

William P. Wilson Oral History Interview –JFK #1, 11/17/1997
Administrative Information

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Biographical Note

Wilson, William P.; Media consultant, John F. Kennedy Presidential Campaign (1960), White House (1961-1963), Robert F. Kennedy Presidential Campaign (1968). Wilson discusses his involvement in Adlai E. Stevenson's presidential campaign (1956), John F. Kennedy's [JFK] presidential campaign (1960), and Robert F. Kennedy's [RFK] senatorial and presidential campaigns (1964 and 1968, respectively). Wilson touches upon his experience with television media, and he highlights the use and importance of television in both of the Kennedy's campaigns, among other issues.

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John F. Kennedy Library

William P. Wilson

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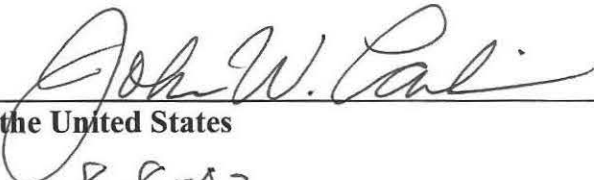
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William P. Wilson

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Oral History Interview

with

WILLIAM P. WILSON

November 17, 1997

Washington, D.C.

by Allan Goodrich

For the John F. Kennedy Library

GOODRICH: Alright. We're ready, and we're talking to Bill Wilson at his suite in Washington. Today is the 17th of November. How did you get into TV, or was it TV then?

WILSON: Well, yes, it was. It's interesting--to me. In the late forties and 1950, I mean television was what the computer age is today. I mean it was, well, what the computer age was ten, fifteen years ago, twenty years ago. I mean it was the beginning of something everybody knew was very, very big. It was a new technology that was going to change the world. I mean it was an exciting period of history. And so I was in college, and I was drafted in the Korean War. I went away between my sophomore and junior years. When I came back, I had had a big experience in radio because I was a propagandist in psychological warfare in Korea and Japan and was able to really learn a great deal about producing radio and writing radio.

So when I came back I majored at the University of Illinois in journalism with an emphasis on television. Worked at the local station; was a director, and did the news, sports, and weather every night. And was making a lot of money and living in an apartment and finishing my college--two years later than everybody else, but just exactly the right time for me. So the day I got out of college, the day I graduated from the University of Illinois, CBS hired me as a writer-producer in Chicago, and I was off and running.

GOODRICH: Interesting. So you were at the station when the debate came on? How did you get involved with the Kennedy [John F. Kennedy] campaign?

WILSON: Well, I got involved because after about two years at CBS in Chicago, which was WBBM-TV, Adlai Stevenson [Adlai E. Stevenson] asked me if I would join his presidential campaign as his television advisor in 1956.

GOODRICH: Oh, '56.

WILSON: At that point I was twenty-two years old, I guess, twenty-one. I started with him in the beginning of the primaries, was with him the whole year. And became the first television person to be hired for a presidential campaign. The other person that was hired for presidential association in television was Robert Montgomery, but that was when Eisenhower [Dwight D. Eisenhower] was already in the White House and was having trouble with television. And they brought in Bob Montgomery, whom I later knew through the Kennedy campaigns. He was a wonderful guy. At any rate, that's how I got into politics.

GOODRICH: Did you do the [Inaudible], too?

WILSON: I did all the live production. I invented a series of *Meet Adlai Stevenson*. In every town we came to, we went to the local television station and did a fifteen-minute show every morning in the time that he was in those cities or villages or hamlets. And I would carry around with me a little slide that said, "Meet Adlai Stevenson," and go into the local television station. The local committee would buy the time, and I would direct those. I mean I would actually sit behind the console and direct the one- and two-camera shows of Stevenson talking with somebody from the local committees, etc., just going over the issues of that area that he was in, and pitching his personality.

GOODRICH: Of course, that was all live, so there was no taping done.

WILSON: All live, all live, and no taping. Taping didn't come in 'til '64.

GOODRICH: We have some of the spots from '56, "The Man from Libertyville."

WILSON: That was Charles Guggenheim [Charles Eli Guggenheim].

GOODRICH: Oh, that was Charlie?

WILSON: Yes. I did one that was at the end of the campaign in California, which was a fifteen-minute show. Where we started with a small baby with a big Stevenson banner, a little toddler, maybe fifteen months, with a big Stevenson bumper sticker across the thing. And the first line in the whole movie was: "Have you ever been to a political meeting?" It was a fifteen-minute film. I don't think anything

like that had been done before. But, yes, Charlie did the--the Libertyville stuff was very good stuff. Stevenson was a tough television person. He didn't like it. He hadn't adjusted to the fact that it was a major, major influence on how people got elected. It was early.

GOODRICH: Yes, we have some...

WILSON: He felt it a great intrusion.

GOODRICH: He got better, though. We have some kines [kinescopes] from '52 of some [Inaudible].

WILSON: Really!?

GOODRICH: Yes. The old DuMont Television Network.

WILSON: I'll be damned!

GOODRICH: And there's a number of them where he's giving a speech, probably about half an hour, and he's just giving a speech, and they cut him off in mid word because he's run out of time.

