

**Joseph Kraft Oral History Interview—JFK, 1/9/1967**  
Administrative Information

**Creator:** Joseph Kraft  
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**Biographical Note**

Kraft was a campaign speechwriter for John F. Kennedy (1960) and a journalist and syndicated columnist (1963-1986). In this interview, he discusses speechwriting and campaign advance work for John F. Kennedy (JFK), press access to JFK and his staff during the presidential campaign and presidency, and Kraft's interactions with members of the Kennedy administration, among other issues.

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Joseph Kraft—JFK

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Oral History Interview

with

Joseph Kraft

Washington D.C.

January 9, 1967

By John F. Stewart

For the John F. Kennedy Library

STEWART: Why don't we begin with the very usual question of when did you first meet John Kennedy [John F. Kennedy]?

KRAFT: I first met John Kennedy when he was Senator Kennedy in the campaign of 1960. It was in the Senate. It was after the Convention. I had come down from New York to work as a speechwriter under Archie Cox [Archibald Cox] and Ted Sorensen [Theodore C. Sorensen], and about the second week, I guess, that I was down they convoked a meeting in the Senator's presence. He really called the meeting of the speechwriters. I guess we weren't really doing very well. He was there and I remember vividly—I guess there were two things that surprised me about him. One was how very good looking he was. And the other was the superb tan that he had. He didn't say very much that was particularly interesting at the meeting. He turned the meeting over to Clark Clifford [Clark M. Clifford] who did most of the talking. Clifford mainly talked about how important it was to get the peace theme into the campaign. Like most meetings that were held in the course of the campaign, I came away from it wondering why it was held.

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STEWART: You hadn't met him at all before that?

KRAFT: Never met him. He seemed to like the stuff that I had done fairly well and at that meeting read off an opening that I had written of a speech. But it was the first time that I had ever met him.

STEWART: Whose idea was it, do you know, to invite you to be on the speechwriting....

KRAFT: I think that, like everything else that you did with the Kennedys, there were several ideas that came together. I believe Adam Yarmolinsky was one of the people who suggested me, and I think Fred Holborn [Frederick L. Holborn], who was on his staff, was one of the people who suggested me. Archie Cox called me up in New York, we had a drink.... And I think also Bill Attwood [William H. Attwood] and someone else. Bill Attwood and Bob Yoakum [Robert Yoakum], who were speechwriters and had been speechwriters for Adlai Stevenson [Adlai E. Stevenson], suggested me. Archie called me up. We had a drink in New York at the Harvard Club, I guess it was, and I agreed to come on. I came down and started working. Fred Holborn, who was on the staff, also had suggested me and knew me through someone else, although I don't remember that I'd ever met Fred. But I came down and started working. I guess some of the things I did came to his attention, and I got on pretty well with Sorensen and with Goodwin [Richard N. Goodwin]. I guess I got picked right at the beginning, and I stayed out on the road.

STEWART: I'm surprised that you hadn't had any contacts with either the Senator or people on his staff regarding Algeria. You of course, had.... Well, you hadn't written the book...

KRAFT: I was in the process of writing it. I had written a good deal about Algeria. And a lot of people had assumed that I had, but I had in fact never.... And I guess that's how Fred Holborn knew about me. He knew about the things I'd done on Algeria. But I'd never talked to....

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STEWART: Because he had been very involved in that.

KRAFT: Yes. I'd never talked to anyone on the staff about Algeria.

STEWART: Did you have any reservations about getting involved in it at that time?

KRAFT: No. I had been pro-Kennedy ever since I saw him at a meeting in 19.... I think it was January 1960, a meeting out here of Maryland Democrats. Tony Lewis [Anthony Lewis] and Harris Wofford [Harris L. Wofford, Jr.] had talked to me about Senator Kennedy well before that. And so when I got the call from Archie Cox, there was no problem at all. I knew that I was pro-Kennedy and I wanted him to.... And

I was pleased that he had won the Convention. It was really—there was no problem at all. I was just too glad to help.

STEWART: Had you had any experience in writing political speeches before? Had you been involved in...

KRAFT: I had been, I guess, in a group that wrote some speeches for Adlai Stevenson in the 1956 campaign, a group of newspaper writers in New York. I was then on the *Times* [*New York Times*]. But otherwise I had no experience that I can remember in writing speeches at all.

