

Edward P. Morgan Oral History Interview – JFK#1, 02/15/1967
Administrative Information

Creator: Edward P. Morgan
Interviewer: William McHugh
Date of Interview: February 15, 1967
Place of Interview: Washington D.C.
Length: 37 pages

Biographical Note

Edward P. Morgan (1910-1993) was a news commentator for American Broadcasting Company in Washington D.C. from 1955 to 1967. This interview covers the press coverage of John F. Kennedy's 1960 presidential campaign and the relationship between the Kennedy administration and the news media, among other topics.

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Suggested Citation

Edward P. Morgan, recorded interview by William McHugh, February 15, 1967 (page number), John F. Kennedy Library Oral History Program.

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By EDWARD P. MORGAN

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Oral History Interview

with

EDWARD P. MORGAN

February 15, 1967
Washington, D.C.

By William McHugh

For the John F. Kennedy Library

McHUGH: Mr. Morgan, do you recall when you first met John Kennedy?

MORGAN: I met John Kennedy for the first time in 1952 in Boston. Actually, I didn't meet him in '52 in the formal sense of the word. I was simply a reporter covering Adlai Stevenson's campaign for the presidency, and Kennedy was running for the Senate. And there was a certain amount of abrasiveness between them at that point. I was committed as a citizen, if not as a reporter, to Stevenson, and I remember being slightly annoyed at the obvious fact that there was a sort of coolness between them, and the senatorial candidate was just more or less going through the motions of welcoming the presidential candidate to Massachusetts. I saw him operate at fairly close range, including at one of those famous Kennedy teas that they gave for Stevenson on a Sunday afternoon. I remember seeing Mrs. Rose Kennedy and some of the Kennedy sisters operating then. But I didn't really meet him personally, face to face to know him, other than a reporter observing a politician, until about 1956.

McHUGH: What were your impressions of him as a person at that time?

MORGAN: You mean between '52 and '56?

McHUGH: When you knew him when he was a Congressman.

MORGAN: I didn't really know him when he was a Congressman. I was working in New York and not in Washington at that point, and working for CBS [Columbia Broadcasting System] out of New York, between '52 and '55 when I left CBS and came to ABC [American Broadcasting Company] and moved to Washington. I didn't really know him as a member of the House. As I say, the first time I laid eyes on him was when he was a Congressman but for the Senate from Massachusetts in '52. And I can't say that I really had much of an impression of him because, in all honesty, I didn't pay much attention to him at that time. When he really bulked large in my consciousness was the time at the Democratic Convention in Chicago in '56 when Stevenson threw the Convention open, you remember, to nomination of the vice presidency by what might be called acclamation. And Kennedy ran and nearly beat out Kefauver [Estes Kefauver], but didn't.

I can't remember, but I think that my first personal meeting with him preceded that summer at a party that my wife, who was not then my wife, gave out at the house that we now live in in McLean, Virginia, when he appeared as one of the invited guests, and we had an amiable chat. And I remember then--that was, I think, in '56, and I can't remember whether it was before or after the Convention, but I remember how thin he looked, how tall he looked, how strikingly handsome he was, cool and aloof. But even then I didn't fix on him very seriously as a looming and rising political figure.

McHUGH: At what point did you think he might be worth more intensive coverage?

MORGAN: Well, between '56 and '58. By that time I had moved to Washington and was covering Washington primarily. It was obvious to anybody that he was moving, and it behooved me to get to know him, and I did. I've forgotten, again, exactly the dates, but I suppose it was between '58 and '60 when he was making his--beginning to make his big move. And his picture and

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Jackie's [Jacqueline Bouvier Kennedy] picture and the pictures of both of them were on the covers of almost every magazine in the country. And during that period, '58 to '60, when he was living on N Street on the west side of Wisconsin and I was living on N street on the east side of Wisconsin, he invited me to their house for dinner two or three times, small groups, and I thoroughly enjoyed this. And I began to realize that whether he was going to get anywhere, he was making a big pitch.

Then once, I guess, only once, he and Mrs. Kennedy came to my house for dinner, and there was a rather bizarre anecdote involved with that. He was very efficient in his planning, but this particular night--I don't remember what time of year it was--I had invited

Dean Acheson and his wife and my wife, who was still not my wife (we got married in the summer of 1960), and I can't remember who the other people were that were there. I think one other couple was a fellow who was the Minister in the British Embassy in charge of Information, an old friend of mine named D'Arcy Edmundson, and his wife. But there couldn't have been more than eight or ten of us altogether. And everybody arrived at the proper time except the Kennedys. And I began to fidget as a sort of a bachelor host. Finally, about forty minutes after the assembled time, which I think was 8 o'clock, I got a phone call, and it was the Senator, all apologetic, saying that his office had given him the wrong address, that he had gone to my office instead of my house. The ABC bureau at that time was way the hell and gone up Connecticut Avenue at WMAL at an old converted skating and bowling rink. They were all apologies, and they finally got there.

We had a delightful evening, except I hadn't known it, but there was a good deal of tension between the former Secretary of State and Senator Kennedy at that time. I don't pretend that the fact that they broke bread at my table started them toward each other in a more friendly manner. But the fact is that after Kennedy became President, he and Acheson had some very valuable personal contacts. Acheson is, I think, one of the wonderful men of our time, but he can be terribly naughty and terribly imperious in his judgments and his

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actions and his comments, particularly in private. And he thought, at one point, that Kennedy was pretty much of an upstart, but after he became President, he was enormously impressed, he has said, with this man's stability and his judgment.

The next day after that dinner party, I got a large package from Jackie, and it consisted of a huge jar of pate de foie gras of Strasbourg with a note loaded with apologies and saying what a delightful time they had had and how charmed and struck she was by the interior decor of my house, which I was very pleased about because my wife and I had had a certain amount of argument as to whether it was too modern or not.

McHUGH: Did you cover the primaries? Or were you involved?

MORGAN: Yes, I did. I did. I didn't cover them as assiduously as some reporters who were assigned specifically to a candidate, but I covered the primaries in Wisconsin, and I covered the primaries in West Virginia. And by that time I was seeing, not as much as some of the reporters--I was not one of those who was on the inner Kennedy circle from the beginning, not by any means. And I must say, in candor and balance, that there was a time when I felt, as I felt later about his brother Ted [Edward M. Kennedy], that he was being something of an upstart in reaching for the presidency. I was totally wrong about both of them, and very happy to admit my misjudgment.

But I think one of the things that upset me was the repeated and supposedly unimpeachable reports that Ted Sorensen [Theodore C. Sorensen] had done most of the writing about *Profiles in Courage*, and that the then-Senator had got the Pulitzer Prize on the strength of that. And this annoyed me, and distressed me. But I was wrong. It turned out

later, as everybody knows, that Sorensen did do a great deal of research--Sorensen was a kind of an amanuensis, in a way--but that Kennedy himself had enormous talent in writing and in research, and he did a lot of this research and writing when he was desperately

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ill with his back in Florida and elsewhere. I had the feeling, and I don't know whether this is true because I've never asked any of the Kennedys--I suppose it's because I was a little ashamed to--whether he held me at a certain distance because I think I had mentioned in a broadcast that perhaps Sorensen should have gotten some of the credit, or more of the credit than he did, for *Profiles in Courage*.