WILSON: That was talked about a lot in '56, as a matter of fact. They were very sensitive about time, but he wasn't. He would change the speech after it had been timed and add to it, and continued to be a.... The way I dealt with that, and I did it with a lot of candidates, I would just give them a signal. I would go down on the floor in front of them and give them a signal they had a minute left when they had two or three left. And they'd always go over the minute, but I'd always get them off on time. See how lying and cheating pays off?

GOODRICH: Sometimes you have to do it.

WILSON: You've got to do it for their own good.

GOODRICH: So you already had a reputation then, but how'd you get involved with Kennedy? From the Stevenson work?

WILSON: When I finished with Stevenson, I went back to--I was living in Washington at the time. I'd moved from Chicago to Washington during the campaign. Because after the primaries when the national campaign started, we all moved to Washington, and the offices were here. There's one remembrance that's interesting to me, though, in the primaries in Minnesota, in that campaign in '56. And then I'll get us right into the Kennedy stuff.

The night that we left Minnesota before the vote for the Minnesota primary in 1956, I found myself in a hotel room with five men, and there were some other people there, too, but

not many. There might have been a dozen people in the room. They had met there to say goodbye to Adlai who was going to get on--Stevenson--who was going to get on a train to come back to Chicago. In that suite at that time were the attorney general. Well, first of all, the governor, who was Orville Freeman [Orville L. Freeman]; the senator from that state, who was Hubert Humphrey [Hubert H. Humphrey]; and the attorney general, who was Walter Mondale [Walter F. Mondale]. And a congressman from that state who was Eugene McCarthy [Eugene J. McCarthy]. And all those guys ran for president.... I mean in one state, all these political leaders in that state became national figures in the coming years. It's fascinating.

At any rate, I moved from Washington to New York after the election in '56. I'd gotten married, and I started a life working in television in New York. I started with a production company that did commercials for corporations. And then moved on to an advertising agency called Compton where I was put in charge of all the television advertising for Procter & Gamble and Mobil Oil Company. And it was a very exciting time in New York City in the late fifties.

In 1959 I met a guy named Steve Smith [Stephen E. Smith] that Bill Blair [William McCormick Blair, Jr.] introduced me to. They thought they might take a run at the presidency and that I'd be in touch. I didn't do the primaries because I couldn't get away from what I was doing. But when it came to the national campaign after the convention, they asked me to.... I was in New York, so they asked me to join the advertising agency which Kennedy had picked. He picked a San Francisco advertising agency whom nobody had ever heard of, whose biggest account was Skippy Peanut Butter.

GOODRICH: That was DeNove [Jack DeNove]?

WILSON: No, DeNove was an entirely different.... DeNove was a man who produced the Christopher Series on television. It's a Catholic series.

GOODRICH: Oh, yes.

WILSON: And Eunice Shriver [Eunice Kennedy Shriver], or Jean Smith [Jean Kennedy Smith], I think it was Jean Smith, recommended him to do some commercials for the Kennedy thing. So he was involved in the primaries. So Kennedy had seen on the bumper sticker of Volkswagen, a sticker that said, "Think small." He thought that was so funny that he said, "Find out who the advertising agency is that did that." It turned out to be Guild, Bascom & Bonfigli [Guild, Bascom & Bonfigli Advertising] from San Francisco. They hired them. Then when it came to the television part, they suggested--Steve suggested me. They hired me, and I became basically their contact with television, the campaign and the agency. Most of the money spent on the campaign was through the advertising agency for time on television and radio. And the bulk of the material that was on TV was through the agency. So I produced all of the live material that was done, that JFK did in 1960, both regional broadcasts and national. And I was his representative on the debates.

GOODRICH: Of course the most important regional was the Houston speech.

WILSON: I had to talk him into that.

GOODRICH: Oh, really?

WILSON: We had scheduled the Houston speech, they had scheduled it. I said, "Let's tape it, let's shoot it in kinescope or film it, let's film it. Let's do something." Ted Sorensen [Theodore C. Sorensen] said, "No, that's a terrible place. It's going to be murder, all these right-wing evangelists. It's going to be a very tight..." I said, "Let's find out. It might be the perfect thing." And sure enough, it was. It was a gorgeous half hour we made out of an hour or so of film. I can't remember now whether it was film or kinescope. I can't remember because it's too far away.

At any rate, the point is that it was a gang-buster show. We cut it into a beautiful half hour. And of all the films that were made of JFK in 1960, that one was seen the most because it hit at the heart of the issue of the first Catholic president. He was brilliant in it. And when you cut to make somebody look even better, it was a dynamite piece of material. And I think that the Kennedy campaign spent maybe two million dollars putting that at least twice on every television station in the United States. Because it went to the heart, heart, heart. People don't realize what a major issue that, one, Catholicism, and, two, his age. That's all they talked about.

GOODRICH: Yes, sure.

WILSON: Issues were not discussed to any major degree at all. The arguments were religious and maturity.

GOODRICH: I've read stories that they used to show it, they took the film to show it to groups as well.

WILSON: Oh, yes, yes, yes.

GOODRICH: Dave [David F. Powers] said one time that anybody that went by somewhere they'd drag them in and show them the movie.