STEWART: How were your duties defined or how was your job defined in the beginning?

KRAFT: Ill defined. I think people were, everyone.... Like everything else everyone does in all campaigns, people were feeling their way all the way through. You know, a pro in American politics is a guy who's won one election. People had different ideas, and it was spitballing all the way, basically. Now Archie Cox had developed the idea of trying to set up in advance certain fixed speeches, and he assigned those out as soon as we got there. The idea was that these would be done in August before the Senator went on the road. For me it was terribly useful just to get my hand in and to find out what was the available material and to see what

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I could do with the stuff. But in point of fact none of this material ever got used. It was difficult to integrate the kind of things that Archie Cox was trying to do in what became basically a speech factory with the ongoing, day to day needs of the people, the staff that was out in the field. Actually I think more of the stuff that got done in the speech factory got used than is generally acknowledged, but it was very, very difficult to plug those things in, especially since the Cox staff was by and large people who came new into the operation whereas the people who stayed on the plane, Sorensen and Goodwin, and eventually me and John Martin [John Bartlow Martin].... Well, Sorensen and Goodwin were people who had been with the Senator before.

STEWART: Did you sense any of the personality conflicts that have been stated as being there?

KRAFT: Yes, I was really right...

STEWART: Especially between Cox and...

KRAFT: I was really right in the middle of those two because I became.... Archie and I got on and get on very, very well, and Ted and I got on and get on

very, very well. I tended to be in the middle and was very, very sensitive to the fact that there was a personality conflict, that in a sense this was a conflict, an inevitable conflict of roles, that Archie was trying to do something that could only.... Well, there was just a built-in rivalry between someone who was writing them in Washington. This was compounded, I would say as an observer, because Archie and Ted found it not easy to talk to one another. So that made what was inevitably a difficult situation a good deal more difficult than it had to be.

STEWART: But it was there almost from the beginning and, I assume, continued?

KRAFT: It was there from the beginning and, I would say, got worse. From Archie's point of view there was the problem of access to the candidate. He didn't know what Senator Kennedy wanted, and he would often try to smuggle ideas through me. He felt that Ted was shutting him out from the candidate. Ted for his part, I think, felt that he just wasn't getting much useful stuff from Archie. I think

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it was an unfortunate, but not really a very serious, episode.

STEWART: How did you eventually come to land, as you say, out in the field with the candidate?

KRAFT: Well, I guess the first speeches that I did caught his eye, and he seemed to like me fairly much and Ted seemed to like me fairly much. I started off—John Bartlow Martin had invented, I think in the '56 campaign, or maybe the '52 campaign, but in any case he had invented the role of advance speechwriter. That was someone who would be going out into the field and gathering material—openers, closers, local color—just the way a reporter would do but putting this into speech material particularly for the quick speeches that we had. On motorcades, for example, or long trips the candidate would make, oh, seven or eight small statements in a couple of hours. Those were kept, tended to be kept, separate from the regular speeches. Now an advance man would go around, as John Martin conceived the job and as I practiced it eventually, would go around, cite all these places where speeches were going to be given, suggest themes, put together as much for a complete speech as he possibly could, indicate openers, closers, references to people, indicate difficulties that you had, and particularly cite themes—but do everything that an advance man would do but with the particular perspective of the speechwriter. Now I began doing that, I guess, the first week of the campaign. Now I wrote a couple of major speeches while I was in the Cox factory, so to speak, and at least some of those they seemed to like. Then they made me the first advance man with Martin. In I guess it was the second week of the campaign, I did my first advancing, which was Texas, and came back to Los Angeles and from that period.... It started off, I guess, with the idea that we would be rotating, but I never left that. I kept doing that all the way. I never went back to the Cox factory. I stayed rotating all the way, I stayed doing the advances and largely being on the plane all the way through the campaign.



STEWART: You traveled alone, I assume. You weren't with Martin all the time?

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KRAFT: No, No. Martin and I never were together except in the last, I would say, the last days up in Hyannis Port. But basically what would happen is that, well, for example, right at the start we went through California, and John had advanced California and came back and went with the candidate through California. While they were going through California, I went to Texas, advanced Texas and came back and helped work on speeches for Texas and then went through Texas with the candidate.