But from the middle of May '60, that was about the.... I remember well that the U-2 incident and the collapse of the Paris summit occurred in rapid sequence, and at least the first one, I guess it was the shooting down of the U-2, occurred while I was in West Virginia covering the Kennedy-Humphrey [Hubert H. Humphrey] primary. And I remember they had a so-called debate about, oh, a few days before the actual voting in a television studio which was our ABC affiliate. It was an old house out in the residential area of Charleston, West Virginia, the capital. There were, naturally, a lot of reporters covering the thing, and the Kennedy family and the Humphrey family were assigned certain rooms upstairs, separate from each other, where they could watch the thing on a monitor. And I was able to squeeze myself down onto the actual floor where the debate was being televised live and watched it. It wasn't a very incisive debate; it was billed as being a fairly knock-down-drag-out affair because there had been some fairly nasty things said on behalf of both camps beforehand, but they (the candidates) were extremely decorous and withdrawn. The only thing I remember about the debate itself was Kennedy holding up one of these cans of food that came in a food package to the poor, and I think it had some effect.

But afterwards, I went upstairs and Bob Kennedy's [Robert F. Kennedy] wife, Ethel [Ethel Skakel Kennedy], came bobbing out of the Kennedy sitting room, and she said, "How do you think he did?" And I said something to the effect, "Well, I thought he did pretty well, but it was kind of even." And she furiously said, "Why, he couldn't have done better. He scored in every possible way." And Ethel

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has--I'm extremely fond of this woman, and absolutely in awe of her energy, let alone her fecundity--but I've always thought that she was, perhaps, more loyal than the Kennedys, in a sense that, I don't mean this to sound the way some people might interpret it, but the king can do no wrong sort of thing. Her consistency in this respect has been absolutely staggering.

McHUGH: You mentioned that there had been some charges, countercharges, by both camps. Do you remember specifically any of the charges?

MORGAN: Yes, I do indeed. I remember the charges.... I don't believe they were made by the Senator himself, but they were made by Franklin D.

Roosevelt, Jr., and they were, in effect, that Hubert Humphrey was a draft dodger in World War II. And I remember it vividly because the charge was repeated by FDR, Jr., who is a friend of mine, at a couple of campaign rallies that Mary McGrory and somebody else and I attended. Now I'm fuzzy on the dates here, but I think, I think, it was the very evening of the debate. I may be wrong by a day or two there, but I think it was the evening of the debate. And I was furious about this and was hopeful that the Senator would disavow this particular charge because it was untrue, although the thing was slightly muddled up by a lot of circumstances. He did not do so. And I remember going back to the press club which they have in Charleston where everybody foregathered after, I'm pretty sure this was the debate because everybody seemed to be there after the debate, and seeing Pierre Salinger and saying furiously to him that this was an unfair thing and should have been withdrawn. And Pierre said something to the effect, "Well, this is a hot political campaign."

McHUGH: In other words, they distinctly didn't take the opportunity to disavow that.

MORGAN: No, they didn't. On the other hand, although there was some validity, perhaps, to it, Humphrey, himself, exaggerated the charge that

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this campaign was being bought by a millionaire and he couldn't possibly compete with him on a money basis. But that rancor between the two camps continued, at least, in public, until the Atlantic City Convention which nominated Johnson [Lyndon Baines Johnson] and Humphrey in 1964. And, as I remember it, Muriel Humphrey--Howard Smith and I were sitting up in our little cubicle covering this thing, so I can only testify at a long distance gaze--only then gave Robert Kennedy, as they were congratulating each other, a warm and friendly recognition. But, as everybody knows, Senator Humphrey became one of the most valuable counselors that the President had in the legislative branch.

McHUGH: Did you have any direct confrontation, we'll say, with the virulence of the religious issue in West Virginia?

MORGAN: The draft issue?

McHUGH: No, the religious issue.

MORGAN: Oh, the religious issue. I'm sorry I didn't understand you. No, I went out in the sticks and the mining towns and interviewed some people, and it was very difficult to put your finger on anything accurate. The religious issue was there; Kennedy seized it; and, you remember, he broke off his campaigning in West Virginia and came back and made a speech, his first major speech on

the subject. I think it was before a luncheon meeting of the American Society of Newspaper Editors in Washington, and I was at that meeting.

But in West Virginia, itself, I would guess that two things--well, three probably--were going most for the Kennedys: That was, the name of FDR was still magic, and FDR, Jr.'s campaigning for him, ironically, without the draft dodge accusation, unjustified, against Humohrey, was a big plus; and then Kennedy himself was beginning to unbend as a candidate. It's been said

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before, but I was impressed by the fact that West Virginia was a revelation to the Kennedys. Bill Walton [William Walton], who was one of his West Virginia resident managers at the time, told me later that they had never been down in a coal mine before, certainly not Jackie and probably not Jack, but they went and saw the way these people lived, and it was an eye-opener to them, and it affected them both very deeply.

McHUGH: You also said that Kennedy was beginning to unbend. Can you elaborate a little bit on that?

MORGAN: Well, I remember covering a Jackson-Jefferson Day speech he made in Milwaukee about 1958, and it was a lousy speech. Not so lousy in content, it wasn't a bad speech in content. I can't remember what it said. Sorensen was with him and obviously had something to do with the text, but Kennedy was perfectly capable of putting together a text of himself, but his delivery of it was about like a high school orator who was unaccustomed to the audience, and he certainly didn't get them with him. But as he went along, he became more confident, the crowds began to light up, and it sort of illuminated him in return and created a kind of magnetic field, I think. And he became much easier and more convincing as a campaigner.

McHUGH: At the time that he spoke on the religious issue being in the campaign, did you have any sense... I believe at that time there was uncertainty as to whether this would be a plus or minus. Do you have any indication of how he himself felt about this being introduced?

MORGAN: Well, I'm sure that as a realistic politician he perceived that this was an issue that could be turned against the bigots and for himself. And I give him credit for this. Some people would say that he exploited it beyond reason. That's their opinion; it's not mine.

One of the highlights of the campaign for me was his speech to the Protestant clergymen in Houston. That was one of the most remarkable confrontations that I have

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ever seen in my whole experience of covering politics. It could have turned out to be a shambles for him. They just were obviously out to get him. They were convinced in their own mind that he had a portable walkie-talkie to the Pope, and they were going to prove it. He didn't even take Sorensen with him up to the podium. I think this was in the Rice Hotel in Houston. I've forgotten where it was, but it was a fairly large, they'd made a fairly large auditorium, mostly for the press. It was televised and broadcast, I think both live and on tape, and played back by the Democrats fairly repeatedly, not only there but elsewhere in the country. But this was a magnificent performance. And, pragmatic or not, you couldn't but believe that this man had a very deep feeling of the importance of the separation of church and state. And I remember one hardshelled gentleman of the clergy asked him about, oh, some granulated issue up in Pennsylvania where a bishop had--I can't remember, I'm groping for the circumstances....

McHUGH: There was a chapel for all faiths that had been...

MORGAN: Yes, yes. Something to that effect, and he was making big issue of this, that here was a point where Roman Catholicism had influenced politics. And Kennedy said something to the effect that as far as he was concerned, this was not true, and then he sort of backed off, and he looked at this man, and he said, "Goodness me,"--or something like that. Goodness me, he never said in his life, but he said something the equivalent of that, maybe even said, "My God, do we have to argue this issue on such a petty thing as that, that has long since past."

