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Biographical Note

Fuchs, an educator, associate of Eleanor Roosevelt; Peace Corps Director, Philippines (1961 - 1963), discusses his first meeting with John F. Kennedy (JFK) and his role in the 1960 presidential campaign, his relationship with Eleanor Roosevelt, her opinions of JFK, Adlai Stevenson, and Lyndon Baines Johnson, and the establishment of the Peace Corps in the Philippines, among other issues.

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Oral History Interview

with

LAWRENCE FUCHS

November 28, 1966
Cambridge, Massachusetts

By John F. Stewart

For the John F. Kennedy Library

STEWART: Let me begin by asking you how you first became acquainted with President Kennedy [John F. Kennedy]?

FUCHS: The first meeting with President Kennedy took place at Harvard in 1951, I think it was the Fall of 1951, at a seminar which was conducted by Professor Arthur Holcombe.

STEWART: Oh, you were in that...

FUCHS: I was in that seminar which was then written about by John Mallan in an infamous article in the New Republic, I think,

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which the Senator objected to. But we met, and after that we corresponded some, but had no sustained contact until he was hospitalized in 1954, I think it was. No, let's see, it had to be his '56 hospitalization, or '57, because he read at that time some articles by me and a book of mine called The Political Behavior of American Jews, and he got in touch with me. I had written an article on the Irish in politics in Boston and on the Irish response to Stevenson [Adlai

E. Stevenson], and then I had written on the Irish and the Jews in a section of that book. He got in touch with me, and Ted Sorensen [Theodore C. Sorensen] got in touch with me, and asked me to write a speech for the Senator on immigration. He was to give a speech before the American Jewish Congress. Then there was one other speech he was to give before another Jewish

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organization and he asked me to draft a speech for that. I did that. He and I then developed a correspondence, as I am sure he did with hundreds of other people in a comparable position to mine. I remember one job I did for him was to write a very long memorandum on the pros and cons of nuclear testing, which he was interested in at that time, and I...

STEWART: When would this have been, do you remember?

FUCHS: This would have been in about '57 or '8. I can make copies of some of this material, the correspondence, if you want it. You can have it deposited and have copies sent over to you so you could check the dates and get them accurate.

He responded to that, he was developing an interest in that issue, although he followed Senator Humphrey [Hubert H. Humphrey] on that issue generally. He followed

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Senator Humphrey, as he told, on those matters, but he wanted some independent assessment. Now, actually I was not a scholar or an expert in this field, but there were very few experts in the field at that time, in 1957. I had made it a very strong personal interest of mine to follow all the literature, including some of the technical literature on disarmament, and nuclear disarmament was the issue. I've moved far from that since, but at that time then... That was one, I remember, one exchange. Then he also helped me by writing a letter to the Guggenheim people, think, in behalf of my application for a grant. Either to Guggenheim or to the Social Science Research Council in order to get a grant to go to Hawaii in 1958-'59 to write a book on the immigrants in Hawaii and the cultururation process in Hawaii.

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That's when I saw him for the first and really the longest conversation. The only really personal conversation I ever had with him in Hawaii came in the spring of 1959, looking for delegates' votes. Let's see, was that... I must have been -- was it the spring of '59? I guess it was. It was well a year and a half in advance of...

STEWART: Yes, that's right.

FUCHS: Yes, that's right. So I came back. Yes, that was definitely the spring of 1959, and I probably can look up the exact date, because he was running for the presidency at that time and there was no question about it. There was a meeting of the

Democratic party in Hawaii and he visited with them. He stayed at the Royal Hawaiian Hotel, and he and Sorensen invited me to come over to the hotel and have a chat.

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It turned out that after I had spent twenty minutes of horsing around with Sorensen and Red Fay [Paul B. Fay. Jr.], I went up to see the Senator and we spent, I would say, at least three quarters of an hour, perhaps an hour, in what was a quite personal discussion about his father and my father, and the problems of sons in dealing with their fathers, and how we didn't agree with our fathers politically, but what did this mean and so forth. This was in the context of why weren't the liberals really more for him. Why weren't -- in effect, he was saying to me, "Look, Fuchs, you're a liberal, intellectual, New York Jew. Why aren't there more guys like you for me?" He didn't phrase it just that way, but he was saying in effect, "On my record I'm entitled to the support of these people." Whereas

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Stevenson had been entitled to the support of these people, he had demonstrated his incapacity to get elected, not to serve, but to get elected. The only way Stevenson would ever get near the White House would be if he, Kennedy invited him in. And, of course, I agreed with that theory. I was anxious to see him succeed in his campaign. He wanted to know what -- he wanted to know several things, Kennedy. One, he wanted to know why these people weren't for him. He wanted to understand the issue better, because he felt it was prejudice.