STEWART: Then he'd leapfrog ahead.

KRAFT: And then he would leapfrog ahead, and then I would leapfrog ahead. That was pretty much the way it was.

STEWART: What was the source of most of your information about the local issues that should be used in speeches?

KRAFT: It could be anything, and it was very much hit or miss. It was people that you.... Well, Martin or Sorensen would have some people that he'd suggest that you see, newspaper people would suggest people. I always found that if I knew university people they were particularly useful. I remember that Dick Wade [Richard C. Wade] was very useful in Rochester, and Harlan Cleveland [J. Harlan Cleveland] and Pat Moynihan [Daniel Patrick Moynihan] were particularly useful in Syracuse. The advance men themselves were very useful; Tom Finney [Thomas D. Finney, Jr.] particularly was useful. Local congressmen in the areas that you were going would be very useful or the local congressman's administrative assistant or legislative assistant. Newspaper editors. But it was a fairly disorganized, catch-as-can thing. It's the kind of thing that one could now, I think, looking back in retrospect, easily write a manual for. It could be much more highly organized than it was then.

STEWART: This wasn't included in the O'Brien [Lawrence F. O'Brien] manual at all. None of this stuff was.

KRAFT: No. No. But I suppose I ought to say also that the freshness of it, of coming smack into a town and really not knowing what you were looking for and just

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getting the waves, getting the sense of what was going on, the way a reporter does, is a very good, has a spontaneous quality about it that's awfully good. You waste a lot of time; on the other hand, you capture things that are not readily available if it's a machine-made operation,

STEWART: Did you ever receive and pass on any embarrassingly wrong information or...

KRAFT: Oh sure. I can take you through, at least.... For example, well, there were a lot of episodes, particularly in the Texas trip, that stand out in my mind, maybe because it was the first trip. One of the things was our second stop in Texas was Lubbock, Texas, and it was not easy for us to come up with anything. That was oil country and the candidate was going to get asked about his stand on depletion allowances. It was also the home, I think it was the home of the Church of Christ, and he was bound to get asked questions about the religious issue. It was not awfully easy to come up with a major speech theme there, and I think I suggested that he be talking largely off the cuff about Texas Tech, which had won the Southwest Conference football championship. I remember, you know, that whatever I gave him wasn't satisfactory because at the end of it he said to me, "You can't leave me naked here like that." At the beginning, the thing that really made Lubbock into a disaster was that I didn't tell him how to pronounce the name of the town. He knew about the German town on the Baltic and started out by saying, "It's great to be here in Lubeck." He used to like to have a lot of gags to begin with. I remember that the one he started off with, I think it was in El Paso, was particularly unsatisfactory.

The beginning of the Texas trip was very, very bad. All the way through I had the feeling that Vice President Johnson [Lyndon B. Johnson] and Sam Rayburn were not being very, very helpful. They weren't knocking themselves out on behalf of him. Basically their approach was, I can remember Lyndon Johnson getting up the first day and saying things like "People ask me why I'm on the ticket. The reason I'm on the ticket is I went to Los Angeles, and I got knocked out flat, stretched out flat. I'm on the ticket for the good of Texas, for the good of the Democratic Party, and for the good of the country." It seemed to me it was kind of a left-handed apologia.

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Now that situation was turned around very dramatically at the Houston ministers statement. It is my very, very clear recollection that the advance information I got and relayed to Sorensen was that the Johnson people were not eager for Senator Kennedy to deal with the religious issue at all. When he decided he was going to deal with it, they did not want him to do it directly. When he decided he was going to do it directly, they wanted Lyndon Johnson to be the intermediary between him and the ministers. My impression was that they were unhappy about his handling it the way he did handle it. But it also seemed to me quite clear that the way he handled it made an immense dent on them. That was particularly striking to me the next day because we flew from Houston to Austin and spent the night after the Houston ministers meeting in Austin. I was briefing Senator Kennedy the next morning on the trip that was coming up. I went in to talk to him. He was sitting in the Governor's mansion, I think it was, with Governor Price Daniel and with Lyndon Johnson, Senator Johnson. We had got in the evening—in the middle of the night really, I had gotten word of something that we'd thought was going to happen anyhow. He was going on later in the day to stop at Texarkana, and there was some question of whether Governor Faubus