Well, I didn't take an actual poll of the correspondents afterwards, but I didn't need to. We were all so enormously struck and impressed, even though several of the correspondents were not pro-Kennedy men, and I'm sure several of them voted for Mr. Nixon [Richard M. Nixon], but this confrontation was a magnificent performance by the candidate. I'll never forget it.

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McHUGH: Another thing that became an issue in the campaign, vis-a-vis Nixon, was his maturity. You mentioned that at one point you felt that he was an upstart, and this was what other people, some other people, felt too. On the basis of these tentative contacts you had had with him, well, had you drawn this conclusion?

MORGAN: No. Until West Virginia, when Humphrey was knocked out of the race, I was, in my private capacity as a voting citizen--I wasn't a voting citizen at the time because I lived in the District of Columbia, and we didn't have the presidential vote in 1960. But I was a Humphrey man. I thought that Humphrey was eminently equipped and had earned it and would make a hell of a hood president. But when he got knocked out, it was obvious that he was not going to make a comeback; it was fairly obvious to me that Stevenson, as much as he sort of vicariously

yearned for the job, was not going to get it; and so I centered my attention on Kennedy. And I became more and more impressed with the seriousness of this fellow.

And when Mr. Truman [Harry S. Truman], as you remember, made this ridiculous attack on him on the eve of the Convention, I was in the home of a friend of mine in Malibu, California. I can't remember exactly the sequence, but I think Truman's attack was on a Friday or a Saturday, and the TV networks carried it live, and I watched it, and I was aghast at this. And I wrote a piece which I broadcast at the next appropriate time. If it was a Saturday, then I did it on a Monday, I just can't remember exactly. It seems to me that the Convention convened on a Monday or a Tuesday. This sounds as if flattery is seducing me, which, I suppose, in some respects it does to people, but the Senator had heard my broadcast, and when I saw him the first time, I guess it was in the Biltmore in Los Angeles, he mentioned it and said that he was pleased by it and grateful for it. All I said was, "Well, I thought it was a justified comment." And I think Bob Kennedy mentioned the same thing.

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But by the time he became a serious candidate, and I fix that, although he'd been running and he'd let it be known that he was running certainly from '58 on, but from the beginning of the primaries, from the beginning of his announcement in--when was it?--in January of '60, there wasn't any question of a doubt that this man was serious for the job and he was serious-minded. There wasn't any callowness about him at all. And if you look back, there was a good deal else to prove this.

You can say it was calculated--and it undoubtedly was in some respects, and it made people in the State Department furious--but the speech that he made on the floor of the Senate, which he was clever enough to have circulated to all the Washington correspondents in advance, about France and Algeria and U.S., this brought him into the limelight. And then it seems to me he made a similar speech on Poland. This was both serious and pragmatic, so that his preparation for the run was anything but a tenderfoot Boy Scout.

McHUGH: Were there any events during the Convention that stand out in your mind particularly?

MORGAN: I didn't see him much during the Convention, obviously. He was too busy seeing delegations. But I remember one thing, and I've kicked myself ever since in not seizing upon it as something significant, although I don't know whether he was saying it in such a way that he was trying to give me a signal. He didn't do that sort of thing. He was much more candid or much more tight-lipped, one way or the other. Well, two things I remember. The first thing was fairly inconsequential. But we had got a commitment from him in ABC to appear on a candidate roundup on radio and television that we had the Sunday afternoon preceding the opening of the Convention, and I was to interview him, and before that he was on "Meet the Press." Fortunately, it was in the same Biltmore Hotel, and he only had to go from one part of the building to the other. But I remember

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it was the first time I met Jim McShane [James J. P. McShane], the guy that's now chief U.S. Marshal. He was his sort of bodyguard, and I picked him up as he finished "Meet the Press," and we went down a freight elevator to the studio that we had fixed up. Here he was coming from a half hour, I guess it was a half hour, interview with "Meet the Press," and I think we had a something like two minutes and forty seconds, one of these ridiculous inserts, but we were able to cover quite a little bit of ground, and it struck me that his approach was a very gracious and balanced one. Sure, he would have liked to have had more exposure on our network, but he didn't begrudge it, which made me feel kind of comfortable.

But the thing that I remember that's more significant is that the day of the voting--no, it was after he had been nominated, and it was the day of the vice presidential go around--I picked him up, partly by accident, as he was going out one of the doors of the Biltmore to go to another hotel to some kind of a lunch. We were sort of jammed in an elevator, and I got out of the elevator, and he did, and he said, "Come on and get in the car." So I got in the car with him, and there was another correspondent there, too. I think it was this fellow that was a syndicated columnist for Hearst, Jim--I can't think of his last name, but I think it's the guy that wanted to do a book, and Jackie said he shouldn't. Jim Bishop. I think that's who it was. I think it--I'm not absolutely clear in my own mind. But Bishop had been doing one of these things that Kennedy permitted quite a bit, even after he became President, of somebody following him from the beginning of the day to the end of the day sort of thing. And he'd been clued in to the itinerary earlier than I had, but he invited me to go with him and I did.

On the way to wherever it was we were going, I asked him, "Well, will it be Hubert?" meaning, "Will you give the vice presidential nod to him?" And he said, "No," something to the effect, "absolutely not. The credibility of that camp has been destroyed."

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There was not an inkling then that it was going to be Johnson, but I should have picked up from there and eliminated all of the other people. Oh, then he said, "We're going to have to start from scratch." I remember, that's almost a direct quote, "We're going to have to start from scratch." And there is where I should have picked up the clue, whether it was a provocative statement by him or not, but I wasn't that good an analyst.

And I remember going on the air. Because of the three hour time difference between Los Angeles and New York and Washington, I had to originate my broadcast three hours early. And there I was on the air when somebody handed me a bulletin from the wire saying that it was Johnson. And I was incredulous, as most other people were, but was able to squeeze it in.

McHUGH: Then after he became President, very quickly another issue came up, and this is when he decided to hold his news conferences live on television.

MORGAN: Yes, the very first one he held, Salinger convinced him that that's what should be done.

McHUGH: Some people felt that this would make the news conference into a side show, that it would be used too much for a propoganda device. What was your reaction?

MORGAN: Well, a president, I think, has the right to use whatever facilities that he can, that the public through the press is able to be aware of, so long as these are not subversive things, secret things. And I cannot object, either as a citizen or as a journalist, to his using the news conference wired for sight and sound any more that I can object, except with some qualifications, to the fact that Johnson is not doing that, because he doesn't think that--and I think he's right, that his presence on live television is not as sharp, not as candid and provocative and refreshing as that of Kennedy.

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But I want to go back, if I may, for just a couple of things that come to mind between the nomination and the election. I covered both Nixon and Kennedy during the campaign, and there is no doubt that my inclinations politically, if I had had a vote, were for Kennedy. I tried to be as detached in my dispatches as I possibly could, and I didn't come out for Kennedy in my commentaries. It's not my habit to endorse people in those things, I think it's unfair. But I did endorse issues on one side or another.

But I was at the first debate. I was not in the room, and I was not among the questioners. I was one of the questioners on the second debate, and there's another story involving that in a moment. But we watched it on monitors in another room a door or two away in the studio in Chicago. And I had flown out to Chicago, as I remember it, with Mr. Nixon. I'm blurring this up a little bit. I'm not sure that I was with him, but I do know that I joined his campaign the next morning, and we flew to Memphis and Charleston, West Virginia, and finally wound up in New York City, one of those irrational swoops that candidates have to make. And it became utterly plain that the Republicans were totally distressed with the impact that the Vice President had made.