WILSON: I know, I know, I know. It was just amazing. But I would look at the number of times that it was shown as the agency bought time around the country. It was just way up there. I mean you looked at the expenses for other things in the campaign, and you saw the--I'm talking about television things--and you saw the budget for the Houston ministers' thing. It was just huge.

GOODRICH: I have those records for that.

WILSON: But you're right. They did pull them in to show them, I mean off the street.

GOODRICH: Yes, Dave Powers used to say they'd show it to Catholic audiences to show them how he stood up to these Protestant guys. And they showed it to the Protestant groups to prove he didn't have horns.

WILSON: It was true. And it worked like a dream. He was brilliant that night. And there were very few guys, [Inaudible] ministers, in that session. I mean it was very sparsely populated. When I shot him, it looked like it was filmed.

GOODRICH: Yes, it does look like it was filmed. [Pause for telephone call]

WILSON: So at any rate, that was an exciting night.

GOODRICH: That was a small group there?

WILSON: It was a very small group. We had chairs for a couple of hundred, and I think there were fifty or sixty people in the audience.

GOODRICH: Oh, really?

WILSON: Yes.

GOODRICH: Boy, the way you shot that [Inaudible].

WILSON: I know. It's amazing. Well, of course, that's what a good propagandist does. And that's what you are; you're a straight propagandist in a political campaign. You're a journalist the next year. But if you're a journalist, you know how to become a non-journalist.

GOODRICH: Oh, yes.

WILSON: One might even say that about Sy Hersh [Seymour M. Hersh]. He's a non-journalist. At any rate, that was an exciting time. The debates, of course, were the most exciting. The fact that Kennedy was going to do his first debate in Chicago was very helpful because I knew the people there in the studios, having come from CBS in Chicago four or five years before.

GOODRICH: Oh, so you were comfortable with them already then.

WILSON: Well, I knew the layouts. I felt comfortable with the people. I was not a stranger. That helps enormously in that business. Just to know where the front door is, you know. Because as you travel around doing these television shows in different parts of the country, you're in strange land all the time.

GOODRICH: Did you travel with him a lot? Or did you just jump ahead of where he was

going?

WILSON: I was always ahead of him. The people that I would touch base with and spend most time with in the campaign, besides Kennedy, besides the candidate, was Dick Goodwin [Richard N. Goodwin] and Ted Sorensen and Larry O'Brien [Lawrence F. O'Brien]. And then I worked with John Nolan [John E. Nolan] in the itinerary area. Those were the people I needed. I needed the writers and the itinerary.

GOODRICH: Yes.

WILSON: Because I was covering it. So I was always there with a camera ready when he walked in the door.

GOODRICH: Going back to that first debate, Melody [Melody Miller] mentioned a couple of things. I think the story used to go that Kennedy didn't have makeup, or he just had a light powder on, or...

WILSON: Kennedy?

GOODRICH: Yes.

WILSON: No. What happened was I was over there in the afternoon, and we had made the plan of what they.... Nixon's [Richard M. Nixon] guy was Ted Rogers. And he and I had several meetings before we even got to Chicago, planning the sets and approving what CBS was going to do from each candidate's standpoint. When we arrived the day before, we settled on the rooms that people would be in and the fact that there would be makeup. I mean everybody had planned--it's a production, so there was a makeup person. I mean it was normal operating procedure. There was no discussion about it except to identify the room and the person who was going to do it.

And so the night of the debate, Kennedy was in the room I'd chosen for him with Bobby [Robert F. Kennedy] and two or three other people. I think Pierre [Pierre E. G. Salinger] and Ted Sorensen, and they were still throwing questions at him, getting him prepped. And then I said, "Okay, it's time for the senator to get made up." And he said to me, "I don't want to go in first. I want to go after Nixon is made up." Now you've got to remember that makeup was an issue, just like big advertising agencies were an issue, in 1960, which is why Kennedy chose the small agency from San Francisco; he did not want to be linked to Madison Avenue and New York. He was already an Easterner, and that one step more.... Anything after age and Catholicism he wanted to do away with as much as possible. So he went to the extreme, taking a San Francisco advertising agency.

At any rate, I said, "Okay. I will go and check and see if Nixon's been made up." I went to the makeup person and said, "Has Nixon been made up?" and he said, "No." And there was Ted Rogers coming around the same corner, and I said, "Is your guy going to get made up now?" And he said, "Nixon says he's not going to get made up until Kennedy is."

And I said, "Well, how do we handle this?" Ted said, "I don't know. I can't get him to do it unless Kennedy does."

So I went back to the senator, and I said, "Listen, he's not going to do it until you do it." And he said, "Then Kennedy said I'm not going to do it. So just forget it." I said, "You've got to have something to take the sheen off your face and fill your pores because these lights...." I didn't say in 1960 they were very hot. But I mean in that time in television the studio lights were just big, almost artillery pieces. It was ridiculous.

