

Prof. Frank Costigliola
Interviewed by Jamie Gorman and Chris Chaplin.
April 21, 1998

Jamie Gorman/Chris Chaplin: This interview is with Frank Costigliola, held by Jamie Gorman and Chris Chaplin. It's April 21st, 1998, and the project is "1968 :The Whole World Was Watching".

So, where and when were you born?

Frank Costigliola: I was born in New York State on November 1st, 1946.

JG/CC: Where did you grow up?

FC: Rockland County, NY, outside of New York City.

JG/CC: Could you describe your family and your neighborhood?

FC: In terms of what?

JG/CC: Just in general, a summary?

FC: OK. Well, both my parents are Italian immigrants. We grew up in a kind of a suburban area that became, a rural area that became suburban as I was growing up, because it's close to New York. It was a neighborhood, that was, most of my friends and most of my neighbors were Jewish, so that's, that describes it. I felt very much part of Jewish-American culture as well as Italian-American culture.

JG/CC: All right. What were your parents political views and affiliations?

FC: Well, my father grew up as a member of the Fascist Party in Italy. That was required. Then he left Italy in 1935 because he was gonna be drafted to fight in the, in the Ethiopian War, so he came here at eighteen years. My parents have a, or family has a long tradition of anti-war feeling. As I said, my father came here to, not to fight in the Ethiopian war, his father deserted from the Italian army in World War I, so there's a, unlike a lot of other families, this was an antiwar tradition. Is it light enough here?

JG/CC: Yeah, yeah. Where did you and your family get information about politics and other events?

FC: Well, I was the one who was interested in politics. I read the newspaper, *New York Herald Tribune*, which was then kind of like the *New York Times*, except it had comics, from sixth grade on, so I was the one who was interested in politics, much more than my family. They were not very political. They were just, not in favor of the war, but insofar as things were, they were not political.

JG/CC: What did you think you wanted to do when you grew up, and how did that change over time?

FC: Well, I thought I wanted to be a doctor, because that's what my mother told me I should want to be, 'cause doctors make money. And that's what I thought I wanted to do until I went to college and I thought about being a doctor, but I really didn't. I did well in Biology, but I didn't like it very much, and I liked history a lot more, and as time went on, I thought about being in the US Foreign Service to be a, the people who work with the Department of State. But then, that changed in the 1960's as I, I was in college then, and I realized what the United States was doing in its foreign policy, and I decided I didn't want to be part of the government, and I eventually, I decided to become a professor.

JG/CC: Were you aware of any discrimination against people in your neighborhood or family?

FC: Yeah, there was a lot of discrimination. Against my family or in the neighborhood?

JG/CC: Either.

FC: I think people, there was a certain amount of discrimination against black Americans, as a matter of course in those days. I didn't, as I said, I was kinda of a funny situation, where I grew up in a community that was, by the time I was in high school, was mostly Jewish, most all my friends were Jewish. I was culturally more Jewish than anything else. And so I fit in with that, I mean at times, you know, basically, girlfriends' parents would think I was Jewish, if they found out I wasn't Jewish, they'd be upset, but I mean, that was just kind of like the way the world was. I don't regard it as discrimination, that was just the way people interacted.

JG/CC: Where did you go to college, and what did you study?

FC: I went to Hamilton College in upstate New York.

JG/CC: Could you describe your extracurricular activities?

FC: Studied. There was a lot, it was a very hard school. It was school you had to bust your butt to get C's. It was very hard. A lot of heavy drinking on weekends, well Friday and Saturday night. I ran cross-country and track, and studied a lot. I went to graduate school, too, and so I mean that was part of, has a lot to do with anti-war stuff rather than my undergraduate years.

JG/CC: Who were your best friends?

FC: What kind of people were they?

JG/CC: Yeah, what kind of people were they?

FC: In college? or,

JG/CC: Yeah, in college.