It's always been my theory that although there is no one single thing that was decisive, that Johnson's candidacy was decisive in some respects, in many respects, in terms of carrying Texas, in terms of doing as well in the South as the President did; the religious issue, who knows how that separated plus and minus. But it has always been my feeling that that first debate had an enormous influence because the Vice President looked just terrible. And in my analysis, this was not anything to do with the make-up man, it was just the fact that all of a sudden--and this is my analysis and it may have no validity whatsoever, but I knew Mr. Nixon reasonably well; I took a couple of long trips with him, one to Africa and one to the Soviet Union in '57 and '59. And here was the great debater; here was the man who was eager to show in public what he could do to this young sort of squirt lawyer from Massachusetts in public; here was the polished lawyer from Duke:

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And all of a sudden--I'm being very Freudian now, and this evidence would have no standing in court whatsoever--I seemed to think that all of a sudden, as he got onto the stage, onto the set, he thought, "My God, what if I do blow it? What if the guy does really make an impression and I don't?"

Now this may never have entered his mind, and in all fairness we must recall that he had been desperately ill with a staphylococcal infection in his knee, and I know something about that because my wife had a similar situation with her knee. We had gone to a cocktail party a few days before the debate when he was still in the hospital and being treated by a new kind of penicillin, and he was supposed to be at this party but because he was hospitalized he was unable, of course. But we did see Mrs. Nixon, and my wife--who didn't vote for Nixon, obviously--was very concerned and mentioned to Mrs. Nixon that she hoped that he was getting the proper medication because this was a very serious thing. Well, there was some theorizing that he was still under antibiotics and that this had something to do with it. But this was not the case. The very next day, or the day after, when we started out for the Commodore Hotel in New York to campaign on Long Island, I found one of the Vice President's doctors in the back of the press bus, and I simply asked him, "Was he or was he not under medication? And did this have anything to do with the way he appeared?" And he said, "Absolutely not." He hadn't been under antibiotics for, I think he said forty-eight or seventy-two hours, something to that effect.

But anyway, I'm rambling all over the place here, but I remember Doris Fleeson was with us that night in the room where the press sat watching the monitors, and I'm sure Doris wouldn't object to being quoted on this. She said, "Why, Nixon had lost this thing. He sat there spraddled out almost as if his fly were open." And I remember, even without her prompting, that first impactful shock of the President-to-be, the candidate at that point, sitting there as cool and composed, to coin a phrase, as a cucumber. And Nixon, really sort of, not slumped exactly, but sort of back in his chair with his legs spread out, and it wasn't--you did not get the

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impression that this was an attitude of being relaxed.

And then, although Nixon probably took him in debating points, Kennedy clobbered him otherwise. The funny thing was that, in terms of the debating point business, I called my wife immediately afterwards, and I said, "What do you think?" And something had gone on the blink with her television set, and she listened to it on the radio, and she said, "My God, I think Nixon did better." Well, as you know, a lot of people have so reported; when they heard the dialogue but didn't see the protagonists, many had similar judgments.

The second debate, my name came up in the hat, and I have never had an assignment that I can recall that was more difficult. Here I was, one of, I think, four guys on the panel, nationwide television. And this time the correspondents' faces were to be photographed, the other time just their backs, as you may remember--it wasn't that that bothered me, except the identity, but what did bother me was: how can I be incisive,

responsible, and fair to both of these men? And the thing just threw me. For two nights before the damn confrontation, I hardly slept at all.

And my anxiety and concern were compounded by the fact that two friends of mine, one a very stolid Republican and one a very liberal Democrat, had told me that I had to ask the question of Kennedy about his policy toward Quemoy and Matsu. And I said, "Why?" And they both said, each independent of the other, neither knowing that the other had called me up, that on the previous Saturday on a broadcast that was practically unknown, and ironically enough it was done by Huntley [Chet Huntley] and Brinkley [David Brinkley], in answer to a question he said something to the effect--I can't remember his words, they're available, they're probably already in the Kennedy Library--that he would take a very hard look at Quemoy and Matsu, the implication being that if he thought it would ease the tensions in the area, he might well pull the Nationalists off of Quemoy and Matsu. Well, I got a text of that broadcast, and sure enough, there it was. It was on a late Saturday night in Boston or New York or someplace, and nobody paid any

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attention to it. Well, there it was.

So one of my questions to Kennedy was, "What about this?" Well, he didn't blink an eye, and he answered it substantially the way he had answered it before, but all hell broke loose. Nixon picked it up, as you remember, for several days, as the issue of the campaign, that he was going to clobber Kennedy on this. And in the Kennedy camp I became known as Matsu Morgan. I don't know how wide the credibility gap was, but I felt uncomfortable for a while. But to my knowledge, he never held this against me. And he shouldn't have really because it was a legitimate question; he'd already been on record; I wasn't throwing him a curve or anything. That assignment was one of the toughest I've ever had. And, also, Nixon did substantially better on the second debate, and I think the consensus was that he probably won the second debate.

But you said after he became President. We were talking about the televised and the live radio broadcasts of the news conference. There isn't any doubt that once or twice after they had done these and they played back the tapes, there's no doubt in my mind, although I never discussed this with Salinger, that they said, "Boy, we've got something here, and we're going to play it." And they did. But don't forget that we also criticized Kennedy for not having news conferences as frequently as Eisenhower [Dwight D. Eisenhower] did, and also we criticized him for not doing the equivalent of FDR's fireside chats to the people.

And this criticism--some of us, I think, did it in public. I think I did a broadcast that after this enormously cataclysmic effect in a good positive way that his Inaugural Address had on the people.... It really electrified the nation, I thought. And although I was freezing to death in front of the steps of the East Front of the Capitol covering it, the thing was enormously warming. But a lot of people figured that he reached such a peak there that he let the public down by now following up and saying what it was he wanted them to sacrifice and ask yourself what you can do for your country. And some of us, commentators and pundits and so forth, I'm pretty sure took this line, and this piqued him.

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Well, once I found myself, luckily enough--I think it was largely due to the fact that my wife knew Jackie Kennedy and her sister, Lee Radziwill, when they were in their teens that in the early days of the Kennedy Administration I was enormously fortunate to be invited to two or three functions at the White House. And one night I remember Henry Brandon and I found ourselves talking with the President, and he was in a good mood, but he was in an aggressive mood, and he sort of punched his finger at us, and he said, "Now do you guys know how many fireside chats Roosevelt actually made?" (He never said "guys," he may have said "fellows.") I think we'd raised the subject about the frequency of news conferences and frequency of taking the public into his confidence, and, of course, I didn't have the remotest idea how many fireside chats Roosevelt had made. But he'd set Salinger to researching this point, and it turns out that in the three terms plus months that Roosevelt was in office, it was something like twenty-six or twenty-seven for the whole span, which made it... [BEGIN SIDE II TAPE I]...a fairly thin average, much less than I had thought, and he sort of took satisfaction in kind of pinning us to the wall.

And then he said to me, "Where were you, by the way, at my news conference yesterday?" And I said, "Well, Mr. President, I try to be at your news conferences every time. I've hardly missed a one, but it just happened that I was in New York yesterday and I couldn't get here." I was very flattered by the fact that he'd even noticed that I was not there. "Well," he said, "I looked for you in your accustomed place, but all I got was May Craig's hat."