So I said, "Okay, I'm going to do it. But I've got to go down to the corner and get some stuff." And he said, "Well, okay." I said, "I'll be back in a few minutes." So I ran down about a block and a half to one of the drugstores on Michigan Avenue, got some Max Factor Cream Puff, which I used to use for Stevenson. And I came back, and I said, "Now, I think it's a good idea if all the people in this room now get out because we need a little quiet time, and I've got to put his makeup on." And Kennedy said, "Yeah, let's get rid of these guys. I'm tired of this." And just as Bobby wished him luck, he clasped his hands around his shoulders, he said, "Okay, Jack, kick him in the balls." [Laughter]

So they left, and I made him up. It was just a slight covering to take the shine off a very brown face, he had a wonderful suntan, and to close the pores, because you perspire even slightly, people who don't perspire, perspire when you're under that kind of heat. And if there's anything to distinguish Jack Kennedy from other people, he didn't sweat emotionally or mentally. He was one of the coolest men I've ever been around in terms of his ability to wander through a group of people asking things of him, making decisions. His reaction time to decision-making was one of the most interesting things I've ever seen. He was just--he was on automatic when it came to running his personal moments.

At any rate, then I led him into the studio. We had two minutes to air, and we had not been in the studio. He said, "I've got to go to the bathroom." Now this happens all the time because it's pressure. I said, "Well, you'd better hurry up because you've got exactly a minute and thirty seconds 'til you're on the air." It was really, I exaggerated that again, so it was about three minutes. So he found a bathroom, and we took him in there, and he dealt with that. And then he came out.

We went into the studio with probably thirty seconds to air. It gave him a chance to just almost nod to Nixon. It was almost as if he'd planned this. He couldn't have because you just aren't able to plan things that way. But the ability to come in and not have to deal with any of the formality or conventions of the event and to ignore the man you're going to debate was ingenious if it had been planned, and I can't believe that it was. So he walked right to his chair in his area, and he sat down and looked at his notes. And the program began.

I went immediately to the control room with Ted Rogers and I was standing behind Don Hewitt [Don S. Hewitt] the director. And we agreed to.... I think one of the key aspects of the debate were the reaction shots where you cut away to watching Nixon listen, and cut away when Kennedy was talking, cut away to Kennedy when Nixon was talking. I mean it gives a correct focus to a dialogue or a debate. You have to know what the other person did; that the other person's in the room.

At any rate, we'd agreed to this. And as we saw that Nixon was looking bad, his beard was prominent, and after about twenty minutes there was perspiration in lines down his face, and I wanted to be able to see: I wanted the audience to be able to see all that. There's

nothing better than to watch somebody sweat in a debate. Literally! And so I would scream at Hewitt to give us another reaction shot because you owed us two. We've had two of Kennedy, now give me two more of Nixon.

So there was a lot of frustration in the control room. One, because Hewitt was trying to do a good job of organizing a program that an audience, a viewing audience, could understand. And that has to do with timing and the balance between the two men and the movement of your cameras. Also, the contentiousness that Rogers and I were having about the problems that we saw on the screen. I didn't see problems. I saw nothing but making hay. Ted was trying to protect his man because he saw he looked bad. And Hewitt knew there was nothing he could do about that. We were live, and we were on the air, and our audience was ninety million people.

So after it was over I started towards the room where I'd put Kennedy, and the first man that shouldered past me through the studio and broke all the security was Mayor Daley [Richard J. Daley]. And Daley had not been that hot on Kennedy because he didn't think that a Catholic could be elected president of the United States, Daley being a Catholic. So as a politician, he made this judgment. But he was friendly, but he was not overly committed. But after that he was overly committed. He saw he had a winner. There are certain politicians I've known in my life that just have such a strong sense of the waves of public opinion and the kinds of personalities that win and can carry the day. These are really interesting men: the Larry O'Briens, the Jim Finnegan [James A. Finnegan], the Hy Raskins [Hyman B. Raskin]. These were the instinctive politicians that came out of a party mechanism and worked judgment and insight as opposed to polls and numbers.

GOODRICH: Yes. Actually, they said that of Rayburn [Samuel T. Rayburn], too, after the Houston speech. That he'd been noncommittal and threw in with Kennedy after that.

WILSON: I think that's probably true. There were a lot of people.... Well, when we hit the campaign trail the day after the debates, the crowds were enormous.
[Pause, for Wilson to answer phone call]

GOODRICH: The other story goes that you and Rogers almost had a fight in the control room. Was that verbally or...?

WILSON: First of all, Ted and I liked each other, and the negotiations that we had, not just in the first debate, but there were four debates.... Were there four or three?

GOODRICH: Four.

WILSON: Okay. And we would have had them in Cleveland and Chicago, I mean in New York. I mean they were all over the place. We didn't do the Cleveland one. Cleveland was.... It was Washington, D.C., New York, and where else?

Remind me.

GOODRICH: I think there was one where they split the screen; Nixon was in California.

WILSON: That's right, yes.

GOODRICH: I think Kennedy was in the studio in New York. I can't remember now.

WILSON: I can't either. At any rate, Ted and I were very compatible. I mean we were professional in terms of each of us knowing what we needed for our candidate. I mean we knew what the production needs were to make it a good show and a fair show. Now, when I took a stand in the studio, in the control room, about reaction shots and the rest of it, there was contention there because he was protecting his man, and I was going for the jugular with my man. And so there had to be a moment where that all broke down and it became personal. But afterwards we had a drink together and toasted the fact that we'd done a show with an audience of ninety million people, and nobody had ever done that before in 1960. And we felt very privileged and excited about the fact that we had been involved in something that reached that many people.

