been there. You walk into an exhibit space, which is about the LBJ presidency, actually his entire career. It's very dark and dim and a motion sensor triggers her voice. It comes on and you hear her narrating her experience of the JFK assassination on November 22, 1963. It's so gripping.

That, of course, opened the door to this multi-year process of listening to her audio recordings, all of them by now, and reading all of the transcripts and trying to put her back inside of the LBJ story, because she'd been marginal to the story as told until then.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Right. Why do you think she was so marginalized and why do we not know, and we're going to talk in this conversation a lot about what you have uncovered through her diary entries. Why do you think she was so marginalized and why do I have the impression, even as a native Texan, of someone who was more frivolous, just focused on flowers and beautification, as something that is a frivolous idea as opposed to what it actually was, and very complimentary to other things that were happening in the administration?

Julia Sweig:

There's a lot of answers to that. First of all, she was a journalism and history major at UT in Austin. She really had in her gray matter, a commitment to recording and documenting, well before she met LBJ. That was before. As his career progressed, she started keeping records. I say that because, on the one hand, she was very conscious of history and recording it, especially by the time they got into the White House. On the other hand, she was a woman of her time who was very conscious too, who engaged in certain acts of subterfuge to conceal her power and influence. It wasn't even that she, I think, thought to herself, "I have a lot of power and influence and I need to conceal it because I'm married to this charismatic, thin-skinned man and the country isn't ready yet for a powerful woman in the White House." That wasn't the narrative.

It was more that this was her training and her socialization. I think she had a lot of modesty and self-deprecation. That's on the one hand, that she was characal to mind how she represented herself to the public. Although she was very activist. She cultivated her image carefully.

Second thing is though, of course, that the historiography, all of the history that's been written about LBJ, journalistic, historians, biographers, and this isn't unique to LBJ, but we're talking about that presidency, focus on the great man in the Oval Office. That's the nature of presidential history and it's the nature of male story telling to not look in a rounded way. It has driven... There are some blinders there. The material that has been analyzed and studied and excavated, has been a focus on LBJ and the people around him, and not so much Lady Bird, even though she was in the room all the time.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Which was pretty unusual for the time, as I gather, right? You didn't have First Ladies of that particular generation, if you will, who were that involved. Jackie Kennedy was not that involved in JFK's administration, at least as far as I know. Right? And not involved in policy making and didn't have offices and all of that.

Julia Sweig:

I think her modernization of the East Wing as a component of the whole White House political operation is very significant. She's really the bridge from Eleanor Roosevelt to Hillary Clinton. I don't know if Lady Bird Johnson had security clearance. She was certainly in the room and reading his documents. Often the room was the bedroom. He famously had staff meetings in his bedroom all the time. She was often there. When you look at all the images of the LBJ Library website, you see her in the Oval Office all the time. I think it is unusual and not something we've known because they didn't broadcast it. Certainly LBJ knew it. She knew it. They were careful to titrade the way the public received that information.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Yeah. Talk about how her beautification efforts actually were such a pivotal part of the Civil Rights Movement and what became the Civil Rights Bill. Talk about how those pieces fit together, because I have to admit my ignorance. I really never thought about it in the way in which she was apparently thinking about it and in the way that you've presented it in the book and in the podcast. Talk a little bit about that.

Julia Sweig:

Yes, I was very surprised to find the way her time in the White House brought together Civil Rights and what we would call today, environmental justice, especially in Washington DC. Beautification is the words that she says much later in her life, "I'll never forgive Lyndon's boys for making me use that word as a cover for my environmental agenda." She hated the word. She shed it off by the end of her time in the White House. She started off with this idea, which she put together with Stewart Udall, who was the Secretary of the Interior and a very significant environmentalist. The idea that she could use her First Lady energy toward beautifying Washington DC and making it a model for the rest of the country.

Very soon into this process that involved philanthropists and landscape architects and Garden Club ladies and big tent Johnson politics in a way, she started feeling quite uncomfortable with that. I think of her evolution and beautification as one that goes from ornamental, literally just planting flowers and beautifying, and we see that Washington today. Washington is in bloom and a lot of that is in thanks to her. From ornamental to fundamental. She developed over time, without a budget. The East Wing can't pass legislation. It doesn't have a budget. It has it's famous and now very significant convening power, partnerships with Black Washington. Washington DC was the largest majority black city at the time. It also, in the 1960s and still spanning, obviously there's no statehood, but almost entirely unrepresented, and incapable of having its own budget and taxing authority, and therefore participation for its citizens and decisions about itself. With the segregation that came in Washington at the time, there was also total deprivation of public services in Northeast and Southeast and Southwest and all of the non-white neighborhoods of DC at the time.