McHUGH: Some people felt that the televised press conference was about as far as you could get from the fireside chats. There wasn't much opportunity to follow up questions, and there was a very distinct, well, imperious time limit on that. Do you think that that would tend to make for set speeches?

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MORGAN: No more so than happened with Mr. Truman and Mr. Eisenhower without the live newscast. It was very difficult to follow up with either one of them, partly because by that time the White House complement of correspondents had become so large and the give and take intimacy of the FDR days on his own private office were destroyed. I'm not trying to defend any of these Presidents because I don't think any of them have given the press quite as much candid information as the public is entitled to, and that they would be able to give without damaging the national security.

But I think that Johnson made a mistake, and I think it's being rectified, of using a few televised news conferences that he has had for a sort of a long, boring prelude of announcements which nobody in the public is particularly interested in, appointments and one thing and another. And if you remember--well, now here we are on the fifteenth day of February, 1967--the last news conference that President Johnson had live in the White House, which was a week or two ago, the first one he'd had since before the election in '66, his

opening remarks were limited to a sentence or two, and they went right to questions. I hope this is a trend, for his sake as well as for the reporters' sake.

McHUGH: Kennedy was very concerned about overexposure. Do you think this was a legitimate concern in his case?

MORGAN: I wasn't aware that he was concerned about overexposure.

McHUGH: I think this was alleged as one of the reasons why there weren't more conferences. If this is a fact or not, I don't....

MORGAN: Well, I think one of the reasons why there weren't more conferences was--overexposure in that sense, yes--that he felt that there

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wasn't any point in having a news conference if he didn't have something fairly important to contribute apart from just the Q and A of the reporters and the President. Now, that can be argued both ways. Most editors, I suppose, argue--and I think I would go along with them--that there should be regular access to the President on a public basis in a news conference even if he doesn't have anything terribly constructive to say on his own, but the give and take of who is interested in what, what part of the country is concerned about what, is a good idea. And I think that what they were concerned about was that this would put them too much on the defensive, that he had the prerogative of spacing his news conferences as he liked, and so he did it. As a journalist, I think I would enter a protest to that, but not an enormous one because access to the White House and to people in the State Department during his regime was one of the easiest and most facile in the history of the country.

McHUGH: Another thing that was an issue with some news--well, I know of at least one columnist who felt the questions were planted, and other Presidents did plant questions, feeling that a spontaneous answer was better than if they...

MORGAN: There's no doubt that--I don't know how far this goes back, but there almost always is a planted question or two. I don't object to this. I wish it didn't happen, but when you get an intimate, even though sometimes abrasive, relationship between a small group of correspondents, such as the White House correspondents who are constantly assigned to the President, and the President's news secretary, you get a kind of a communication there that's sort of a logrolling kind of thing. They don't do it in a vulgar way. They say, "I suspect that if you ask the President a question in this field, you might get a fairly responsive answer." And they don't hand out preconstructed questions, saying, "Hey, Jack, you ask this, or the President won't recognize

you anymore.” None of that stuff. But certainly questions are planted. It’s been admitted. I don’t

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know about the Kennedy regime, but Moyers [William D. Moyers], I think, while he was news secretary, conceded quite candidly in an interview, I think on the air, that now and then something like that that I’ve just suggested would be told to, perhaps, one of the agency fellows or one of the more regulars. I don’t consider this a huge blemish on the freedom of information.

McHUGH: Another opinion that was expressed was that Kennedy used social flattery in such a way as to rob the press of their independence. Do you think there’s any substance to that?

MORGAN: Yes. I suppose I do, although I insist that the fact that I did have social contact with him didn’t warp my professional approach to his Administration, and I think I could produce commentaries that were highly critical of something that the Administration did. But there is something insidious about this. It’s very difficult to go to a man’s house for dinner and have a hell of a good time in the process--let alone to the White House for dinner and enjoy an intimate relationship with the President and the First Lady of the land--and then go off and haul off, not necessarily with a sledge hammer but with a stiletto, and be enormously critical. And this is a problem.

I think it’s quite possible that Kennedy attempted to charm people although he was very puzzled as what to do about this woman called Sarah McClendon. She, I’m afraid, didn’t have a terribly high stature in the press corps. If anybody got televisionitis, she did. And it dated clear back to the Eisenhower Administration when, although Hagerty [James C. Hagerty] held up the release of the texts, they were almost never deleted, and it got to be a running joke because she was a correspondent for a number of newspapers, and one time she’d bob up and identify herself as the correspondent of the El Paso something-or-other, and the other time she’d bob up as the Camden, New Jersey, something-or-other. And once President Eisenhower sort of paused, and he said, “How many papers do you write for?” That got a big guffaw, and as a result of that, she got a little piece in either *Time* or *Newsweek*. And I’m afraid that

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good Sarah was a little bit beguiled by this and framed her questions in a contentious way ever since. So that it works both ways.

But the only time that I remember that the President was curt with somebody in a news conference was with her, and it was highly deserved because it was one of those McCarthy-like [Joseph R. McCarthy] questions that she began, and she said, “Mr. President, when is your Administration going to stop coddling communists in the State Department?” or

something to that effect. That wasn't exactly it, but the implication was as clear as a butcher knife. And it involved two men, one of whom was a personal friend of mine, so I suppose I took it a little bit more with concern than I might have otherwise. But the question was outrageously put, and the President blanched and then just told her off, said, "You haven't any business making an accusation like this." And then in this wonderful Kennedy poise, played back to her what the situation was. He knew what the situation was. Whether he'd been tipped off that she was going to ask this question, I don't know. I was not aware of the fact that there was a contention about these two men in terms of their security, but he was and he just told her off. And I'm afraid I think she deserved every bit of it.

McHUGH: Was it difficult to draw the line in the contentious phrasing of a question, as you put it? Was this....

MORGAN: No. Every correspondent has his own manner of phrasing a question. I've been accused of being the most long-winded questioner in the White House Press Corps history, and I indignantly deny it. Sarah McClendon is a living example of my innocence, and so is the dean of the Press Corps Merriman Smith. But I got the reputation, so I'm stuck with it, but I don't worry about it too much. I don't happen to be of the beat-your-wife school of journalism. Maybe that just shows my lily-livered approach, but I think you can, on the whole, elicit more

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out of somebody in public or in private if you're not publicly hanging them for something that they did or didn't do. That happens to be my own personal view. Other people don't believe it; other people take the prosecuting attorney's approach or the Sarah McClendon approach and...

McHUGH: You don't feel that if the question is not sufficiently pointed, they won't slip off the hook, so to speak?

MORGAN: Well, sometimes they do, sometimes they do. Other times.... Howard K. Smith came to my defense once on this allegedly long-winded question. He said, "He's not really long-winded. His question is really a corkscrew, and by the end of it the guy is telling a hell of a lot more than he suspected." Well, that was very kind of Howard to do, but it's an argumentative, it's a controversial point. Sure, they can slip off, but they can also slip off by just saying, "No comment," to the bludgeon or kissing the bludgeoner off as a brute, at least Kennedy could very well. Johnson, perhaps, has a slightly different reaction, not, perhaps, quite as quick with his improvisations in public and perhaps shows his indignation a little more. But that's a matter of opinion.