GOODRICH: Well, I was one; I remember watching it.

WILSON: Yes. Those were, you know, seminal events in a nation's history, it turns out. You don't think so then.

GOODRICH: Not only that, it changed the face of campaigning, though.

WILSON: Yes, from then on, that ended the party strength in political campaigns. Basically you went as a candidate for president directly to the people. And that relationship is what the election was about, not.... The party event became just people to get out the vote, get people to the polls. But television went over the heads of everybody that was involved before that. And that demonstrates the difference between the advertising agency which stayed in the game until '68, not this particular one, but agencies. And then that turning point where it became individual people running the campaign and buying the time through their own personal organization, and their only business was campaigns. They didn't do products.

GOODRICH: Dick Morris.

WILSON: All those guys, the Bob Squier's [Robert David Squier] and the Dick Morris' and those people who do those things. I did that for a while after '60--I mean after '64. I did a few dozen campaigns. But I was always, I always, went back to the networks. So later on I went back to the movie business. I never felt there was a place for what I did and how I thought in Washington, D.C., in government. There was always a place for me for putting somebody in office. There was no role in Washington for a film producer unless you're Charlie Guggenheim, who developed a great business not just

from candidates, but as a documentarian. I was more involved in progressing to the dramatic, the theatrical parts of the business.

GOODRICH: So you just didn't do--you didn't want a job in the administration?

WILSON: Well, there was a point where I was offered one, and it would have been terrific if I had not been offered a better job at the same time. After the election, after JFK's election, and before the inauguration, I was put in charge of the transition in government of the Eisenhower and Kennedy Administrations for television and radio in the White House. And was able to have one of the most exciting experiences I've had, which was to go to the White House on the night that Eisenhower was giving his farewell speech to the American people. To observe, so that when Kennedy came in, I'd be able to arrange things and know how to do it.

I remember staying at the Hay-Adams, and walking across Lafayette Square, and going into the White House, and being taken into Jim Hagerty's [James C. Hagerty] office, and sitting there was Bob Montgomery, who was Eisenhower's television man. And I was very young at the time. I was in my middle twenties. They took one look at me, and I thought they were going to drop their jaws down to their knees. Here were these men who were in their late fifties looking at this kid.

They introduced themselves, and I introduced myself, and we sat down and chatted. And then Hagerty said, "Well, I guess we should go in. The president's going to talk in about ten minutes. You want to see the arrangements?" And I went in and looked at the Oval Office and saw how they'd set up the lights and the cameras and the rest of it. Met some of the people I knew who were working with the crew. There was a pool reporter, myself, and maybe Hagerty, and, of course, Bob Montgomery, other than the crew and the president.

The president came in, sat at the desk, and gave that speech which was really one of the most exciting moments in presidential speeches, where he told the American people to beware of the military-industrial complex. And when he said those words, I looked over at the pool reporter, the pool reporter looked at me, and we both went [gesture] like that. We just opened our mouths and reacted.

At any rate, after the speech, Eisenhower got up and started to go, and Montgomery and Hagerty went over to him, and talked to him a little bit. And then Hagerty motioned me over and said, "Would you like to meet the president?" And I said, "Certainly." So he introduced me to Eisenhower, and I shook hands. I said, "Nice to meet you, Mr. President." And he looked at me, and then he looked over my shoulder at Bob Montgomery with a smile on his face and said, "Bob, have you met your replacement?" [Laughter] They all responded to how young.... You can see pictures on the wall of how young I looked at that point. But that was a wonderful moment actually.

During that period of time I had also set up the State Department auditorium for the first Kennedy press conferences.

GOODRICH: Oh, did you!

WILSON: They were the first electronic press conferences by a president, and that was

an exciting time, and I arranged the whole--chose the State Department after looking all over Washington, and made all the arrangements for that.

GOODRICH: Eisenhower's used to be, where, in the Treaty Room of the EOB [Executive Office Building]?

WILSON: I think so, yes. It was just across the street as opposed to....

GOODRICH: You chose the State Department just for the size of the auditorium?

WILSON: Yes. It was a very good auditorium. And I liked the acoustics. I tested the acoustics. There was a nice sense of drama to his entering from one side of it. And there was room for three or four chairs where Pierre and some others might sit. There was a nice look to the place. It made a good set, even though there were many more seats than you needed for this press, although they became pretty substantial.

GOODRICH: Yes, I know sometimes they screened off part of the auditorium.

WILSON: Yes.

GOODRICH: He was a [Inaudible].

WILSON: It was an interesting moment, at least for me, when I came back into--after the president arrived, I had been out doing something outside the auditorium or something. When I came in, the FBI, I mean the Secret Service, had cut off everything. I mean that was it. The president was there, the room was sealed. And I said, "Oh, my God, I've got to get in there. I'm producing this." And he said, "Well, wait a minute." The Secret Service guy said, "Just a second." So they get Walsh, who was head of the Secret Service. And I said, "Lookit! I've got to be in and out of here all over the place because this is something I put together, and I'm producing it." And he turned to a guy who I later found out was Rufus Youngblood [Rufus W. Youngblood], the guy who threw himself on top of Johnson [Lyndon B. Johnson] when Kennedy was assassinated. And he said, "Get me a book." In fact, Rufus gave me that wallet that's got the Secret Service badge in it. I was shocked at this. He said, "This is all you'll need."