STEWART: Because of his father [Joseph P. Kennedy]?

FUCHS: Yes, because of his father, Catholicism, and perhaps because of his youth, too. He used Mrs. Roosevelt [Eleanor R. Roosevelt]. This was then.... He knew I was close to Mrs. Roosevelt because Mrs. Roosevelt and I

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taught a course together at Brandeis for several years. She was on the Board of Trustees at Brandeis; we just became very personally friendly. But Mrs. Roosevelt adopted people, families, in her lifetime. She just liked them and would become socially friendly, and she became this way with my wife and myself and our children. He used her as an example of the kind of person who was just prejudiced because they were politically astute enough to know that Stevenson couldn't get elected, or at least they should be politically astute enough -- that was rational position on Kennedy's part --- then why didn't they do the next most sensible thing and then take a young dynamic liberal who on the basis of his record had proved his liberalism. Well, I didn't argue with him about his record, about McCarthy [Joseph R. McCarthy]

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or anything like that, because I accepted him as a bona fide liberal. But he said things like...He wanted to know about people like Jimmy Weschler, Max Lerner of the New York Post and that whole New York Post syndrome. It seemed to him they treated him rather unfairly, were not as friendly as they should be: Mrs. Roosevelt, he said... Well, I argued with him that Mrs. Roosevelt actually liked him, which she did. I knew at that time that she thought well of him, but she was committed to Stevenson. She thought Stevenson was one of the great men of the century, and that Stevenson could be one of the truly great presidents in American history. She believed he was a man of very high capacity and that Kennedy was not ready for the presidency, that it was just much too early for him to push for the presidency.

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I explained that to him, as I was to say again on several occasions. He used the same argument. He said, "Well, it's just a matter of prejudice, it's an argument she had with my father thirty years ago." I said, "No, it wasn't an argument. At least that's my opinion." He dismissed me and brushed it off, and said, "Well, you just don't know," you know, something like that. That's all it amounts to at this time.

On the Catholic side, of course, he knew I was very interested in liberal or progressive or dynamic activities in Roman Catholicism in the United States. He knew that this was a major intellectual interest of mine, and that I was highly sympathetic to that particular problem of his as a candidate. But that didn't stop him from saying, "Why, all these friends

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of yours," and so on, "They're just prejudiced against Catholics." I must say many of them were. They had a tremendously strong disposition to disbelieve the possibility of a Catholic being a free and independent and liberal President of the United States. He knew that very well that he had to fight that issue right up to the very end. But he said, in effect, he labeled all of these people this way and that bothered me because I just knew that wasn't true, that it was a much more complex thing than that. And I felt very that it was not true in Mrs. Roosevelt's case. Now, although she had her battles with the Church, with Cardinal Spellman [Francis J. Spellman], and she had certain attitudes, there is no question about it. But I think she had the kind of free mind that did not stereotype people. She took

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people pretty much as they came, and that was my experience with her, at any rate, over the years.

STEWART: Did she view his Catholicism as unique at all, or did she tend to view his position in relation to the Church as a unique thing as opposed to perhaps the majority of Catholic politicians?

FUCHS: My impression was that she did not make a strong sweeping pejorative condemnation of Catholics ever, when with me. She never stereotyped, and she never said anything like "Well, Catholics are like that," or "Well, what do you expect of Catholics?" Never did anything like that. She believed very strongly in separation of church and state and so on, and she did not view Kennedy as a Catholic at all. I mean, she just saw him as a person. We never talked about Kennedy as a Catholic, which

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answers your question directly. Her consistent objection to Kennedy was, as far as I could make out, was he was not Adlai Stevenson. That she always would come back to her conviction that Stevenson was a man of the century, one of the most far-seeing statesmen. You know, she had a picture of Stevenson on her dresser in her townhouse in New York. It was bigger, I think, than any picture that she had in her bedroom. This woman was devoted to Adlai Stevenson. She had great understanding of his limitations. This isn't about Kennedy, but I remember one time after Stevenson lost the first time. She told me that she had a talk with Stevenson and told him, "Look, you're never going to get elected President of the United States unless you can feel with people. It's not enough to understand people intellectually, but you have to

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feel with them. You should get in a flivver and drive. You should spend the next four years driving around the country and getting out at gas stations, and beaneries and sitting down and listening to people and trying to understand, not just their problems in an intellectual way, but feel their problem with them so that you'll be able to communicate to them." She did say this, that she felt that he was much too aloof and so on. But she never said a negative word about Kennedy to me, never one negative word. Publicly she criticized him, raised questions about his failure to act on McCarthy. But she was very interested that I admired Kennedy. She admired me very much and she was extremely interested. She would always ask me questions which would elicit a positive, some kind of affirmative opinion on my

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part, about Kennedy and she seemed to take it in. And it seemed to add up with a lot of other things that she was getting. Mrs. Roosevelt was a growing person, she would never sit still. It seemed to add up with other information that she was getting that this was a really amazing and fine young man. But that's the way she looked at him, looked upon him, as a young man, who had relatively little experience in politics, and who should be Vice President. She was very consistent on that in our conversations. She felt, "I think he should be Vice President. I think Adlai Stevenson should be President of the United States."