[Orval E. Faubus] was going to be on the platform or not. It looked likely that he was, but it was not clear. But in the middle of the night I got confirmation that Faubus was going to be there. So I opened the briefing, and he said, the way he did, "What's up?" I said, "Well, we've got some bad news. Governor Faubus is going to be on the platform." He, I thought, put on a little bit of anger, because it wasn't that much of a surprise to him, and said, "Who's responsible for this?" and turned to Senator Johnson. I don't think that Lyndon Johnson was responsible in any way for that, but he seemed to think it was incumbent upon him to defend it. He then said, "Well, as a matter of fact, Texarkana is at the border point of all four states, and Governor Faubus is going to be there along with the governors of Texas, Louisiana and Arkansas,"—and I guess it would be Mississippi. Kennedy turned to me and said, "Is that true?" That wasn't our information, I said it wasn't our information. He then turned to Senator Johnson and said, "I don't know who's responsible for this, but I don't want anything like this to ever happen again." That to me anyhow was a dramatic

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expression of the way their roles turned overnight after the Houston ministers meeting. We then went on to Texarkana, and Governor Faubus was on the platform. Price Daniel, I know, didn't come. I don't think the other governors were present at all. There were no incidents and no problems arose.

STEWART: Did you have any other contact with the Johnson campaign during the whole thing?

KRAFT: No. The only other thing I remember was that when we came in to—there was a second time when we came into Texas in the campaign, flying east from California. I can't remember; we stopped somewhere in west Texas, I think it was. Lyndon Johnson was meeting us at the airport. By this time all the fans had been divided by the press into shouters and screamers and jumpers. Senator Kennedy used to get off the plane first. This time, for reasons that aren't too clear to me, he decided that he'd wait, and he let some of us start to get off in advance. As we were going down, he shouted up from the back of the plane—Lyndon Johnson was coming up toward the plane—Senator Kennedy shouted up toward us, "Tell me, is Lyndon shouting, screaming, or yipping?" [Laughter] That, too, seemed to me a... He was pretty relaxed about the relationship, fairly relaxed about it after the Houston ministers piece. Those were the only contacts I had with Lyndon Johnson during the campaign.

STEWART: As far as the whole religious issue is concerned, did you do anything special in each location to try to determine the general feelings about the religious issue or was it...

KRAFT: My own judgment would be that the answer would be no, I didn't, and I should have. One of the things that I had as a special responsibility was agriculture, because no one else was interested in it, and I was one of the few people who would talk to the agricultural expert we had on board, Willard Cochrane [Willard

W. Cochrane]. It is my current impression that almost everywhere where we talked, where the candidate talked about agriculture, he should have been talking about religion. I would say that if there were criticisms of the campaign that I would make in retrospect—and this clearly is in retrospect—one

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would be that there was insufficient, really insufficient, concentration on religion in areas where it was important. The other would be that the plan of the campaign was not well planned. Instead of ending up in California, for example, he spent much too much time, I would say, in the East, particularly in New York, should have ended up in California, should have ended up on an upbeat, but was really kind of sagging. I think that was bad organization. That should have been foreseen and it wasn't.

STEWART: What about this whole area of humor? Were you always conscious of giving him little quips or...

KRAFT: Yes, there was always the need to do this, and Goodwin and Sorensen were really superb at putting together easy, off-the-cuff things. Wherever you'd go you'd try and look for things. He was, I think, sort of diffident about using it at the beginning but got more and more self-confident as he became president, got very self-confident about it. But at the beginning he was really quite diffident about it.

STEWART: Did your job, I assume, become easier as the campaign progressed?

KRAFT: Oh yes. A large part of my job was getting to know Sorensen and Goodwin, getting to relax with them, getting to relax with the Senator. He really liked a relaxed relationship, and you had to know him a little bit in order to achieve it. I only achieved it with time. But I think in the end I did achieve it. That was terribly important. In that sense the job became easier and also became more routine. I got a better feel for what I was trying to do.