So I found myself running in and out of the auditorium and behind and all the rest of it, cleaning up all the things I had to do before the president came in. And, of course, getting back into the--we'll call it the Green Room where he was waiting to come out, I would never have gotten back; it was just all completely.... I flashed that badge, and they just kind of giggled at the fact that I had it. [Laughter]

But that was when the Secret Service felt more sanguine about security. That's all past. They'd never do that now. They were more cavalier in those days because they knew when they were in those situations that it was basically secure. They don't think anything's secure now.

GOODRICH: No. There's a control room there, isn't there, for the TV?

WILSON: No, the TV was.... I think the first one had a truck outside. We didn't have a control room situation. I think they built into it later. But we had a tape truck. We didn't have a tape truck. That was '60; there was no tape.

GOODRICH: [Inaudible].

WILSON: But it was an exciting first press conference, and he was brilliant. Jack Kennedy had one of the most together qualities. I've never seen him flustered. He was just a very cool guy, and he was always on top of his game. There was never a sense that, even though there's been so much talk about illnesses and this, that, and the other, I never felt one drop in his energy level in terms of a public event or in a group of people. It was a characteristic I carry with me about him that I associate when I think of him.

I remember in the second or third debate we were sitting in a room, just Bob Kennedy, myself, Jack, and the director, and maybe Goodwin or Sorensen. And Pierre Salinger called, Bobby took the call, and said, "The bishops in Puerto Rico said if you don't vote for Jack Kennedy, you're going to be excommunicated."

So Bob put the phone down and said--and explained to Jack what the problem was, and Pierre wants to know what to say. And Jack said, "Well, I'm not going to comment on it. I'm not the pope. I have nothing to do with that. I just go to church. Have him talk to a bishop or a cardinal. Call Cushing [Richard Cardinal Cushing] in Boston. I'm not going to have anything to say about that. It's not my place to even respond to those questions." Which, I mean, but that was automatic. And of course that was the position that Pierre should have taken. That has nothing to do with us. We're running for president.

At any rate, he was capable of making really specific judgments. And I was reading Kennedy tapes of Cuban Missile Crisis. I think if anybody wanted to know the true worth of the man as a leader, those are the--that book of the tapes is what to read.

GOODRICH: [Inaudible] those tapes are not easy to transcribe. That's true when you listen to them.

WILSON: Perfect example of being on top of the hill.

GOODRICH: Utterly cool. Right from the get-go--yes.

WILSON: No sense of calculation. No calculating sense. It is pure judgment that comes out each time. Our questions--I mean the agenda is so clear and clean. Bobby was the same way. He was a great editor of people and what people said.

Both the Kennedys were just magnificent at that.

GOODRICH: Yes, Steve Smith, too, I think.

WILSON: Steve, too. I don't know how it all got that way. Well, it got that way because when you're in the midst of, oh, I suppose chaos is a good way of describing, you learn to edit, you learn who's talking bullshit, who's talking right, who's making sense and who isn't. We go fast, we just don't put up with it. You know what's important right away.

GOODRICH: Did Bobby pick you up for the '64 campaign, or...?

WILSON: By that time I was Steve Smith's guy. Whenever they went to another agency.... They had two agencies. They had Guild, Bascom & Bonfigli in '60, and then Papert, Koenig, Lois in '64 and '68. And he would say, "Use Wilson for your television because he knows us, and we know him, and we're comfortable." So I would go into a.... And besides that, as Bobby said in '68, "I think it's time for you to form your own company. We're tired of paying you that kind of money. I don't want it to appear on a piece of paper what we've been paying you. So I want you to start your own company." So I started Communications Task Force and worked as a company that was working for the campaign. I was still working at the agency, but I was paid in a different way.

GOODRICH: We've got most of the Papert's spots...

WILSON: Those were all my spots.

GOODRICH: Oh, really?

WILSON: Mmmm hmmm. All the spots that had to do with the man. You see, Bobby in those spots, I covered, my people covered. The concept advertised spots, where you had, well, in '64 it was [Inaudible] who worked for the *New York Herald*, the [Inaudible]. Everything that had to do with him out on the campaign trail in those moments where he said something brilliant or just great for thirty seconds, a minute, those are all mine. Well, they came through Papert. I guess Papert was paying me through Communications Task Force. But my editors did all that. Very few times did we see Papert [Frederic Stuart Papert] or George Lois or any of those people. Because they weren't used to how we did that. Which was to take an enormous amount of material and just find those isolated moments where the man was perfect. Then we put the end piece on it, and the introduction with the voice over, and make them into an entity. It was looking through hours of tape and just isolating those two or three things that clicked together that made him appear heroic.

GOODRICH: So what was Charlie's role in '68? Did he just do the bio?