STEWART: Do you think then that there was no real basis to Senator Kennedy's concern about Mrs. Roosevelt's attitude towards his father?

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FUCHS: Not in my opinion. She did not admire the father and that's clearly documented. But she was not the kind of a person who would make that kind of a transfer to Kennedy. She did not admire the Catholic Church in the United States of America, particularly in the person of Cardinal Spellman. I should say that particularly, I don't say the Catholic Church. I say she did not agree with the positions taken by Spellman and others in the hierarchy, on many Church-State questions. That's really as far as we discussed Catholicism in the United States. But she never would, never gave the slightest hint to me of any pejorative feeling about Catholics as such. Now, Kennedy, of course, had this opinion and was defensive about it, and we argued about that briefly. Then he asked me would I do certain things for him.

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He was very worried about what Schlesinger's [Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr.] position would be, and Galbraith's [John Kenneth Galbraith]. This was in the spring of '59. Of course they were the big fish, and I was a very small fish. So it didn't mean anything to him that I was leaning in his direction, or willing to do something publicly and so on, because what he needed was the big people. In that situation I was involved in my research and couldn't do anything really in Hawaii. I pointed that out and, I'm sure, seemed reluctant to him. In fact, his parting comment was, after he asked me to think something over, he looked at Sorensen, and he jerked his thumb and gave a big smile and he said, "He'll think it over," you know, as if to say, "well, you know, you don't spend any time thinking things over around here.

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You just either do, or you don't." But I did write letters to people who were close to Mrs. Roosevelt and people who were liberals, and from my general background, at least, stating my answers to what I thought – and I have a copy of that letter I'll give you – my answers to what I thought were the objections that they were raising to Kennedy, in effect, trying to give a factual answer to every what I thought was a badly premised question that was being raised.

STEWART: Who were some of these people, do you recall?

FUCHS: Well, mostly professors, leaders in the Jewish community, and people like Max Lerner, some people, and publicists and so on. So that was the first and long meeting, and it was a very good meeting because it gave me a wonderful feeling for Kennedy as a human being. I remember

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him saying, bursting out saying, "Well look," he said, you know, "don't you love your father?" He said, "I love my father." He said, "Do you agree with your father on everything?" I said, "No, I don't." You know, this was a wonderfully Socratic approach to making a point, and so on.

Then the next time we got together was at Brandeis, and this was in the spring of 1960. He came to do a television program on the program which I was the advisor on, and Mrs. Roosevelt was the hostess, on TV. Sometimes I participated; this time I did not. Kennedy was the major guest of the program. It was called *Ways of Mankind*, and it was to be, I think, on Western Europe. He came early for a meeting with the other participants and the staff of WGBH. He stayed for lunch

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and then there was about an hour before the broadcast. During this time we had quite a lot of conversation. The overall impression I had was, first of all, Kennedy had just finished with the West Virginia primary and he wanted to think about issues. He felt very strongly that he would be nominated. He said, "Now is the time to think about issues." He started to ask me all kinds of questions and I felt very inadequate. As you know, he had this way of reaching into your mind, and almost, kind of like you felt your mind was being scoured, if I can mix metaphors, and very badly. But that's the feeling I had. Of course, at that time my scholarship was very much wrapped up in this big study I had done on Hawaii, about domestic politics in the United States, and particularly about ethnicity, race and religion. I was

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concerned about race, religion, and ethnicity, and nationality groups. He wanted to talk about Common Market and he wanted to talk about nuclear disarmament. He wanted to talk about things that really mattered to the country and they were vital issues. I felt very inadequate. I remember during that day he would ask me some questions about nuclear disarmament, and I'd say, "I just don't know." Of course, this thing had become a great field and very complex. I said, "I don't know Jerry Wiesner [Jerome B. Wiesner] well, but I know him enough to call him up and ask him to come over here and answer because he did." Kennedy said, "Get him over here right away." This was right before the broadcast. Wiesner came over after the broadcast, and they sat and talked for about three quarters of an hour.