FC: Kind of people, the school I went to was mostly for white Anglo-Saxon Protestants who were rich. It funneled a lot of people into investment banks in New York, things like that. I really didn't fit into that group, except I didn't realize it until I got there. So I kinda hung out with other misfits, and a lot of my friends were Jewish, were strange people in one way or another.

JG/CC: Could you describe dating among your group of friends?

FC: At where, high school or college? Big difference. (*JG/CC: Both.*) Well, high school was kind of, well high school was, people went on dates, you know, I went to my first dance when I was in sixth grade. People went on, went to dances and stuff, and there was a fair amount of pairing up. People didn't engage in sex as people do today, did not.

In college it was weird, because it was an all men's school. There weren't any women's colleges nearby, and so social life was concentrated on these party weekends. There were three a year, one for the big, those three big weekends there was no Saturday classes. Normally we had four hours of class on Saturday morning, and so those party weekends, there was, involved a lot of drinking and I don't know if you'd really call it dating, I don't know, it was kind of, bizarre. If you've ever seen the movie *Animal House*, it was a lot like that.

JG/CC: Did your guidance counselors and teachers in high school encourage you to go to college?

FC: Yeah, well it was understood. I was in the very top of my class, it was always understood I'd go to college.

JG/CC: Did you feel there was a generation gap in the late Sixties?

FC: Yeah. Yeah, I think, particularly the baby boom generation felt since we were so numerically large that we were going to take over the world.

JG/CC: What did you know about the counter culture? Did you think it was good?

FC: Yeah. I was, well, when I was at Hamilton, Hamilton was still back in the 1950's. This is the late Sixties, but psychologically, mentally, it was still back in the late Fifties, 10 years later. And then I got to Cornell University in the fall of 1968, where all kinds of things were happening.

Let me relate something else. I also spent my junior year in Germany. That was 1966-67, and I have one memory that sticks in my mind that in the spring of '67, I was listening to Armed Forces Network Radio, AFN Radio, which was American radio for soldiers, in Munich, Germany, and the song, I think Barry Maguire song, "When you come to San Francisco wear flowers in your hair", that song that played, I had never heard it before, and it was like "Wow, what's happening, what's going on". You know, it's like this is my sense that there was a counter culture back in the states, and, in Germany, I remember German students were interested, who didn't even speak English, were fascinated with Bob Dylan records. They wanted to copy my, you know, listen to my Bob Dylan records, and tape them. So I guess I began having inklings in '66, '67 that things were happening, but a lot of it happened in '68, when I went to Cornell, where the counter culture was in full bloom, and the anti-war movement. And by then, they were kind of fused. As I, when I became really active in the anti-war movement, '68-'69, and after that, a lot of it was mixed in with the counter culture with it.

JG/CC: How did you feel about the use of drugs?

FC: That they were good. That you know, if you talk to, in terms of identification, we thought we, you know, myself and my friends, who also worked hard by the way, I busted my butt in grad school, too, but we called ourselves, and regarded ourselves as "freaks". Freaks were people who used marijuana, straight people were, you made it a point of pride not to drink beer, I mean people who drank beer were straight, I mean, you didn't want to do that. So I, I as I said, I was a serious student at Cornell, but a lot of my friends were drop-outs from Ithaca College or Cornell, who used a lot of drugs. Some of those people died, this one guy who did heroine, who died. I, we knew a lot of people who did a lot of drugs. I mean I did, I guess you can say this here, I don't know, am I gonna get arrested? If I run for office or something, are you guys gonna release this?

JG/CC: No, no.

FC: That's alright, I was just kidding.

JG/CC: Just avoid saying, just talk about it in the third person.

FC: Oh, third person, right, okay, third person. I knew a lot of people that did a lot of drugs. People did, I mean it was sad, but like anything else, there are people who, like anything else, there are people who use it and people who abuse it. And I think the people who abuse drugs is, they'll abuse whatever drug there is around, but there was a lot of recreational use of drugs, and there was a sense of that that was an important thing to do. That you did, it was mind expanding, and it was, you know, if you didn't use it to excess, it was a good thing. And I still think that that's the case. I think we kind of have it, I'm so straight now it is ridiculous, I don't do anything. But I still think we kind of have an hysterical attitude about drugs, where it's all good or all bad. I think that's crazy, and also the idea that we have legal drugs like caffeine, an extremely powerful drug, alcohol is legal, nicotine, those are all legal drugs, marijuana is not legal. I mean it's just kind of historical chance which drugs are legal and which drugs are not legal.