WILSON: Yes. We talked on occasion. I think Charlie did a lot of spots. His spots were in most campaigns. But he was fighting the agency. The agency never liked Charlie's spots, which is no reflection on how good the spots were. But there

was an ego involved in terms of the agency. Now, my stuff, which they really didn't have much to do with if anything; they just saw that it was natural material. It was organic to the campaign. Basically I taught them this is the kind of material that goes, that works. And they would spend a lot of time trying to sell their concept advertising or Charlie's spots. And they would have a lot of trouble with the committee that saw these ads as to whether they should run them or not. And in the meantime, since they were paying cash for those spots, time, they had to be on the air. And if they had to be on the air, they had to be shipped. If they had to be shipped, they had to go out two or three days before.

So my stuff was all over the place because I would send it out on time. I mean the time buyer and I, Bill Murphy[?] worked very strongly together because he knew what he bought. He'd say, I have to have such-and-such here for this network within, you know, twenty-four hours. We're going on the air. They really didn't know how to do it, to a large degree. Because I'd done it before. And agencies that come in that haven't done it before, don't know how it starts. They try to work with the candidate and his staff to convince them to do things, which takes a long time. And in the meantime, the campaign is running.

GOODRICH: And you don't have a lot of time in a campaign.

WILSON: Yes. [sound of finger snapping]

GOODRICH: We've been giving Charlie credit for all those spots.

WILSON: Anything that had Bob Kennedy on the campaign trail, walking around, doing all this stuff we, was ours. Because we had all the money. I mean we just shot anything that moved.

GOODRICH: Did you go back to the editing room?

WILSON: When we were in California, I brought the whole crew at huge expense in trucks out to L.A. because people in L.A. were not used to editing tape in '68. They were still talking A/B role and playing around. There were tape companies, but they were very early in terms of their.... First to fall, L.A. people were all fiber [Inaudible]. Now tape's taken over. So I decided to bring out at huge expense two huge tape trucks that I put out in front of the tape company we were using. And they stayed up all night cutting those spots.

[END SIDE 1, TAPE 1]

[BEGIN SIDE 2, TAPE 1]

WILSON: ...the machines you have today.

GOODRICH: Oh, it would be 2 inch.

WILSON: Oh, 2 inch, they were working in 2". And their ability to jump between film-- between machines was an aspect of their talent.

GOODRICH: Go back to '64, the Columbia speech.

WILSON: The Columbia speech was....

GOODRICH: It's a very effective half hour.

WILSON: Wonderful.

GOODRICH: I know Steve Smith was very proud of it.

WILSON: Yes. I think it was Fred Paperts idea. I think it was. And he came to me, he said, "Where would we do it and how would we set it up?" I said, after going and looking at Columbia, because it all has to do with itinerary, what he's going to do, and the fact that he was going to do a talk with some students, we wanted to make something of it, as opposed to that kind of small event.

So I found a room at Columbia, and I did a six- or seven-inch platform, very square. The whole principle was I thought it would be really effective for him to just be having a hand mike and walking around and not being tied to a podium or a desk, and give the audience a sense of the man. Because both Kennedys had great body movement. I mean there was something about the way they moved that said something to people. But this is something in my business that you look at first. There's so much non-verbal message in a person's face and the way he moves or she moves. It's very effective stuff.

And so I wanted to see him in a square about, oh, I suppose it was ten by ten. And I put carpeting on it so there would be no noise, and I lit it sparsely. We were beginning to get decent lighting now. I started in '64 to do film lighting for television. In other words, I'd hired film guys to light. The equipment was getting better. So consequently we could get clear images without as much light.

We did stack the event by putting questions in maybe five or ten people's hands that I made up. But by and large it was wide open, and questions came from everybody. When there was a lull, one of my people would jump up and ask a question. But it was the kind of question that anybody would have asked. And that wonderful moment when he was asked about his brother, and he had to try to handle it, and almost lost it but didn't. The film was full of wonderful moments. And you got to see all sides of him. I mean you got to watch him move, and it was an effective presentation.

GOODRICH: He would much rather that way than with a set speech, that's for sure.

WILSON: Oh, yes.

GOODRICH: Definitely.

WILSON: Bobby was.... Well, he was, again, on his feet when he was on his feet, or in a pressured situation where he had to make judgments. I don't know what the gene is in those Kennedys, but they're very, very solid at that stuff. They're outstanding in that ability. They're natural leaders. And I think a natural leadership of that sort comes from knowing--you can call it sophistication--but basically it's knowing the business you're in. Knowing what is going on in the world; and having an easy time with being in that world; and understanding it and relating to it in a way in which you can make judgments about it and give opinions without double-thinking yourself. What's my opinion about this? Oh, my God, what am I going to say about that? It doesn't enter into their thinking. They have a response built in almost.

GOODRICH: Yes, I see that in Ted Kennedy.

WILSON: It has to do with time and rank. It has to do with being in that business long enough to get it right. It has to do with being brought up in a home where you were put on a hot spot by a father at the dinner table about, "How do you feel about this? Did you read about this? Tell me what you heard about that." I mean they were automatically on the ball. It's exciting to find people like that. I have found men in the movie business that are that way. I mean there's some directors and producers who are very capable, some executives who are very capable at knowing their business well enough to make really good decisions about things. But they're few and far between.

GOODRICH: Okay. One last question.

WILSON: Alright.