Let's see if there're any more interesting episodes. I ran tangentially into the fight in New York when, I guess it was in Syracuse that.... We did a long motorcade from Albany to Syracuse. It was all day long. I think Mike Prendergast [Michael H. Prendergast], who was the state chairman, had lined up a meeting with some farmers, upstate farmers. I began writing the statement that the candidate would make to them. Then someone, I think it may have been Pat Moynihan, came up to me and raised

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the question of why we were talking to these farmers at all. I then began trying to find out why it was, and it became fairly clear to me that there wasn't much point in doing it except that this was servicing a kind of clientele of Prendergast. I then recommended to the candidate that he cancel that engagement. I remembered someone saying, "You know, there are more people that work in warehouses in New York State than work in dairy farms." I

think I told him that. He was pretty, I think was not reluctant to hear that. But, in any case, he then told me to talk to O'Donnell [Kenneth P. O'Donnell] about it. This, to me anyhow, was the kind of thing that O'Donnell did very, very well. He got it in a minute and was one of the few people around the candidate that was prepared to say no, that would take a no decision without worrying about it. And he did take a no decision. Then Prendergast tried to crank Harriman [William Averell Harriman], who was coming along with us to that motorcade, into giving the speech. Kennedy was kind of.... Kennedy was always, it seemed to me, not happy about having to talk to farm groups. I remember before going out to the plowing contest he was saying out loud in the plane about how these people had no reaction; they had square heads, square faces, square bodies; they were square; even Eisenhower [Dwight D. Eisenhower] couldn't move them. He'd seen them before, and he didn't know how to address them. He was kind of afraid about Averell Harriman talking to them, and at the last minute it seemed to me he even got—he called up his old roommate, you know, the football fellow from Harvard.

STEWART: Macdonald [Torbert H. Macdonald]?

KRAFT: Torbie Macdonald. Torbie flew up and was set to give the speech, but finally the speech was cancelled, and Senator Kennedy, I think, had a telephone interview with them.

STEWART: Did you get involved in many decisions like this regarding, well, for example, regarding scheduling or the....

KRAFT: Fairly rarely, I would say. Very rarely. I think, looking back, the thing that would be surprising to me would be how closely I was involved with the

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candidate because I used to, you know, on a day like a motorcade I would be in there right at the beginning, watching him get dressed and eating breakfast while briefing him and then say goodnight to him, be with him all day long. And he was awfully good, you know, he was just very, very good at taking a fast briefing, just very, very good at switching gears and picking up something. But, looking back, I would say that one of the striking things was how close you could be, how intimately involved you could be on a day to day basis and yet how remote you could be from the important decisions. I can't think of many that I was involved in.

STEWART: What was his big concern as far as the things you were briefing him on? What was he generally most apt to come back with a sharp question on?

KRAFT: I would say that his prime concern—and in this case he was terribly good, it seemed to me—his prime concern was to evoke a response. That was the

thing that he was.... And in that case he would shift very, very rapidly. If he found that a particular line was exciting people, he was getting them interested, he would move on to that in a hurry. If it happened by accident, he'd note it immediately. I think that that was his primary concern. It was to reach people all the time. I don't think he was terribly concerned, and rightly, that the text of his speech match exactly what he would say. I think that would be his main concern. Then there were some other concerns where he clearly felt himself ill at ease, and he didn't know how to handle things. This was certainly true about anything that had to do with agriculture.

STEWART: Why was this? Was it a personality thing? I don't suppose he was that concerned with his supposedly bad voting record on agriculture issues.

KRAFT: I think he just didn't feel confident, he didn't feel at home. These weren't people with whom he had rapport. He was kind of alert to all his losers. I mean, he could pretty well.... I remember when we went into Texas—that was the period when his voice was kind of bad—I remember him furiously writing out in a script that I couldn't read but handing it to me as if I could, instructions to—because

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I pointed out that depletion was going to be a problem—instructions to get the record of everything he'd ever said on depletion. He was quite well attuned to his vulnerabilities, very well attuned to them, and I think in the farm area he was particularly vulnerable. Those would be the two that I remember. He was, I think, pretty concerned—maybe this was his kind of compensation he did for me—I think he was pretty concerned not to get involved in.... He was also concerned that when he was talking about policy speeches, he'd be talking about things he would do. One of the things he disliked a great deal was a simply beautiful analysis of a problem. I can remember several speech drafts that were fed to me or that I fed to him that he rejected out of hand on the grounds that they were too abstract and not enough focus on what he was going to do as president.