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Kennedy pumped him with these questions. But that was one of his major concerns. Yet, he had a concern of the moment, which was Mrs. Roosevelt. Mrs. Roosevelt had scheduled a press conference for Kennedy and for herself after the broadcast. All the Boston press was summoned in; of course the news services would be there and maybe, I think, some of the people from other major newspapers. Maybe the *New York Times* had a man there and so forth, and Kennedy was very nervous about that, and he couldn't see what good could come of this press conference. Here, he had just won some major primary victories, things were going well. He was very nervous about it. As in the other situation, compared to Mrs. Roosevelt, he was like a little boy. Of course, you can understand this; she wanted something and she really was above it all in a sense. She wanted

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something, she wanted Stevenson to be President, but she wanted nothing for herself. And she was much older, and I suppose in many ways a more mature person, and being a very wise person. He got nervous when he talked about Mrs. Roosevelt. He asked me, couldn't I arrange to have her call off this press conference at the last minute. Even though it might look funny, it would be better than risking some kind of argument. And I asked him, I said, "Well, what are you afraid of?" Well he said, "Gee, she might bring up the McCarthy business." He said, "What good can come of this? You know it would just get people excited." So I said, "Well, alright, I'll go talk to her about it, but," I said, "you know, you can't move Mrs. Roosevelt. She's a real difficult person to move." So I went and told her and she

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interrupted me, and she said, "Now," she said something like, "You tell the Senator..." She interrupted me before I could finish my sentence; she said, "You tell the Senator not to worry. Everything will be alright, and I certainly wouldn't do anything that would embarrass him." Of course I never put it that way. I was trying...

STEWART: She anticipated his fears.

FUCHS: ...to play it cool, but she knew what I meant, of course. Really, Mrs. Roosevelt was very astute politically, in many respects. I think she had, you know, overconfidence in good will in international relations. But aside from that – and she didn't apply that in domestic politics. I think he had very astute judgment about people like Adam Clayton Powell and how to deal with them, and so forth. But she knew exactly what I wanted right away, and she

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said, "Tell him not to worry." So I came back, and I told him how she handled it. He said, "Well, I'll have to live with it." And so they did, and she was very good. It turned out, as far as I could see, there was very little news in the press conference; there was virtually no news in it; it was just a very nice exchange of pleasantries in which she made no effort to even plug for Stevenson at this press conference.

In the campaign all I did, really, was make a lot of speeches to my own peculiar constituencies. Ordinarily, at that time in my life, I used to make many speeches in the fall anyway. I would hit the Jewish circuit and certain liberal circuits, and so forth. This was a "speak for pay" business, which I don't do anymore. Anyway, I had all these speeches lined up, and I thought that would be the best thing I

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could do. I would speak quite frankly and openly why liberals should be for Jack Kennedy. So I did this in Massachusetts and New York and Connecticut, but then I'd come back and meet my classes and I would see Mrs. Roosevelt. Our procedure would be to meet early in the morning

that we had a class scheduled and just have a lot of chitchat. Of course, she was very ambivalent even about going to the Convention. She was, I think, sorry she did go in a certain sense, especially the way it turned out. She planned not to go; Franklin Roosevelt, Jr., was for Kennedy, and she did not want to take the limelight away from her boys. That's what she said to me one time; she said, "I've decided not to go because I don't want to be in the limelight. I think I am too old for this kind of thing, and so..." But Stevenson, or

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somebody persuaded her to go. Of course, then she made her presence felt in his behalf, and it didn't come off. Kennedy was nominated. She offered to do everything she could do for Kennedy, and I think he asked her to do certain things which she did. I remember her telling me of speeches in out of the way places, where it took a good deal of physical getting around in trains and planes.

STEWART: So can we cover just a few more items regarding her pre-convention attitude toward Kennedy? For example, it's been mentioned that Kennedy had taken a number of stands which were viewed as anti-FDR [Franklin D. Roosevelt] stands. This was in the late 1940s and early 1950s. For example, he voted for the 22nd Amendment and had spoken out against FDR's actions at Yalta and so forth.

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Did Mrs. Roosevelt mention this at all, or was this a...