She started partnering with a very special man, who actually became the first elected major of Washington, Walter Washington, who in the early 60s and late 50s, was the head of the National Capitol Housing Authority, to try to bring the idea of empowerment and beautification together with that of representation and civil rights. Over the course of her time in the White House, deployed her staff from the East Wing and organized big money from civil rights supporting philanthropists and radical landscape architects from California to try to develop a way to convert all the green space along the Anacostia River, which of course is not the Potomac River and quite neglected, but controlled by the National Park Service in to a desegregated public recreation space where access to nature for the residents living there would be the priority.

That's the story behind beautification in Washington DC with Washington as the model for the rest of the country.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

It's absolutely fascinating. As I have listened to this and as I have read your book, there were so many details that I never put the pieces together. It's really quite incredible. Let's talk about her partnership with President Johnson, and his reliance on her in a way that I think also surprises people, notwithstanding what you just said about her being in all these photographs and being in the room and the Oval Office all the time and in their bedroom where he was conducting meetings elsewhere. I understand he would conduct meetings in what are otherwise known as private places.

Talk about their partnership and how he relied on her.

Julia Sweig:

By the time they got into the White House, and that's the primary focus of the podcast and the book are the White House years, they really had a joint political and business enterprise that they built and shared together. Lady Bird's activism as a business person goes back to her financing the acquisition of their radio station and her involvement in the growth of their media holdings in Texas. That begins in the 1940s. At the same time, as his congressional career grows, she's increasingly out on [inaudible 00:17:43] and could famously memorize and repeat to him the names of everybody in the room of some fundraiser that she might have just been to.

They are totally intertwined in terms of their political operation and their business operation. In 1960, this really becomes evident because he and she join the Kennedy ticket and that campaign. Jackie Kennedy has been suffering miscarriages, doesn't want to go out on the campaign trail and risk another one. Lady Bird travels all around the country as Jackie's surrogate and as LBJ's surrogate. Of course, Bobby Kennedy famously says that Lady Bird won Texas for JFK.

I'd say that by way of background, because by the time they take office because of the tragedy, the assassination, their jointness... They were totally inseparable in terms of their vision for the country domestically and also in terms of their awareness of how difficult it's going to be to keep the country united. They feel very readily, the tension between being pushed to escalate in Vietnam and their desire to deepen the progressive social reforms that started under FDR, who was their idol. That joint enterprise continues from the day they enter the White House until the moment they leave. It's manifested in her role in setting the arc of the presidency, meaning making sure that he runs in 1964 when he has many, many doubts, a big story that also has not been told before, and also participating actively in his exit strategy that we see come to the surface March 31, 1968, when he announces he won't run again.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

What did you learn, Julia? LBJ was a larger than life personality. What did you learn about their relationship on a more personal level and her ability to work with him, manage him to some degree? There's a lot of complexity in this relationship. Talk about what you learned about that aspect of this partnership.

Julia Sweig:

The layers and complexity of the marriage... of course anybody that's been married for more than a minute understands that, or married or together with anyone else for more than a minute, understands that layers and complexity are also impenetrable from the outside. Nobody knows what really goes in inside of a marriage. That's the cliché, the truism, but it's true. I'm hazarding, I'm surmising here, making an intelligent guess.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

She didn't talk about this.

Julia Sweig:

Of course, what has been talked about is a lot of emphasis on the negative side of the marriage, on LBJ's infidelities, on his vulgarities, and on his mistreatment of her in public verbally. I just thought and could

see right away that clearly this couldn't be but hurtful to her. It paints her as his victim, that mythology. It deprives her of agency. It neutralizes, minimizes, disappears her substance. When I took the time to read all of the material, not just her diaries, but all of the policy material, the campaign material, that are in the LBJ library and in other archives around the country, what you see is that what she brought to the table was the ability, as you say, not just to manage him, but to ground him. We talk about the emotional ballast that women in marriages to powerful men provide. It wasn't just that. It was political savvy. It was judgment. It was a strategic mind. It was judge of character. It was a highly compartmentalized, contained personality, who knew how to take care of herself so that she could take care of him.