JG/CC: Which were your favorite musical groups in the late Sixties?

FC: Oh, the Band, the Doors, the Beatles to some extent, the Rolling Stones, those are the names I guess.

JG/CC: Did you watch TV?

FC: No, not since after 1964, after I went to college, I stopped watching TV. Nobody at Hamilton watched TV. There were two guys who had a TV set, that was considered weird. Nobody watched TV. I didn't watch TV. I haven't really watched TV in the last 35 years. I don't have a TV today. I mean, just, it's boring.

JG/CC: *Did you have any teachers that were, that really stuck in your mind, that you remember a lot?*

FC: Yeah, I did. From high school or college, or both?

JG/CC: *Both.*

FC: Okay. Yeah, I had a number of teachers in high school and college, yeah.

JG/CC: *Did you, did you think that, did you think about the threat of nuclear war a lot?*

FC: Yeah, I thought about that a lot. I thought my family should build a fallout shelter, I kind of pushed for that. They didn't, but I thought they should. I had thought that we should move to New Zealand in the early Sixties, because there would be protection from nuclear fallout there since it's so remote. I thought about nuclear war then, I think about it now. I think it's still possible, I think it's, it's something I emphasize in my courses, I think it's a very real danger.

JG/CC: *Did you participate in the peace movement?*

FC: Yes.

JG/CC: *Were you affected by the Cuban Missile Crises?*

FC: Yeah. I remember that taking place while I was in school. I remember the attitude was, well, kids are crazy, I mean, kids are incredibly naive. Thinking that well, hoping at that point, hoping that if, that it would come to something. That that would be, that this would be good, I mean, I was extremely naive. Thinking that if, that if, I mean this is kinda contradictory to what I said about nuclear war, but thinking that it would be good if the United States finally, you know, just did away with Castro, or you know, faced down the Russians. It was an incredibly stupid way to think, but that's what I thought.

Also, people were saying, I don't know what to make of this, but people were saying, which is again ridiculous, partly because almost everybody was a virgin, that people were saying, it was a common thing people were saying, that if there were a nuclear war announced in ten minutes, people would want to lose their virginity quickly, in the last ten or fifteen minutes, but I don't think, I don't think it would have been physically possible. (laughs) But anyway, people talked about that in high school.

JG/CC: *Did you think that the election of John F. Kennedy was really important?*

FC: Oh, I thought it was like the dawning of a new era. I thought it was going to be all kinds of wonderful things.

JG/CC: *Was discrimination against women a problem?*

FC: We didn't think in those terms. I think there was discrimination against women, but we didn't think in those terms, or I didn't.

JG/CC: *Were you involved in any political action groups, like SNCC [Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee], MOBE [National Mobilization Committee to End the War in Vietnam], or something like that?*

FC: MOBE, the MOBE. MOBE was a big antiwar group. Yeah, I was involved in the MOBE, I was involved in, a member of SDS [Students for a Democratic Society]. Those are the two main ones.

JG/CC: *Was there any rallies or teach-ins or demonstrations on your campus?*

FC: There were a lot of demonstrations and rallies. There was a lot. I went to Washington several times. Cornell was a very big anti-war campus, and the reason was that there's, it's a center in the country for Southeast Asian studies, and so the first, some of the first criticism of the Vietnam war came out of Cornell University and some of the scholars who knew the most about Vietnam and knew why the war was a mistake were there. And the person I was studying with at graduate school was kind of the leading expert on American foreign relations, who was very much a critic of the war. So yeah, the antiwar stuff was not just there, it was part of everyday life. But it was also not just a protest, it was the idea of learning about American foreign policy to learn why Vietnam happened.