McHUGH: Did you have the feeling that Kennedy tended to dry up as a source, say, or the office of the White House, for newsmen that were critical of him?

MORGAN: He would not bare his heart to people who were utterly hostile to him, I'm sure. It was a point of pride more than of professionalism, I suppose, with me that, even though I had a very good relationship with him and, as I say, enjoyed the social contacts at the White House, which were more than social because you could see people there, I was not one of those who ever had, after he became President, a personal talk with the President. I had asked for it several times and,

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indeed, I'd sort of semi-seriously approached him at one of those White House things and said, "How does one get in to see you?" He said, "Well, all of you have to do is to call Evelyn Lincoln." Which I did, but it didn't work. And I'm sure that it had nothing to do with the fact that I was now and then critical and now and then not critical, but because he perhaps thought that people with the written word were more important. I don't know, I don't know. I can't give you any specific example to prove a yes answer to that question, but I would think that just in a human way a man is more likely to go out of his way to give time to somebody that he knows will be empathetic, if not sympathetic, than somebody he knows is going to clobber him. Although, on the other hand, one of the techniques, I don't know how much Kennedy did use this, Johnson has tried to use it on occasion, of trying to disarm his enemies by being charming to them.

Now Nixon had a foible in that direction that just indicated to me that he never really understood the press. He was very affable and, indeed, sometimes both before and after he became Vice President, more informative on a background non-quotable basis than Kennedy or Johnson have been in my experience. But he would seem to think that little tangible acknowledgments of the correspondent's presence, like sending him a scroll as a memento of their trip to Africa with him, or a scroll about the Kitchen Debate in Moscow, that this would sort of put them in his corner. Well, nobody--at least I certainly didn't resent this. In fact, I got one of these things framed and hanging in my house. But he seemed to be outraged when people in the press were critical of him as a result of this.

McHUGH: Could we go back just a minute, you mentioned Nixon. Could you say a few words about his handling of the press during the campaign, say, as compared with Kennedy?

MORGAN: He was almost unavailable. He was almost unavailable during the campaign. It was terribly, terribly difficult to see him--

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particularly after the first debate. He knew he had been burned. I can't quote chapter and verse of this; I covered them about equally. I mean, I went with one almost as much as I went with the other. I never did count up exactly. But he was almost

unavailable. You got some stuff from Klein [Herbert G. Klein]; you got some stuff from other sides that was helpful; but he was very aloof.

McHUGH: Could you compare Klein with Salinger as to their effectiveness?

MORGAN: Klein was a very savvy guy, as was Pierre. It's hard to compare them because Pierre went on to be presidential news secretary and did quite a good job, although in the beginning it was freely predicted that he was going to fall over his own bad preparations for briefing. This didn't happen. He was so resilient, and the President used him now and then as a kind of a straight man for his own jokes with the press both in the news conferences and so on. But Pierre was very shrewd, and he would, for instance, be sloppy about the first name of somebody that the President had appointed or something like that, but on the whole, he was not sloppy. And neither was Klein.

It is very difficult to compare the two for that reason, that Klein did not become the presidential news secretary. But Klein first surfaced as an important Nixon aide when we went to the Soviet Union. Nixon was not too pleased--no, I can't say that. I was going to say he was not too pleased with the press he got on the African trip. It wasn't anything disastrous, and Nixon handled himself very well, indeed, on his African trip. But Klein came along on the Soviet trip, and he was very helpful. He's a very hard-headed, realistic and, I think, pretty candid fellow.

McHUGH: Do you have any observations, just tangentially, to make here on Nixon's trip to Russia? Anything that stands out in your mind?

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MORGAN: I thought he handled himself quite well under difficulties. He'd never been there before. This was in that curious era when things were becoming sweetness and light, and Khrushchev [Nikita S. Khrushchev] came to this country afterwards. He did a foolish thing, and it blew up in his face, but Kennedy possibly might have done the same thing.

McHUGH: What are you referring to?

MORGAN: Pardon.

McHUGH: What are you referring to?

MORGAN: One morning after we had got to Moscow, he and Klein took a walk, and they went down to, I think, a vegetable market, and somebody approached him and said, "We can't get tickets to the American Exposition." Which is what he was there to dedicate, to open. And he, apparently.... The translation was not vividly correct, and he thought they didn't have any money to buy

tickets--they were on sale for a nominal sum--and so he fished out of his pocket either some dollars or some rubles and said, "I offer you this." Well, within a day, one of the youth newspapers, I forget the name of it now, came out with a big blast that Nixon was trying to, in a typical capitalistic way, subvert socialism by passing money around. And this was very embarrassing. Now he probably shouldn't have done that, but it was a perfectly honest mistake. The translation didn't seem to be clear on the point that it wasn't that they were out of money, but they couldn't get the tickets, money or no money. But on the whole....

Tommy Thompson [Llewellyn E. Thompson] was our Ambassador there then as he is again now. And Nixon had two very difficult speeches to make. One was at the opening of the American Exposition, which was being, as I recall it, carried on, I'm not sure it was being carried nationwide, but it was being carried on Moscow radio and TV, I think. And he had to be both polite, because in a sense this was an Embassy property that he was on, he was on his own soil technically speaking, and he was the host. Khrushchev

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was there. But at the same time he had to be somewhat abrasive. He'd been very, very badly and unexpectedly mauled my Khrushchev the very day that he got there to present his credentials because they'd had this silly business in the Congress about a resolution to free the captive nations, and it went through just at the time that Nixon got there. And Khrushchev just unloaded on him, and instead of spending five minutes in the routine business of presenting his credentials and the President's compliments, they were there for well over an hour, and Nixon was quite shaken up by this.

So when he got to the so-called Kitchen Debate, which was not the Kitchen Debate at all, but was the one that was put on video tape and everybody thinks was the Kitchen Debate, he suspected that Khrushchev's spleen had already been drained, and there wouldn't be any more. But then Khrushchev lit into him again, and then a third time at what was the Kitchen Debate, which there never has been a text of because there was no tape recorder there. So he had a pretty tough day, all in all. And then he had this speech to make that evening, and then the day before he left, at the acquiescence of the Russians, he did make a speech to the Russian people, which was carried live coast to coast--or border to border--in the Soviet Union on radio and TV. And it was a pretty good speech. I thought, on the whole, that he was a credit in that very difficult trip.

McHUGH: I see. Well, we'll return to the Kennedy Administration. Arthur Krock expressed the opinion at one point that the Kennedy Administration had a policy of direct and deliberate action on news management that was more cynically used and more bold than any other administration. Did you have any....

MORGAN: That they were more cynical about news management and more bold?

McHUGH: Yes.

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MORGAN: I don't believe this at all. I'm extremely fond of Mr. Krock. I once asked him for a job, and he was very courtly about telling me that there wasn't any prospect. He couldn't have been nicer. And I'm very fond of him. I don't agree with--there's hardly anything that he's written of a contentious nature that I agree with, and this is one of them. I don't deny that the Kennedy Administration did try to manage the news; every administration tries to manage the news to a certain extent. And I just don't think that charge holds up to the extreme to which, by your quotation, Mr. Krock seems to make it.

There was news management. There always will be news management in the sense that every administration from the chief executive down will try to put its best foot forward and cover up its worst stumbles. This is bad, but this is what we're supposed to be here in Washington doing, is to point out how valid the best foot forward is and how deep the stumble was. Now this is difficult to do because the bureaucracy is big, sometimes highly inaccessible, and highly partisan.