FUCHS: They never came up. My impressions of the pre-nomination campaign was that her respect for Kennedy actually went up. She was more convinced that he would be an outstanding candidate for Vice President than she had been in the beginning, when it probably was just a political thought, that this was a good idea because he was a Catholic, because he did have a lot of appeal, and so forth. I remember one dinner party at Hyde Park, we spent a weekend at Hyde Park, and during this period I remember Henry Morgenthau, Sr., there. He was for Rockefeller [Nelson A. Rockefeller]; John Roosevelt was there, the youngest son, the Republican, and he was for Nixon [Richard M. Nixon]; Mrs. Roosevelt was for Stevenson; and I was for Kennedy. I remember the

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conversation. This was before both conventions. Mrs. Roosevelt did not say a negative thing about Kennedy, say, as compared to Nixon, for whom she did say much that was negative. But not a single thing about Kennedy. She was just still convinced that Adlai Stevenson would be, if he could ever be elected, a man of great destiny. I had the feeling that she thought him a bigger man in some respects than her husband. But that's an opinion. It's just a feeling, just a feeling, and she never said anything in words. I think his idealism was so great and powerful it appealed to her very much. But this is my impression, at least in my presence, she never said a word

negative about Kennedy. Now, maybe she did in the presence of those who she knew would be sympathetic to that kind of a negative comment. But

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she never did to me.

STEWART: Did she ever express any concern that certain people were supporting Humphrey, or Stevenson, or even Symington [Stuart Symington] solely as a stop Kennedy device? This of course....

FUCHS: No, in her view, she believe that Stevenson could be nominated. In her view, anything that would work toward that end, I think, was a good – as long as it was in the bounds of human decency and ethical conduct, any political stratagem was alright. She felt that the country had been through a terrible period of eight years of stagnation and that Adlai Stevenson had the vision which should be rewarded at the polls. On that night she said, “I think your man Kennedy is a very able man,” something like that. That’s the way she used to phrase it.

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“I think your man Kennedy” or too, would say, “How is your man Kennedy” – that’s the way she would – “these days? How is he doing? I think your man Kennedy is a very able man, and he will probably be a very able President someday. I think he should be Vice President first,” and things like that. That’s what leads me to think her impression of him as the campaign developed was increasingly favorable. I think she admired his courage.

STEWART: Even before the convention?

FUCHS: In the primaries, she admired his courage in the primaries, and she said that to me and the way he spoke out on the issues, I think she admired him very much the way he spoke out on the issues and on church-state issues. She was extremely impressed by that.

STEWART: What was the general reaction to Lyndon Johnson’s

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candidacy before the convention?

FUCHS: We never discussed it.

STEWART: Never?

FUCH: To my recollection we never discussed Lyndon Johnson.

STEWART: Because, of course, this was a concern of many people, that Kennedy and Humphrey, or even Stevenson would knock each other off, and that Johnson would come in in the end. And this certainly was the strategy of some people.

FUCHS: If it was a concern of hers, she never mentioned it to me. I know it was, and I don't think she was at all close to the Rayburn [Sam Rayburn]-Harry Truman strategy as to how this ought to go. I don't think she took the view at all that Harry Truman took, which is a negative view toward Kennedy as well as trying to get somebody who was not Stevenson. I mean, her view,

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I think, was very clear, at least to me. Stevenson was best, and she never discussed an alternative with me as being the next best. Not Humphrey, or Kennedy, who would have been her choices, in my view. But that Stevenson was best for President, and Kennedy was best for Vice President. I don't think she was part of any strategy to get anybody else in but Stevenson. I don't think, in my opinion, that she would have thought Lyndon Johnson a better choice than Jack Kennedy because in other conversations about Johnson she never expressed strong enthusiasm for him. She was very impressed.... You know, we talked about Kennedy's views on foreign policy, and the *Strategy of Peace* had come out, this collection of his speeches. Mrs. Roosevelt was an open minded person, one of the most open minded I have ever known. So that dinner, really, was shortly

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before the Convention, and that was really, to me, representative of her overall view. Then after the Convention was over and Kennedy was nominated, she pitched in. I think she went to speak to some small Negro college somewhere...

STEWART: There were some problems in making arrangements. I think someone inadvertently – no one made contact with her after the Convention.

FUCHS: I see.

STEWART: There was a real mix-up, and it wasn't until, I think, probably in September before they arranged a speaking schedule for her.

FUCHS: I see. Well, she never complained; she never did anyway. I mean this was her. She was one of these kind of almost self-punishing, but Puritanical in her attitude toward physical hardship. I mean, she

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would meet her classes in blinding snowstorms, half the class would show up, but she'd be there; she could somehow get there. I think she welcome physical adversity as a part of that Puritanical, in what seems to me to be a somewhat foolish way. But I think she did; it was part of her character. She was all for him. It wasn't just that she was against Nixon. She thought that Kennedy was growing all the time, and I don't think that it was just convincing herself because she was a Democrat. I think she felt that Kennedy had, despite his youth, within him the makings of a man of very high statesman-like qualities, you see, and vision, as well as capacity. Then he was elected, and we had – the other personal conversations.... Shortly after his election, she came to our house for dinner,