STEWART: Was this a real problem of trying to condense complex subjects into a fifteen or twenty minute talk? Well, fifteen or twenty minutes would have been long for the types of things that you were probably working on. They were more like ten minutes or....

KRAFT: Some of them were ten, some of them were fifteen. In the areas that I was covering I would also work on the big speeches. Was it a problem? Not really. You know, people agonize over speeches, but I think Kennedy had a very healthy attitude toward speeches. They were an occasion for being in touch with people, and he really didn't worry all that much about the beauty and purity of the language, except on fixed occasions. And I suppose, you know, one has pride of authorship, and that figures, but I think that maybe one of the reasons that I worked out as a speechwriter was because I'd been used to being edited a great deal when I was on the *New York Times*. You need that kind

of a mentality. You've got to be used to having, oh, things struck out and having them rewritten a great deal.

Another thing that he liked and that he was good at was to pick news, to get things out of the news. The Sorensen humor was particularly good at that. I think Ted Williams retired at forty-one, and Sorensen was always able to work in something about his being an old man at forty-one that would turn the experience issue around. He was very, very alert to what Nixon [Richard M. Nixon] was doing.

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STEWART: I was going to ask that.

KRAFT: He thought in terms of a horse race all the time, of what the other fellow was doing and where he was vulnerable. In that sense, it seemed to me that I never had the sense of the ruthless Kennedy machine or even a sense that they were very highly organized. I did have the sense that he was running to win, and throughout the campaign there was the sense that he was not running for the truth, he was not running for anything abstract like that, that he was running against a man and the point was to win over marginal votes. The point wasn't to enthuse your own followers particularly. The thing about the campaign that struck me, in that sense it was pragmatic. You thought about what the other side was doing and how you'd fight back against it.

Now, you know, we had a lot of disappointments. Well, the trip up through southern Ohio where Mike DiSalle [Michael V. DiSalle] kept telling him—it seemed to me every time we stopped, DiSalle kept raising the margin of victory by another ten or twenty thousand, and of course he lost. There, I remember, that was sort of a typical example of his sort of diffidence about humor. He spoke in Middletown, Ohio, which is a company town pretty much owned by the Armco steel company, and the people that own the Armco are named Verity. I think it was William Verity [William Verity, Jr.], who was the president of the company at that point, had been, I think, a roommate or at least a classmate of Kennedy's at Choate. I found this out when I was advancing the town and wrote something in about the "eternal verities," which I thought was pretty funny. He didn't and we didn't give it. I remember out in California, in the same vein, I did a series of gags with Goodwin. I remember one of them, which again he didn't use, had to do with Pat Brown [Edmund G. Brown] and the Chessman case. You remember Caryl Chessman?

STEWART: Yes.

KRAFT: The opener was, "I ran into Pat Brown on my way up here. I said, "Beg your pardon." He said, "Go to hell." That was another one that, as I remember, he didn't use. Middletown was also interesting, I guess, because of O'Donnell's role, also in policing something. There's been some kind of a... I remember they were doing a spot, I guess it was, for a minimum wage ad. The advance men got one of the

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laundresses who worked in the hotel to pose for the spot, and the people who ran the hotel found about it and were, I think quite properly, very irate. I remember O'Donnell chewed out the people who had arranged this and did it in what I thought was a very, very effective, forceful way saying that this was just very bad manners. I saw a fair amount of O'Donnell and Powers [David F. Powers], who had a marvelous working relationship with the candidate. He tended in the early morning to be kind of, well, not in the best humor. They could take an awful lot of guff, I think. I don't know, it may be something the Irish have among themselves. I remember once when a cufflink was missing, he really blew up. I walked in and was asked to leave while he had his fit with them.

STEWART: Were you people always very well aware of the setup that the Nixon campaign was using? Were there any real comparisons?

KRAFT: Well, it seemed to me that this was, again, a sort of thing that I was dimly aware of without being fully aware of. Reporters would come in off.... You know, we had the wire copy all the time, and Salinger [Pierre E.G. Salinger] would always keep the candidate abreast of what was going on. And then reporters would come in off the Nixon campaign and would have the feeling they felt a lot more at home with Kennedy, but in any case they would always offer a basis of comparison. I don't think there was any systematic effort, but it was something that was always kept in mind and was going on all the time.