The Pentagon is badly covered, partly because it's so technically involved, and it's very easy for a reporter, covering, let's say, space or the Air Force, to be seduced by the very technicalities of the situation. I'm not trying in the slightest to pose the idea that they are brainwashed by lures of jobs or something of that kind, but they get into this highly technical area that the rest of us don't know anything about, and sooner or later the first thing you know they become advocates, I'm afraid, of the very area that they cover. This happens I think under any President or under any Secretary of the Defense.

I think McNamara [Robert S. McNamara], in the sense that he has imposed civilian domination on the military brass, which I think is enormously important, in that sense, has been the best Secretary of Defense that we've ever had. I don't think he's understood the problems of more give and take between government and the press, and has been too closed in his policy on letting the press get more access to responsible information. But he has

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a hell of a difficult time because here he's got people like Mendel Rivers and Dick Russell [Richard B. Russell] and Senator Stennis [John Stennis] sniping at him for various reasons of their own on the one hand; he's got a columnist or an editorial writer sniping at him on the other; he's got the Air Force brass and the Boeing people, whoever it is sniping at him on the other. And it's a very difficult row to hoe, and I think that some of us in the press fail to take this into consideration as much as we should. But even having said that, I think that Defense's policies during the Kennedy Administration and during the Johnson Administration have been too closed.

McHUGH: You said, well, as you do, with some conviction that they could have told more than they did and it would not have endangered national security.

MORGAN: Well, just take two recent examples that I think are utterly ridiculous. We're partly to blame for one. Just a week or two ago they conceded after long haranguing in Saigon and in Washington from people like Congressman Moss [John E. Moss] of California and correspondents that their total number of aircraft destroyed was twice the number that they had been carrying. Well, that's utterly ridiculous, utterly ridiculous. They can't defend that on grounds of security at all.

Point two--and here is where we in the press are partly to blame. This business of body count. You can't count accurately the number of enemy that you kill in any kind of an engagement without a whole union of undertakers going out on the battlefield and really determining who these people were. And you certainly can't do it in a jungle, mountain, or marsh condition as exists in Vietnam. But one of the reasons that we in the press are partly to blame for this is that we didn't go up the boot of Italy where we could measure backward and forward movement by saying we pushed the Germans back ten meters today, or something like this

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because we weren't consolidating territory. We had to have some kind of a score on how we did today. To me this is utterly foolish and totally dangerous because, being so meaningless, it can indicate that we killed a thousand communists and lost one ourselves, to be extreme about the example, and then the next day the communists rise from the dead so to speak and clobber us. I think this is utterly ridiculous and totally dispensable, but this latter thing is partly our own fault.

McHUGH: Kennedy objected to some of the reports that came back from Vietnam. Religion was also an issue in that country.

MORGAN: During the Diem [Ngo Dinh Diem] regime, before both of them were assassinated. Yes. I can't speak with any authority on that because I didn't cover the Vietnamese thing here or in Vietnam with any depth until '65 when I first went to Vietnam, and there may have been some justification to his distress. But one of the troubles in that period was that we had a very small, quote, advisory group, unquote, and the Diem people, particularly dominated by brother Nhu [Ngo Dinh Nhu], wouldn't let them move very much, didn't give them very much information, didn't have very much information themselves. And the result was that reporters like David Halberstam and Malcolm Brown and a few others who made a kind of a career out of this and wrote books had to rely on their own intelligence, and in many cases their own intelligence was better, or certainly as good as, the intelligence that the U.S. gathered but did not put out. And this was one of the difficulties.

I don't deny that they souped up the religious issues, the immolations and so forth, beyond their importance. This is one of the curses of journalism, particularly pictorial journalism on television, that a monk burning himself to death in the middle of a square is allegedly better television than somebody telling what the thing really is in terms of a good

cool judgment. This we haven't got through to ourselves yet. I hope we will, but we haven't gotten

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through to ourselves yet on that one. And I'm sure that was part of the distress of President Kennedy, and in that sense it was totally valid, I think.

McHUGH: Do you have any observations on the news security in the Cuban crisis?

MORGAN: The Bay of Pigs, you mean, or the other one?

McHUGH: Well, the Bay of Pigs. I think there was less control at the time of the Bay of Pigs it would seem.

MORGAN: Yes, it seems now in retrospect, and I suspect that Kennedy himself would concede this, that if the *New York Times* and a couple of others had been more forthright in publishing the stuff they didn't publish when they intended to publish it that the Bay of Pigs might well have been averted. Now this is the brilliance of hindsight. You can't prove this, but there is enough evidence to indicate that might have been the case. That's about all I can say about the Bay of Pigs because I was not covering that aspect of it.

I was at the publishers' or the ASNE lunch, I forget which it was, in Washington where he came over two or three days after it was obvious that we were clobbered and made his speech which was really a kind of an American Legion speech of patriotism, "And we're not going to let communism flourish in this hemisphere, but I goofed and I'm responsible." In some respects, it was a terrible speech, and in some respects, it was a very impressive one because he didn't try to fob off the responsibility on anybody else.

In terms of the second one, I can't really criticize. I think that this was an enormously impressive business. My friend and colleague, Elie Abel of NBC, has written a little book as a going back and recapitulating that whole thing. I forget the name of the book, it was published a year or so ago, but it's a beautifully responsible journalistic job of recreating the thing. And, as I recall it, I read the book through and I don't recall that there's any implication or inference invited that Kennedy made any great error. This was one of those

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things where we were right up there toward the nuclear cloud although nobody quite realized how much at the time. Perhaps it was less than some current historians have evaluated, but it was a devil of a lot more than a lot of others said it was. And I don't really have any great, vivid opinion to make on that one. I was so pleased the way it turned out. I went to some of the briefings, including the last one that Rusk [Dean Rusk] gave after the thing had been

eased that remarkable Sunday, and I thought everybody showed pretty high marks on that one after we got into it.

McHUGH: You mentioned the *New York Times*. They often seemed to be able to get information that wasn't available to other reporters or newsmen. Do you think there was favoritism as far...

MORGAN: This is a maddening thing. There is favoritism, but let's face it, the *Times* on the whole has had better reporters than anybody else; they've had a bigger budget for foreign and domestic coverage; they've taken more care in getting responsible reporters who know what to do. They've got some lemons. I said "has had" because the *Los Angeles Times*, of all papers, is, to my great delight, now coming up to challenge the *New York Times*, which is as it should be. I haven't counted the bodies, but they've got an enormously large foreign service now, and they've got some enormously capable people in it.

But the prestige of the *Times* of New York is still there; it does open doors that are not opened to the rest of us. And this is, let's face it, this is maddening as hell. And if I had to compete from day to day with the *Times*--which I do in a sense but not quite in the same sense that, let's say, a guy from the *New York Post* or the *World Journal Tribune* does--it would be galling, particularly if I thought or I knew that I was really a better correspondent than my competitor, but he was getting better breaks because he was from the *Times*. I'm not too upset about this. I think that the *Times*

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is the bellwether of American journalism, and if it ever should sink, God help us, journalism in this country in terms of its responsibility and respectability, I wouldn't say it would sink without a trace because there are other papers that are showing more responsibility, but it would be terribly, terribly badly served.

McHUGH: Who, at the White House, was there anyone other than Salinger that was useful in....