By the time they get into the White House, that's an enormous amount of power that she exercises over him. I place that into the full context and think, "Well, you know, every marriage has its trade offs. I don't want to deny that it's horrible to know about how busy he was outside of the marriage, but there's a much bigger picture and it's something that she clearly made peace with.

What you hear in this material is how much she loved him.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Right.

Julia Sweig:

And vice versus.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Yeah, it's so fascinating. One question that springs to mind that you reference in the book and I believe you reference it in the podcast as well, is that you hear elements of self doubt, maybe even imposter syndrome, or what we talk about as imposter syndrome now. You think about this complicated relationship that she had with this very big personality. Where did that streak, that confidence, come from to plow through that self doubt that you hear?

Julia Sweig:

One of my listeners wrote to me and said that she thought it was related to Lady Bird's surviving the loss of her mother. Her mother died when she was five years old. She was raised by her father, who was this larger than life, Tennessee Williams character. She was raised by descendants of enslaved people. This is in East Texas, on the border with Louisiana, and then aunts from Alabama. She had a lot of grit. She, as a lifetime reader and a long lifetime person who sought solace in nature, she really did have the ability to... She was an incredible survivor. She was very, very intelligent.

It's hard to know exactly what shapes people. Does trauma shape people? Or does opportunity shape people? Or a combination of both? I think, taking my cue from her too, she always talked about how Lyndon himself stretched her, how he pushed her to be her best possible self. When we hear about those stories about him giving her a hard time about her clothing. This wasn't as much, "You don't look nice. Be more feminine," or something. It was also, "Rise to your capacity and show the world how amazing you are."

Laura Cox Kaplan:

The ability to depersonalize that, I think for an awful lot of women, to get that what was feedback, and he probably didn't deliver it in the nicest way possible is my guess. Getting that feedback and not

personalizing it, I was not aware of the fact that her mother had passed away and this idea of resilience and where that comes from. That's a really interesting element. You wonder if she saw... In some respects, LBJ was similar to her father personality wise, perhaps, and that the training from a very young age and having somebody that was tough and not having that mother figure. Men and women, certainly in that decade, raised children differently and related to children differently. So you wonder.

Julia Sweig:

He adored her. He gave her a lot of independence. She started driving herself to high school when she was 13 years old. She was a young girl of privilege. She had a credit card to Neiman Marcus when she was in college. In fact, she never used it. She was a bit of a, I don't know if we use the term tomboy anymore, but it's interesting to me. Women have to stuff ourselves into certain outfits and appearances and show up in public looking certain ways that we're socialized to, certainly in her era. She never liked the idea of having to stuff herself into shoes and girly clothing. She got used to it once she became a political animal and a public figure, but it wasn't her nature. It wasn't her nature.

Her father, back to the father, gave her a lot of autonomy, gave her I think, confidence, encouraged her intellect by bringing in this kind of eccentric aunt to help raise her, who was an upper buff and very well-read herself. I think, by the time she meets LBJ, you're right, she's trained to deal with a big personality, but LBJ saw her very remarkable attributes. That's something about him. He was very good at spotting low ego, highly intelligent people, and bringing them into his inner circle. Many of them stayed there for decades, as did Lady Bird.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

So fascinating. Let's talk a bit about her relationship with Mrs. Kennedy. Mrs. Kennedy had a very interesting persona and a very different role in the White House. In later years, as we've uncovered in her own audiotapes, she says things that are not particularly kind. She said a lot of snarky things about a lot of people.

Julia Sweig:

It was snarky.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

But Lady Bird in particular, which is interesting given the role that Lady Bird played, as you just said, as serving as a surrogate for Jackie on the campaign trail and really helping the administration as a group. Maybe talk a little bit about their relationship, which as I understand it, evolved. I found Jackie's comments to be, or Mrs. Kennedy's comments to be interesting given that relationship.

Julia Sweig:

It did evolve. It's an interesting arc and it goes from the 1950s until Jackie dies in the 1990s. In the 1950s, once LBJ becomes majority leader, his seniority confers to Lady Bird. She's the queen of the Senate spouses and they meet once a month. It's a time for intelligence gathering and intelligence spreading, and as I imagine it. She brought Jackie in. Jackie was a socialite. She was a debutante and an equestrian. She studied in Paris. She was very, very different in orientation and culture than Lady Bird. Each of them knew that. They were very respectful to one another. Lady Bird, you can hear it on the podcast, speaks of her quite adoringly.