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here in Weston, Massachusetts. She said, "Well," things like, "I really like your man Kennedy now." This was after the inaugural speech, this kind of thing, I mean, very strong enthusiasm. Kennedy had invited her to the White House. She especially appreciated the graciousness of Kennedy and of Mrs. Kennedy [Jacqueline Bouvier Kennedy Onassis] in taking her through the White House. She was so impressed and delighted that Jackie Kennedy was re-doing things. She said if Franklin would ever see that, you know, he would turn over in his grave. He would never let her do things like this. But she just admired that courage. She thought that was marvelous, that this man and his wife had terrific courage and zest for living and that was just great. She was interested in them personally. I know one time I was driving her back to

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a place where she stayed at Brandeis overnight. This was then after another dinner party at my house. She asked me, "Do you believe all those stories they tell about Kennedy, and mistresses in New York?" I said, "No, I don't believe them." She said, "Good, well, I don't either." She said they used to tell those stories about Franklin too.

STEWART: Oh, is that right?

FUCHS: What I'd say, I guess, here, is that she had a very strong liking at this point for Jack Kennedy, a tremendously strong liking, even to the point of wanting very much to disbelieve anything negative that would be said about him. I see, in that development – now maybe you'll find other people who knew her better, or as well as I did, who had different relationships with her who will give you a different interpretation of it – but I found that

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her view was one of consistent growth in her positive attitude toward Kennedy. From an early skepticism that he was too young and had not demonstrated his liberalism consistently and clearly, to a growing belief, as he campaigned for the nomination, and then for the election, and then in the Presidency, a growing belief in his strong liberalism and courage and ability to articulate, and a glowing warm feeling toward Kennedy as a person as well as a President.

STEWART: How deeply did she feel about the whole McCarthy business, and him?

FUCHS: I think that with us it went unsaid, because we both had the same view: that Kennedy had an opportunity to do something which he did not work at, he did not work at doing it. I think we both had the same view. We discussed it once very briefly,

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and I don't think that there is any point in discussing it, and that is that no man is going to cut his political throat. Hubert Humphrey is not going to come out against farm subsidies at that point. Lyndon Johnson is not going to be against the oil depletion allowance. Fulbright [J. William Fulbright] is not going to be a crusader for racial desegregation. But that Kennedy had that margin of safety. Of course, that's a calculation that's easy for the outsider to make, and if you are in it, and you have to face that issue, you may not feel that way about it. But that Kennedy could have afforded – in hindsight, of course, retrospectively, it looks clear that he could have afforded to have done more to stop McCarthy. Well, at the time, because she believe McCarthy was the greatest menace to the nation and that

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he was in a position where he could have done something. But of course, there are certain excuses which are personal and physical, which are, as we all know, which are reasonable ones. Although I think Kennedy made it very clear, on a number of occasions, personally, that he regretted not having done more. I took that to be a sincere regret and not just trying to score points with those of us who....

STEWART: But she never could fully accept his reasons?

FUCHS: I don't think she did. I don't think she did. I think she just thought that the man lacked, at that point in his career, the courage to do something and he had the margin of safety in his constituency to do it, because he was very popular and he had influence. It was Boston, and Irish Catholics and Polish Catholics generally

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were very much involved in the politics of revenge which McCarthy represented and that Kennedy could have done something. But I don't know if Franklin Roosevelt would have taken the same view. Mrs. Roosevelt is a very high minded person, who makes few allowance, even though she was politically skillful herself, I think. Well, of course, she viewed McCarthy as a menace, an absolute menace. This wasn't a normal issue, it wasn't like farm subsidies or oil depletion allowance. I think that was my view too, and I was disappointed in Kennedy. I was disappointed in Kennedy. But I could still see that he had a much better chance to be President than Stevenson.

STEWART: Was she convinced that Stevenson could have beaten Nixon?

FUCHS: Yes.

STEWART: She was?

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FUCHS: And she had me convinced, too, at one point. At one point, I believed, "Well, Nixon is such a bad egg." Stevenson, in his first campaign, really was liked by a lot of people, and so I was convincing myself that, well, if Stevenson got nominated, we still would win, you see. Maybe Kennedy had the best chance, and maybe he would really make the best President because he had a better capacity for action than Stevenson, even though I thought Stevenson's indecision was overrated by the Kennedy people, as his record in Illinois proved. I think that he had certain kinds of indecisiveness, like Abe Lincoln [Abraham Lincoln] did. He carried it over, more than Lincoln did, into the political realm, particularly in getting something. There are two kinds of indecisiveness. Lincoln had personal indecisiveness, Stevenson had that. But then the political

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indecisiveness, Stevenson also had that, but the executive indecisiveness, he did not have. The political he had also, I think. He couldn't make up his mind all along the line, in so many ways. That's very close to the person, "Am I fit for the office, do I really want to spend my life doing this?" There are many people like that. Kennedy wasn't like that, and no good politician is like that. Stevenson, once he had an executive responsibility, even though it was very limited at the UN because it's representational, he had a certain amount. Once he had the governorship, or in his other positions that he held; once he took that responsibility, he acted when he had to act and he acted firmly. So I think he could have been a very good President. He never would have gotten elected, it's clear now.