MORGAN: Oh, yes. As I said earlier, and a lot of us have written about this, the White House was pretty much open. I don't mean that it was open to the point that you could go in and steal top secret documents, things for the eyes of the President only, but you didn't have to go through a long song and dance. You sometimes had to--you nearly always had to take your turn, but you could call up Arthur Schlesinger or Walt Rostow, who was for a while in the White House entourage along with Bundy [McGeorge Bundy] before he was moved over to State. Bundy was accessible. There was hardly anybody in the White House who wasn't accessible. And I used them quite frequently.

One guy sort of covering the town, as I do, wouldn't develop contacts in one place as much as somebody who was on the White House beat or somebody who was on the

State Department beat, but this was enormously helpful to me just for dimensional purposes, not for, I don't think there was once during the Kennedy regime when I got what is euphemistically known in the trade as a scoop. My approach to journalism isn't quite that way anyway. I'm not being derogatory. Competition is good. But I pretend that my understanding of the Administration and my ability to praise or criticize was enhanced by the fact that I was able to talk to these people.

McHUGH: Did you have enough contact to be able to form judgments? I was curious as to which of the people around the President impressed you most, and why.

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MORGAN: Well, obviously, Bundy was the nerve center. He was more formidable, and to me diffidence about his knowledge and intellectualism perhaps put me under a kind of a restricted attitude. And I kept feeling that I wasn't asking him the meaningful questions and that he was being impatient with me. There certainly was no hostility between us, but I saw him on a number of occasions and he was quite helpful in putting things in balance. And other times he was utterly unhelpful.

I remember vividly, and so does he, we had him on television the Sunday before the Sunday that the second Cuban crisis was on. And by this time Senator Keating [Kenneth B. Keating] had been jumping up and down in the Senate so much that you couldn't ignore him, and we asked him a question about that, and he just shrugged and said, "There's nothing to it, nothing there at all." I've forgotten what the sequence of the aerial photographs was, but it--I don't believe that he was lying at that point, but it was almost within a matter of hours that this reconnaissance photograph was put on his desk. And we've kidded each other about it since. He was obviously important.

General Clifton [Chester V. Clifton] was terribly helpful. He's an old friend. And due to his past career in the Army, which included public relations when I didn't know him--I didn't know him during the War, but I met him when he was over in the Pentagon--he knew how to handle the press, and he knew what the press' problems were. And he was terribly helpful on occasion, and somewhat, on a few occasions, to Pierre's exasperation--sort of competition a little bit. But he was quite helpful to me.

Schlesinger would be helpful on some things, and it was always stimulating to talk to him. Jerry Wiesner [Jerome B. Wiesner] was very helpful on a lot of things except you could never hear the man. He talked in such a whisper that even if you got right up to him about half the distance between you and me, it was very difficult to hear him. And I mentioned this to him one time, or mentioned it to his wife, I've forgotten which, and she despaired and said, "Yes, he never talks above a whisper." But he was awfully knowledgeable, obviously, and awfully helpful in terms of disarmament and that kind of thing.

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Pierre was by no means unhelpful. You'd go in sometimes and shoot the breeze with Pierre and get a little feel of things.

And a guy who was enormously helpful in politics was Larry O'Brien [Lawrence F. O'Brien]. I've kept up my contacts with O'Brien.

McHUGH: Why was he especially helpful?

MORGAN: Well, because he was so knowledgeable, and he grew to trust you if you had several contacts with him and he knew you weren't going to violate his confidence and put him on a spot by publishing his name in some exclusive story. And he would level with you. He would give you what was his judgment. Perhaps once in a while, he would try to lead you away from some critical situation, but on the whole he leveled with you, and I found him--we've become quite good friends, but he's been a very accurate political source.

McHUGH: Could you compare Pierre Salinger's performance as secretary, or would you attempt to, with James Hagerty?

MORGAN: Well, they had totally different responsibility. Hagerty was supreme in what he had to do. He had a President who was not interested in politics in the ordinary manner of speaking. He was a hell of a lot more interested in politics than a lot of people gave him credit for, and he was much more acquisitive than a lot of people gave him credit for. He used to absorb these CIA [Central Intelligence Agency] morning briefings with a great deal more alacrity and trenchant response and questions than was generally known.

But Hagerty's problem occurred in its most dramatic form, of course, with the heart attack in--when was it?--September of 1955 and continued until the Inauguration of John F. Kennedy in January of 1961. And from '55 through '56 one of the main problems that Jim had was, without being counterfeit--and he wasn't being counterfeit--to stage manage the situation so it became obvious that the

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President was still President, and he was still signing bills and still making statements and still making news, and act as a barrier between the President and the press, which a news secretary does to a certain degree anyway.

Well, now, of course, that didn't happen with Pierre. The President had a painful physical disability in his back, but that wasn't the same situation. Pierre is quicker, he's funnier, he more easily makes copy than Hagerty did, but it's a little bit like mixing oranges and apples to compare the two. I suppose I'm dodging it a little bit because they're both my friends, and I find it difficult to rack up a score that might be unfair to them.

Hagerty--let's put it this way, for the assignment that he had, Hagerty was almost supreme. He made some mistakes. He made a mistake when he blew his top on the U-2 thing, and he blew his top another time or two. His weakness was a bad temper which would

sometimes get out of control, and although the loyalists in the press corps protected him, it was well known that he sometimes could blast off in a way that might be damaging.

I doubt, even if their personalities had been compatible, that Pierre would have been anywhere near as good as news secretary for Eisenhower. And I reverse the roles and say that I doubt if there'd been the same compatibility between Hagerty and Kennedy. You have to link the two, the four, in terms of their respective personality. Pierre had a lot of faults. He was, as I say, rather sloppy in his briefings now and then. But on the whole, he was awfully good, and he was clever and could fend off questions with a funny remark. Some of the notes, the transcripts, of his briefings are hilarious in the give and take.

McHUGH: Were there any other things that you felt particularly annoying other than his sloppiness on occasion?

MORGAN: As not one of the regulars that was in the White House every day, I sometimes got annoyed when I would call him with what I knew was a legitimate question, and he wouldn't call back. This was not avoiding me. He just had other questions, and he saw

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Morgan on the list and somebody else was more important. I can't give him bad marks for that.

McHUGH: Can you say any other sources that you had for....

MORGAN: I didn't mention Sorensen. I didn't see Sorensen so much. I did see him on occasion, and we would see each other sometimes with small groups of correspondents in background sessions. Perhaps I should say this, we've got a marching and chowder club in town called the Overseas Writers, which consists of more or less the senior correspondents in town, of not only American but European and now Japanese nationalities, none of them members of the commie bloc countries. This outfit meets fairly periodically in background sessions with people in government, visiting VIPs from Britain and Japan and elsewhere. And I had the happy coincidence of being president of this outfit for two years during the beginning of the Kennedy Administration, and I was popular among my colleagues sheerly by an accident. We got an awful lot of very informative and interesting meetings because the Kennedy people, Wiesner, Rostow, Schlesinger, Sorensen, Salinger, were available and would come to these meetings, and the contrast between that and what we'd gotten during the Eisenhower administration was absolutely vivid. And I was given credit for this, which was not really fair because it was--I got these people, it's true, but I got them because they were available.

McHUGH: We're just about at the end of this tape, do you have any?

MORGAN: No, goodness me, I'm glad we are. I've talked much too long.