In 1960, the tables turn and Lyndon loses in the first ballot in Los Angeles in the convention and Jack is now on top and asks LBJ to be his Vice President. Suddenly, the asymmetry that the Johnson's had been used to flips, and they're on the bottom and wants to be Vice President. They couldn't find a way to say no. Lady Bird becomes Jackie's surrogate as Jackie is trying to have more babies. Jackie is not the political animal. I shouldn't say not entirely. She's not as much of a political animal as Lady Bird is. The cultural differences between the Kennedy and Johnson plans become more and more pronounced. The Kennedy team is very, very negative about LBJ. They spread these terrible, cultural biases about the south and cornpone and all the ways of smearing the Johnson's. It's very, very hurtful. Although, between Jackie and Lady Bird and Lyndon and even Jack, there is a kind of intimacy and understanding and mutual respect, especially between Jackie, Lady Bird and Lyndon.

After the assassination, and I do want your listeners to listen to the podcast and read the book, so I don't want to give away the whole story, Jackie and Lady Bird orchestrate a really incredible transition, incredible in terms of its grace and its care and its caution and the way they treated one another during that process. Once Jackie leaves Washington DC, the distance does then set in. I think Jackie's snarkiness that you hear in talking about Lady Bird is very much tainted by Bobby Kennedy, who's lost his brother and who very much wants to be in politics. He and Lyndon have what my friend and historian, Jeff Shessel calls mutual contempt and it infects everything. I think it definitely affects Jackie. By the time Bobby himself is assassinated and Jackie and Lady Bird see one another at his funeral, you really get a sense from Lady Bird's telling of it and you hear it and I write about it, of just how much distance is between the two of them.

They recover their relationship in the aftermath of LBJ's death and Lady Bird's very long first presidency.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

She's spent, as I understand it, time with Jackie on Martha's Vineyard, at Redgate Farm, multiple times right?

Julia Sweig:

Multiple, every New Year for years in the 1980s. Yes, I would have loved to be a fly on the wall there.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

They've opened that property up. It's such a beautiful place. You're going to have to go, especially given your connection.

Julia Sweig:

What are of Martha's Vineyard is it in?

Laura Cox Kaplan:

It's in Aquinnah, so it's upper island, but it's absolutely gorgeous.

Julia Sweig:

When I started this research actually, and put in ad out in the Martha's Vineyard Gazette to see if anybody would respond to it who had any kind of experience with the two of them there. I didn't get one response. I kept it up there for eight months or something.



Laura Cox Kaplan:

No kidding. Okay, I have what is maybe a mundane, or what may seem like a mundane process question. In some of the photographs, I noticed that she's got her microphone. She's recording these diary entries. There are envelopes that are dated behind her. There's a piece of paper that she's reading from. Was she writing these diaries in long hand and then recording them after the fact or was she doing it spontaneously? What was her process? Did you gather how she did this and why?

Julia Sweig:

I did. It's an excellent question and not a mundane one because I think it goes, Laura, to what a, can I say badass, she was.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Sure.

Julia Sweig:

As I said, she was trained as a journalist and a historian. Before she got into the White House and for probably decades of them, but they haven't been processed, she kept little tiny spiral notebooks with her and kept in red shorthand, took notes on everything. Even took notes, and I don't know if it was a long hand or shorthand, on the flight back from Dallas to the White House, to Washington DC, on the day of the assassination. This was a woman who was constantly gathering material. The way she produced her audio recording was not in long hand first. Her staff, in those envelopes you see, would put together for every day, press clippings, Lady Bird's daily diary. That is her schedule. Lyndon's schedule, memos, guest lists, all kinds of material that would allow her to then record her first draft of history. It's really kind of amazing. She didn't write her diary entries down first. Her first drafts are recorded.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Wow.

Julia Sweig:

That's stunning right?

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Yes.

Julia Sweig:

She could sit there and synthesize and tell a story and do it in these cogent paragraphs. She, very seldom, would rewind and re-record. Her straight first drafts were incredibly remarkable. Then, before she left the White House, they started to transcribe them.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

That is fascinating. In fact, I find that quite stunning, especially as somebody who spends a lot of time in front of a microphone. To be able to do that spontaneously without editing, without pausing, without cleaning it up, that is remarkable. To tell a story that coherently, that is really something.