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STEWART: Did she ever comment on the Kennedy-Stevenson relationship even during the campaign or after, especially when he wasn't appointed Secretary of State?

FUCHS: No, she showed only disappointment. But no, absolutely no surprise. Politically this was the thing that Kennedy had to do probably. But only disappointed because Stevenson was such a.... And she thought that the UN post would be very good for Stevenson.

STEWART: She did?

FUCHS: But, of course, she would have wanted him to be Secretary of State, like so many

people, but she was not surprised. She was a political realist. Kennedy had made it clear, so clear, to everybody that if Stevenson wanted to be Secretary of State, he'd have to move very early. He did not move. In that conversation in Hawaii

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with me, Kennedy said to me – I remember this very clearly – he said, “If,” – this was such a momentous thing to say – “If I am President, I will make Stevenson Secretary of State, but he has to get on the ball.” Well, he didn't get on the ball, so Mrs. Roosevelt nor anybody else could expect other than what happened.

STEWART: Let's see, I've got a couple more. Did you feel that the people around Kennedy were realistic in their assessment of Mrs. Roosevelt, especially in the pre-convention period? Did they seem to really understand her position, or do you think they were....

FUCHS: I doubt it, but I can't say. You see there were such callous shorthand views that I would pick up from time to time. I doubt – I don't know these men well, I don't know them well at all. I know

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Schlesinger must have been very realistic, but he wasn't close to Kennedy at that point. What Kenny O'Donnell [Kenneth P. O'Donnell], and those guys were thinking and people like Red Fay and even Ted Sorensen, I think they were so, they had such a shorthand version of people's motivations in a political context. Mrs. Roosevelt really was too big and too complex for that. I think in that respect Kennedy was less of a person than Mrs. Roosevelt, at least in my experience with him. The little bit that I could pick up was that they really, you know, she was a bleeding heart and didn't really have good political judgment and that she had prejudices and so on, these things that just oversimplified very much, Mrs. Roosevelt's view of the world, of human nature, of politics, and of what was going on.

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STEWART: What further contacts did you have with the President after January of '61, if any?

FUCHS: Well, just one very brief meeting at Hyannis Port, when he was much preoccupied with other much more important things. I came to Hyannis Port at the request of Shriver [Robert Sargent Shriver] over a weekend to make final plans for a Peace Corps in the Philippines, where I would be going. As soon as Kennedy was elected, I told the Board of Trustees at Brandeis, “Look,” I said, “I don't know what I'm going to do, but I've got to do something to be a part of this. This to me is very important to what's going on.” I'm not an important person in any of this, so nobody's going to ask me to do.... Mrs. Roosevelt wanted me to be Assistant Secretary of State for International Organization Affairs and

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Stevenson. I think she wrote to Stevenson on that issue, and wanted that, but I think Dean Rusk clearly had other plans. In fact, he made that plain to me in a conversation that I had with him, and I think it made very good sense. I think he picked a better man for the position. I'm delighted and I wouldn't want that position; it's an indoors position if there ever was one, coordinating. It's a terrible job for someone with my personality, who is really much more of a political than an administrative personality. So Kennedy's Assistant for Civil Rights and Peace Corps was Harris Wofford [Harris L. Wofford, Jr.]. He was a very good friend of mine. He started talking about Peace Corps and so on and getting me all jazzed up about this. Then he introduced me to Shriver, and Shriver is so appealing, and the Peace Corps idea

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was tremendously appealing. They needed people to head up their programs overseas. The Philippines' program was going to be a very difficult one in certain ways the largest for one thing, but in certain other respects. The program itself was so badly conceived. I saw this as a tremendous challenge and I agreed to do this.

STEWART: The program in the Philippines...