JG/CC: *After high school and college, could you describe your work experience?*

FC: I have been a professor for the last twenty-six years.

JG/CC: *How would you describe relationships between men and women?*

FC: When?

JG/CC: *After, after college and high school.*

FC: You mean my relationships, or, relationships in general?

JG/CC: *In general, in general, like the women's movement and all.*

FC: Well, I mean, this is something that's still a problem. It's kind of like race relations are still a problem. I think things are getting somewhat better, although there's somewhat of a backlash. I think relations should be equal, they're not equal. Well, I could talk more

about it, but that's a pretty big question.

JG/CC: Do you have anything more you'd like to say about that?

FC: About race, about gender relations?

JG/CC: Gender relations.

FC: Yeah, but tell me the direction you're interested in, I could talk about this for. We've got twenty minutes left. I got, I can talk about, tell me what would help you.

JG/CC: I guess, skip to, [consulting papers with questions] yeah, work from I guess around there. Alright. Like after college and stuff, was music an important part of your life?

FC: Yes, yes.

JG/CC: Did you go to any really major concerts, like Woodstock or?

FC: No, I didn't go to Woodstock. I should have, but I didn't. I went to a concert actually that was larger than Woodstock, that had six hundred thousand people, Watkins Glen, in 1973. Bob Dylan was there, and The Band was there, and a bunch of other people were there. There were six hundred thousand people. That was kind of nice in that it was, Watkins Glen is near where Cornell is, but I was at URI at that point. This is in 1973, and so I brought a bunch of students, people in my classes, to Watkins Glen. We were kind of all friends at that point. I had lived, I knew a number of these students as friends, and so we all went there together. But I've been to a lot of other concerts, too, Rolling Stones, and lots of other things.

JG/CC: Did you go to any, well, could you talk about like race relations, like, what did you think of the Black Panthers and Malcolm X?

FC: Well, at the time, at the time, you know, people's ideas change. At the time I didn't think very much of Malcolm X. I probably thought about him mostly negatively. I now think he was, I know more about, I'm more sensitive about these issues now. I think that Malcolm X was a great leader. You know, I think that when people are younger, meaning in their teenage years, they're involved more, I think they're involved, tend to be more involved with their own immediate life, and then after, when you get older, particularly if you're a person who's a scholar, who's supposed to be thinking about these issues, your ideas change, and you become more, realize that there's a whole world beyond you. I think, so what I am saying is that impressions I have about race relations have changed a lot. I think I've become much more sensitive and much more aware of things beyond my own immediate life.

JG/CC: What did you think about birth control and the pill?

FC: Well, we thought that those were good things. I mean, particularly because it made sexual relations easier without having to worry about, about conception. It was never really an issue. I mean, some issues for a while about health side effects of some of the early pill, pills used a lot of, too much hormone, and so there were some dangers there. But I never felt it was wrong morally or anything like that.

JG/CC: What did you think of Lyndon Johnson's announcement on TV that he wouldn't run for Presidency.

FC: I remember seeing that, really surprised. Of course, you know, that was on the, I believe on a Sunday night, Martin Luther King was killed the following Friday. It was an incredible week. And I remember thinking that well, this was good, that Johnson was not running. At that time I favored Eugene McCarthy because he was anti-war and I was very much against the war by 1968. And so I thought it was a good thing. I was surprised, I thought it was a good thing.

JG/CC: Could you talk a little bit more about Eugene McCarthy?

FC: Yeah. I favored McCarthy a lot because he was anti-war. I favored him over Robert Kennedy because he seemed more anti-war than Robert Kennedy. I think it's unfortunate that, that he really lost heart in the 1968 campaign after Robert Kennedy was killed. He didn't campaign very effectively after that, and that allowed Humphrey to get the nomination. I mean, Humphrey might have gotten the nomination anyway, but I think McCarthy, McCarthy should have either campaigned heavily or turned the race over to Ted Kennedy or something, I think that we kinda lost a chance to have a, of having a charismatic anti-war Kennedy when Bobby Kennedy was killed. Bobby Kennedy was killed, and McCarthy didn't really pick up the ball. So I guess my ideas have become more negative about him over time.