Julia Sweig:

She's the first podcaster in the White House.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

She really is.

Julia Sweig:

This is why I agree.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

What about the Johnson family, her two daughters and her grandchildren? Have you had contact with them and what do they think about this project and their mother slash grandmother?

Julia Sweig:

I did ask both daughters, Linda and Lucy, to allow me to interview them during the writing and research process, but I didn't make any headway, so I didn't interview them. I don't think it was a... I'm not exactly really sure why, but subsequently, I had the opportunity to go to Linda Robb's house because we taped a CBS Sunday Morning program there. I had the chance to share the book with her with the photographs. I don't know what she specifically, or Lucy specifically, think of the book. I have heard from some of the grandchildren. That's been really gratifying because what they're telling me is that they love to hear their grandmother's voice and her spirit and that their friends are listening to the podcast and reading the book. That just makes me feel very happy because I know if that were my grandmother and I had been raised around this interesting, bright, articulate woman, being able to go back and listen to her tell her story of when she was in the White House, it would be a wonderful experience.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Yeah, I think for anyone who has living relatives who are older, sit them in front of a microphone as fast as you can and have them record their memories. The power of the spoken word, it's what makes podcasting so incredible as a tool. Let's talk a little bit about that, Julia, because you have embraced podcasting as a complimentary tool. I'm curious about why you did what you did. You've written this book. You've produced the podcast, which takes excerpts from different elements, and I'm not even sure how many episodes. I hope there are many more. You've produced now, seven or eight, I think, at last count, seven.

Julia Sweig:

Eight is next week. I don't know when you're airing this, but there are eight episodes.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Eight total?

Julia Sweig:

Possibly a couple of bonus episodes in the works.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Okay great. Talk about your thought process and why you decided to do what you did. I assume you wrote the book first and then produced the podcast. Talk about when it occurred to you that this would be a great thing to do.

Julia Sweig:

I did write the book before I produced the podcast. Over the several years it took me to write the book, that coincided with the explosion of podcasting. I think Serial, which was the first big one by Laura Keonig, that came out when I was in the early stages of this process, or at least of the writing process. Because Lady Bird left this huge audio trove, it's 123 hours of tape, and because we hear her in her own voice narrating her experience of these iconic moments in recent American history, it just seemed a natural fit to me that the book in and of itself, as much as I love the book and I hope your listeners will read it, couldn't do full justice to her story, and that the ability to hear people in real time, narrate their experiences, is astonishing. It brings things so alive.

As I was in the final stages of editing the book, I had a coffee with an old friend of mine, old friend. As in, since we were teenagers in San Francisco growing up, who had been in the film and entertainment industry for a long time and had just launched his podcast company, Best Case Studios. We started talking about the Lady Bird story and how we could turn it into an audio documentary, because that's what it is. His name is Adam Pinkus and he's really the creative genius, I think, behind the podcast. He's a musician. He's had a lot of experience directing. He directed me. He helped transform the story into scripts. We pulled together a team that involved archival producers so we were able to ferret out and pull in all that archival material from the period. Then we teamed up with ABC News, which was a huge help because we could use their archival material to really pull it all together.

I love the format. There's the kind of podcasts that you do, seem to be very accessible and here you are and I'm looking at you and you're doing it. I don't know, Laura, if you've taught yourself all of this or if you have a team. I'm curious.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

I use freelancers, although at the moment, and with COVID, we really had to change everything. We were recording in a studio before COVID on a weekly basis. We had to immediately, obviously, pivot from that. I had to figure out how to make Zoom work. Now, as you know, we're using SquadCast, which is a fantastic platform. Ultimately, I have a Masters degree in Broadcast, so I had the fundamentals. I have two degrees in Journalism and Government. My career took a lot of different turns before I got back to where I think I probably was always supposed to be at some point in my career. This idea of storytelling through this platform was not something that I had necessarily thought that I would end up doing, but that's where I ended up.

I had some ability already and understanding how to edit and how to produce. We're a startup at best, so I still have plenty to learn, but the basic fundamentals, I had some background in.

Julia Sweig:

Well, I think it's a really powerful medium. You asked me if I had written the book before I produced the podcast. Yes, we produced the podcast in the last six months of 2020 and released it for Women's History Month. For my next work, what I have in mind, and I don't know if you want to talk about that.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

I do.