FUCHS: Yes, so badly conceived. The whole idea of promotion in the Peace Corps was, in effect, what I was being drafted to do was to be a – in military terms, I mean, I was expendable – the idea was to launch the Peace Corps, to get the peace corps started. This is what the President wanted, this is what Shriver wanted, get bodies over there. The Philippines was the place where you could get the largest number of bodies most quickly, because you

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had the fewest intergovernmental problems. And what problems would emerge could be dealt with intergovernmentally and hidden from the public and so on. So we planned six hundred people over there and we got them over there within a year and a half, three hundred in the first year. So the first year we had one third of all the volunteers in the world were in the Philippines. But people didn't know that generally, we talked about being in fifteen different countries and so forth. Anyway, the point of this was that I went down to see Shriver and saw Kennedy just for a minute. He went out on the yacht for a ride, and I went sailboat riding with many of the other members of the family, having been delayed. I think I would have gone out, which I would have preferred to do, I think on that boat with him

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and Mrs. Kennedy and one or two others, but having been delayed by Dr. Travell [Janet G. Travell], who was examining me on the beach. Then he was preoccupied with the Berlin crisis and he looked very bad. He looked very drawn and his back with bothering him, you could tell.

Then I went overseas. The one thing I did for him, which he may not even have known about, I wrote to Bundy [McGeorge Bundy], Schlesinger and Sorensen, all three, urging that he make some kind of a peace offensive speech, preferably before the United Nations in September of that year when the United Nations would reconvene. I guess it was either Bundy or Schlesinger who asked for a draft of that. I think that helped get started what a lot of people were thinking about. Must have been many others with that kind of... But that's the way the Administration

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was, it was so great in those days, I mean you could write, you could get an idea started like this. I drafted a speech on the race for peace idea, that kind of idea which Sorensen and others took over, and the President presented as a new speech, but with that basic idea. By that time I was in the Philippines, I left in Augusts for the Philippines.

STEWART: In 1961.

FUCHS: This was in July when we discussed that idea. Then I did nothing else for the White House except draft, I think it was Bundy's or Schlesinger's request, an annual message from the President to all overseas employees. The idea was to put some guts into the annual message. The President sends a traditional message wishing them a Happy New Year but to say something of a "I hope you're trying to learn the

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languages. I hope you're trying to live among the people, and I hope you're trying to carry something of America's historic revolutionary purpose with you when you live overseas, and our concern for oppression and arresting poverty," and so on. So I drafted something and a lot of it was intact by the time it got back, as a letter from the President, but a lot of it was ripped out too, in the State Department. It was more namby-pamby than we wanted. But I was terribly preoccupied with my own job and came home and had nothing to do with the President. I came home, we were home for about a month or two, and he was assassinated. And that's it, so I really didn't know him. I don't feel I knew him well, except for those two longish conversations that I had. It was just the connection with

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Mrs. Roosevelt. At least it may be a different view than say Kenny O'Donnell's or Mrs. Roosevelt's or somebody else's view of it. The historian has to put it together.

STEWART: Have you written – this is a little off the subject – have you written of your Peace Corps experiences at all?

FUCHS: Yes, *The Peace Corps* will be a book out in April. I wrote a book on John Kennedy and American Catholicism which will be out in February. This is really

about the Church in America, but Kennedy is used as a symbol and as a catalyst to deal with certain issues. It's really a sociology and religion book, sociology and Catholicism in America, that's what it's about more than anything else really. But the publisher wanted it to be called *John F. Kennedy and American Catholicism*, and it's

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justified because the last half of the book is about him as a symbol and as a force. Then I did the Peace Corps book and that will come out a couple of months after that. So that's my work since then and a book on ethics politics since I've been home from the Peace Corps. Those are the three that I have worked on. They're all coming out this year.

STEWART: Well, is there anything you would like to add, just as a way of conclusion or...

FUCHS: Gee, I don't know. There are so many little things, but they're not relevant. I think the main point is a...

STEWART: Just one thing to get clear here, did she ever express to any feeling at all about Johnson's selection as the vice presidential nominee?

FUCHS: I think she thought it was good politically. Now, she never said that it was bad from the point of view of issues or anything

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like that. But I think, just after it happened we both discussed it from a political point of view and took that.... You see, I think both of us knew, instinctively, that as soon as Johnson got into the national picture he's going to be a liberal. But who ever thought of Johnson being President? I mean, that's very short sighted, I realize now, but there was Kennedy and just so much life. And I think she thought it was good politically because I remember, just briefly, we said, "Well, you know, neither one of us cares much for Johnson but, well, of course, maybe he'll do more to bring civil rights to the Negroes than any other Vice President could have done. Of course now he's going to be for it surely," and that kind of thing, and domestic legislation.

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STEWART: So she was quite realistic about why he chose Johnson?

FUCHS: Yes, I think she was. She was very realistic politically in a lot of ways. The way she handled her conversations with Khrushchev [Nikita S. Khrushchev], you know, very, you couldn't ask for something more in a combination of firmness and sensitivity.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

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