JG/CC: What did you think of Bobby Kennedy's assassination?

FC: At the time I didn't realize what a loss it was, now I think it's much more of a loss. As I explained in the lecture to your class, he was a person who was really unique in a lot of ways because he appealed to a broad section of people, he appealed to hardhats, he appealed to black people, to Native Americans, to rich people, he had a good social agenda, an excellent social agenda. He talked about things that other people didn't talk about. He talked about quality of life issues that other candidates have never talked about, since 1960, and I think it was one of the, a great loss. In some respects, a worse loss than the loss of his brother.

JG/CC: What did you think of George Wallace's campaign?

FC: Oh, I, Wallace was, well, I hoped that Wallace would draw enough votes away from Nixon and allow Humphrey to be elected. I mean, I voted for the Peace and Freedom Party, Dick Gregory and Eldridge Cleaver were running for President under the Peace and Freedom Party. And I think, you know, in retrospect I should have supported Humphrey. Again, Humphrey was much better than Nixon.

JG/CC: What did you think of when Richard Nixon got elected?

FC: I thought that was a disaster. I mean, it was a disaster.

JG/CC: *What did you think when, when you saw the women's liberation demonstration at the Miss America Pageant?*

FC: Well, of course, I didn't see it 'cause I wasn't watching television, I read about these things, and heard about these things. I thought it was a good idea. I thought it was, the Miss America Pageant was a lot of BS and it was, they had, women had a perfect right to protest against it.

JG/CC: *What were your feelings on the space program and the circling of the moon by US astronauts?*

FC: Well at the time, I thought it was a waste of time and money. I remember I got married the day before they landed on the moon. So it was chiefly irrelevant to me. I had an extra holiday, an extra day's holiday. At the time, I thought it was a waste of money. Now, in terms of the space program, the space program is much cheaper today in terms of real terms, real dollar terms. I'm in favor of it, and Federal government spends money on lots of other things, they might as well spend money on this, too. But I was not thrilled about it. It was not like I breathlessly watched the Americans put a man on the moon, that was something that straight people did, that was something that the government did and at that point I was very much against the government.

JG/CC: *Overall, how would you say the Sixties affected you and the United States in general?*

FC: Well, okay. First I'll talk about me, then I'll talk about the United States. The Sixties affected me in a major way, I think, for a lot of people in my generation, but for me, a lot. The basic ideas I have, the basic values I have, the basic orientation I have, was set in the Sixties. It's a formative period. Partly because of the age you are, I think that whoever you are, what's happening around you when you're, let's say seventeen to twenty-three, is formative. That's when people often form the kind of basic values that they have. Something I joke about with my wife now is that when we get real old we'll go to the White Rabbit Nursing Home. You know, that there'll be a, set up a nursing home for The Volunteers album, you know the album I'm talking about. That they'll set up a nursing home for old hippies, you know, with "OK, Mr. Jones, time to take your marijuana now". You know, that there'll be kind of like, such a large number of baby boomers retiring that there will be a market to cater to that. So it's affected me a lot. I think, you know, I think that Sixties music is still played by people of your generation, I mean that's a real achievement. There's a kind of arrogance of the Sixties generation that you know, we think, we're not, we think we're always forever young, we determined what being young means, it's kind of made it hard for other generations to come after. So I, it's affected me a lot. It certainly influenced my ideas about war, and social welfare issues, and race. All those things were set in the Sixties, and have modified somewhat since then, but have not changed.