Julia Sweig:

I might actually do more podcast production before I do my next book because it's a little bit more immediate and the long, long grind of doing a major book like this can be very isolating. We're sitting in our living rooms doing this podcasting but at least when I produced this podcast, I had a team and I had collaborators. I had research assistants doing the book too, but at the end of the day, when you're writing, it is you and you alone.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Right.

Julia Sweig:

I like the idea of the collaborative part of this. The storytelling that you mentioned, there are so many other women, and this is a focus of yours, who's stories are adjacent or hidden and who make up the fabric of who we are and who we're becoming. I'm very inspired by Lady Bird's decision to leave that record. I really want to see what else is out there in terms of audio record that can be used to bring these people's lives to the light.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Yeah, I love that. Do you have a specific project that you're beginning to work on that you want to talk about at this point? That gives us some sense of where you may end up, but also how you tie in, you mentioned at the beginning of our conversation, your origin story and why this appealed to you because of the work that you had done in Cuba and Latin America and maybe looking at other elements of pulling that thread?

Julia Sweig:

I'm not entirely sure. It's weird how much I found myself able to relate to Lady Bird Johnson, even though we're from such totally different generations and geographies and demographics. She is a political animal that lived in Washington DC for 30 years and so have I. I say that because I don't know if I'll go back to Latin America and Cuban and foreign policy because working Washington DC, I maxed out on being in the policy weeds, especially once President Obama... This is a bit of a tangent but it will help explain. Once President Obama launched the diplomatic and commercial opening of Cuba, which is something that I was very involved in for a very long time, I felt like I didn't have much more to add. In the world of foreign policy hierarchies, Latin America tends to be at the bottom of the priority list unless we're talking about the border. So I don't know that I'll go back to that material. I am really interested in maybe having a way to find other people who are also in plain sight and yet haven't gotten the credit or taken the credit, whether they're in the military or in science or in judicial system.

I think there are, as Mitt Romney's lovingly told us, binders for women.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

For sure.

Julia Sweig:

The question is to be able to get back in when they open up, into the archives to find out who else left the kind of material that can be used for audio.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

I ask everyone who comes on this podcast because impact is such an important component of women's leadership and the impact that we potentially want to have or we hope that our work will have. When you think about this body of work, what impact do you hope it will have on future generations?

Julia Sweig:

Not just future generations, first of all, I hope that the work will cause us to do a massive rethink of the LBJ presidency, by putting Lady Bird in the room and at the center of so many discussions, upside and downside. Civil rights, great society, and of course, her blinders on Vietnam that she shared with him up until about the end of 1967. I feel like the focus on the LBJ presidency needs to have her in the center. That goes to an issue of how historians tell the story of the American presidency. I think once we have a woman in the Oval Office, that will automatically shift the gaze and also give space to more and more women to write presidential history. We don't have a circuit of women writing presidential history and that was one of the things I was trying to do.

This book is a political biography but it's also a story of LBJ presidency, not just of Lady Bird herself.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Yeah. Julia, this has been such a pleasure. Thank you for the book and for the amazing podcast. We'll include links to both in the show notes for the episode, episode 149. Really grateful for your time today.

Julia Sweig:

Laura, thank you so much for having me. What a wonderful interview. Very happy to meet you.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Hey friends, thanks so much for joining us today. To learn a bit more about Julia Sweig, check out the show notes for this episode, episode 149. I've also included links to both Julia's terrific book on Mrs. Johnson called, *Lady Bird Johnson: Hiding in Plain Sight*, as well as the terrific podcast called, *In Plain Sight*. You'll find those materials, as I said, in the show notes for this episode.

Now, before I let you go, I need your help. If you're enjoying *She Said, She Said* podcast, I would love to hear from you. There are several ways that you can contact me and send us some feedback. The first, if you are listening on iTunes, is to click the review button there, give us five stars and then write a few words about why you listen to *She Said, She Said* podcast. Those comments help others who are looking for podcasts like this one to find it. I also love hearing from you. You can also direct message me on Instagram at [lauracoxkaplan](#) or at [shesaidshesaidpodcast](#). Finally, you can use the contact link at the [SheSaidSheSaidpodcast.com](#) website to send me a message as well. Be sure to include why you listen and what we can do to continue to improve this content and make it even more meaningful for you.

Friends, most of all, I am so grateful that you've chosen to spend some time with us today. I hope you found this little investment in you well worth it. I'll see you next time. Until then, take care.