GOODRICH: The famous Frankenheimer [John M. Frankenheimer] film of '68 [Inaudible].

WILSON: I produced the Frankenheimer film.

GOODRICH: Oh, you did?

WILSON: All the stuff in the Frankenheimer film is done by (staff?). My people shot all that. Dick Goodwin and John Frankenheimer and I literally would sit in editing rooms and in screening rooms looking at that stuff and talking about what to do with it. Now John, who is an exceptionally good editor, I mean he sees material, he's the talent, but that was all my material, and I was with both of those guys every inch of the way. And Dick Silbert[?] was very important in that, too, process.

We stayed up all night at MGM, night after night, putting that stuff together. And Bobby would come in after a couple of, you know, would come in at midnight and look at that stuff. He had a great sense of how to look at that material. Bob Kennedy was the first person that literally had something to do with his own television, not in '64, but in '68.

For example, in '64 he was terrible with teleprompters. Bob Kennedy was terrible with teleprompters. I brought equipment into the suite at the Carlyle Hotel in New York and taught young--I think it was young Bobby and Joe, who were kids then--to work the teleprompter. I put it in a little living-room area. Then would Bobby would come in, they'd have fun playing with it. And he learned not to be afraid of the teleprompter. It became a game. From then on he felt quite comfortable with the teleprompter.

Anyway, the point is that you work with really smart guys, and you look good. But, no, Frankenheimer and Dick Goodwin and I and Dick Silbert were the people that made that picture. And all the material in that picture was the stuff my crew shot in Indiana, and it was a terrific film. Do you have it?

GOODRICH: No.

WILSON: Why can't anybody find it? I couldn't find it.

GOODRICH: It's just disappeared.

WILSON: Isn't that amazing? I looked for it in the seventies.

GOODRICH: We keep hearing of it. People keep calling us and saying, "Can we see it?"

WILSON: Did you talk to John about that?

GOODRICH: John doesn't have it either.

WILSON: Fred Papert was looking for it. [Inaudible]. I mean the agency who paid for it wasn't [Inaudible]. We spent a lot of money on that thing. Steve Smith was really upset, but he liked the picture. That was an exciting time. That was one of the most exciting times in the campaign for me, putting that picture together.

GOODRICH: That was done in Indiana?

WILSON: We did it in Hollywood. We did it in California. My guys were in Indiana shooting it, and I was there for a while. But they'd send it back, and we'd put it in the lab and look at it the next day and decide what we were going to use.

GOODRICH: And then Charlie's still working alongside or separately?

WILSON: Yeah. He was always a totally separate entity. Now, he was talking to Steve and to Bobby. I mean they were good friends. I mean they were professionally hooked up. But the agency never liked.... He was too independent for them. But the money was coming through the agency. Like DeNove, the same thing. DeNove and Guggenheim had this separate relationship. But the amount of material that was going on the air was always the stuff that I did in '60, '64, '68. There were

key spots that he did now and again that would get past the board, the committee that would decide what was going on the air.

GOODRICH: That's right. So again, in 1968 Charlie did the bio again?

WILSON: Mmmm hmmm.

GOODRICH: [Inaudible].

WILSON: Yes, yes. And that's a big job. And it was a brilliant piece of work. But as far as--I know he made some spots, but I was shown the spots. I don't think any of them got on the air.

GOODRICH: That's interesting.

WILSON: Very interesting. You see, there was a New York group, and there was a Washington group. I lived in New York, so I became part of the New York group. The money all came through the agency in huge lumps, not specifically for stuff. I mean to buy time, for the production, for the print, for everything. And that was the clearinghouse for the bulk of the money. And since you had to pay cash for time, they saw to it through their traffic, and their stuff got on the air.

GOODRICH: Cash gets a priority.

WILSON: Cash always has. Money talks [Inaudible] at once.

GOODRICH: Well, this has been very good. I've been [Inaudible].

WILSON: Well, what I'm telling you is the way it was. And there are very few people who knew how it really worked. Have you ever interviewed Fred Papert?

GOODRICH: I didn't, no. But somebody.... We've got an oral history with him that somebody did in the late sixties, no, early seventies.

WILSON: Do you have a transcript of that?

GOODRICH: I think so, yes.

WILSON: Would you send it to me?

GOODRICH: Sure.

WILSON: I'd love to see how that jives with what I've been talking about. And I think that you should do an oral history with Bill Murphy, who is in the Papert

organization and brought all the time for '64 and '68, and is very close to Steve, and was the guy that was most prominent in terms of [Inaudible]. He was senior vice president and on the board of directors of the organization. People don't understand the power that the time-buyer has. And he's a strategist as well. And since he's working with cash, he's very close to the pocketbook, and Steve and Bill Murphy were a very solid unit. Bill Murphy knows a lot about those two campaigns.

GOODRICH: I'll see if I can get in touch with them.

WILSON: They'll continue to open up that aspect.

GOODRICH: Of course a big time time-buyer.

WILSON: It's a big deal. It's a big deal, a key element, in a political campaign particularly, where he's buying for Procter & Gamble and the big corporations. He comes in, and he makes the presentation on how they're going to spend billions I mean over a five-year period. Okay?

GOODRICH: Okay. Thank you very much.

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