In terms of the country, well, I think we're still fighting the battles of the Sixties. I mean a lot of the stuff about Bill Clinton's personal life goes back to the Sixties. I mean whether issues then about marijuana, sex, the draft, all have come up in Clinton's presidency and I think one reason, that's one reason why he's a controversial president. We're still fighting those issues still today, so I think it's affected the country that way. I think the Sixties were an opportunity to change America significantly for the better. It turned out that we changed America some for the better, but it was a missed opportunity, and I think it was not, things could have turned out somewhat differently. I think, let's say if Robert Kennedy had lived, things could have turned out differently. If we had ended the Vietnam war sooner, things could have ended differently. If Martin Luther King had lived, I think things could have turned out differently. We ended up with a kind of a disappointing, I think, disappointing society. If people thirty years ago could look on today, I think they would be somewhat disappointed.

I, one of the things, I often have a, have a feeling that it's kind of a naive on my part, surprise or whatever, particularly sometimes when I see violence. I mean there's violence all around in our society, and there's still kind of, it's shocking in a way because there was a sense in the Sixties that we were gonna put that violence behind us, that the peace movement was gonna bring about an end to a violent war, that people were gonna relate to each other in more of a non-violent way, and that nonviolence was gonna triumph over violence. That hasn't happened, really. And I'm kind of shocked, and then those kids were killed in Arkansas, I mean, it's the kind of thing that I think about and I think about how things have turned out differently than a lot of us expected thirty years ago.

Other things, I think that you know, in terms of the technology, a lot of people from the Sixties are, are fascinated by the advanced technology we have now, and I think a lot of, what I'm saying, if you teleport somebody from let's say 1968 to 1990 and how they'd react. I think somebody from 1968 would be fascinated by the technology today. And with some of the opportunities that technology has for people let's say to telecommute, you know commute from home, and do their work from home and so forth. But then again, you know, the other thing, the other side of the Sixties is kind of an anti-technological thing. There is an element in that, too, when I think about Theodore Kozcinski who, whose ideas I think made sense to a lot of people from the Sixties. I mean that, I think that you got that too. That, there's a sense in which Kozcinski was absolutely wrong to kill people, and he killed the wrong people certainly, but there's a way in which his ideas also resonate in the Sixties, so I guess there is a certain contradiction, there is a certain Sixties element of fascination with technology and also a Sixties revulsion against technology.

JG/CC: *Is there anything else you'd like to say, or any advice you'd like to give to finish up?*

FC: With regard to the project or the Sixties?

JG/CC: *With regard to the Sixties. Well, how much time do you have left?*

FC: Oh, 5 minutes.

JG/CC: *Well, maybe talk about Vietnam or your protests, I guess?*

FC: Right, right. I was a conscientious objector. Still a conscientious objector. My position was that I would have gone to jail instead of go into the Army. And I you know, would hold to that position today. 'Cause I thought the war was wrong. I thought war in general was wrong, and I was not gonna leave the country and I was not gonna go into the Army, but I would do, go to jail. As it turned out, I got conscientious objector status and did two years alternate service helping to set up and living in a halfway house for ex-mental patients. So that's how I did my alternate service, you're supposed to do two years of alternate service if you're a conscientious objector.

I went to a lot of anti-war protests, I thought you know the war was a disaster, the disastrous nature of the Vietnam war is something that makes up a core of my teaching today. Another thing that I taught for many years and still teach some is the history of the North American Indian which I started teaching in 1973 after the Wounded Knee Occupation, in some respects, that's a continuation of the Sixties, as you know, the Sixties kind of go on into the early Seventies in many ways, and so there are certain values that Native Americans have that appeal to me because of my background in the 1960's.

JG/CC: Do you have anything to add, that you'd like to say? Anything, that you want brought to attention?

FC: Yeah, I'm trying to think. Well I think one of the important things about the Sixties was a sense of optimism that, that things were going to change for the better, and I wish we had more of that today. I wish that a lot of people your age would have more confidence about changing things. I think that maybe we were naive, but I think that we had a sense that you could change things, and I think that people, if people had more of that sense today, they would be better off and society would be better off. I think people are too apathetic and too, too closed in on themselves and not optimistic about changing things, so it kind of, leads to kind of dull life if you're just involved in your own, your own affairs.