STEWART: What about access or talking to the reporters that were covering the campaign? Were there ever any problems as far as you or anyone around you were concerned?

KRAFT: I can't speak for anybody else. I felt, because I had been a reporter and knew a lot of those guys, kind of ill at ease, and I think I acted kind of like a prig about it because I really just didn't know how to handle it. I can remember once I was typing a statement for the candidate when Scotty Reston [James B. Reston] came up, and I turned it over so he wouldn't see it. I really tried to stay away

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from reporters and did stay away. I remember once riding somewhere with Sorensen in a motorcade when Murray Kempton was with us. I remember Sorensen handling it very, I thought, adeptly and adroitly. But I really just did stay away. In that sense, I don't think there was much I could have told them in any case, but I just did stay away.

STEWART: There was a rumor, I think it was during October, that the team of speechwriters was breaking down and that they'd soon be replaced by a lot of people who had written for Stevenson in '56 and '52. Do you recall this rumor at all coming out? What was the reaction to it?



KRAFT: I guess I don't. That would have been... You see, one of the things that happened was that the Stevenson people really fell away rather fast. Bill Attwood was the chief Stevenson person, and I think he left and he didn't work out too well. Goodwin and Sorensen did the bulk of the writing, and I guess I would probably come after that and John Martin, who was the only Stevenson fellow who got on. There was, and I guess there always is in a speechwriting enterprise, and awful lot of rivalry and jealousy. But I don't particularly remember that story. As a matter of fact, nothing could be wronger. It worked the other way, and the Stevenson people tended to fall away. And I don't think altogether by accident. The Kennedy operation was just very, very different from the Stevenson one, and my impression is that by and large the Stevenson people were kind of horrified. The Stevenson people tended to be awfully issue oriented. As I've indicated, Kennedy was mainly interested in reaching people. He didn't care that much about getting parity exactly right. I think this horrified a lot of the Stevenson people. I think there were a lot of these personality flare-ups, differences of style on the manner of speeches, but they really didn't amount to very much at all. The most striking element of the speechwriting operation and, in my opinion, of the whole campaign was the degree of casualness, of hit or miss. Goodwin would carry around a lot of the speech material in a great big suitcase. Well, he was losing the suitcase all the time. An awful lot of it was spitballing, it had to be spitballed. It would have been

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impossible really to integrate the Cox operation with the plane operation. In a sense it would have been like trying to funnel Niagara into a hose.

STEWART: There had to be, in other words, this very personal relationship between President Kennedy and the people who were finally responsible...

KRAFT: Well, there had to be that, but also the fact was that the Cox operation, while it wasn't all that big, was much, much too big. It was just very, very difficult to integrate something as large as that, as heavily researched as that, with the kind of intimate needs that you have on a campaign plane.

STEWART: What about your contacts, if any, with Myer Feldman's research operation?

KRAFT: Mine were very good. I'd met Mike the first or second night that I was down there, and I guess that sort of helped me along because I'd stayed up 'til about 2 o'clock working with him on some kind of a statement about Social Security—no, I guess it was on Medicare—that Senator Kennedy was supposedly going to give, but I think never did give, in this rump session of the Senate. You could always call Feldman and get a fast answer on what the position was on milk orders, or almost anything under the sun. He had an absolutely fantastic knowledge of legislative positions taken by Kennedy and was very adaptable, very fast, worked very, very well with Sorensen. But I didn't have that much contact. Whenever I needed him, I could plug in in a hurry, but I

didn't know that much about it or didn't have that much contact. I was on the road almost constantly after Labor Day so that I wasn't in touch with the Washington headquarters. I got to know Feldman really in.... Election night my wife [Polly Kraft] and I spent with Feldman and Sorensen and Goodwin in Hyannis.

STEWART: What role, if any, did you play in preparing for the debates?

KRAFT: None.

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STEWART: None at all? What about press conferences, especially local, small press conferences in a place?

KRAFT: I would often write a press release. The way it was worked was that there would be a press release for the morning papers and press release for the afternoon, and I would very often, more times than I can remember, write those.

STEWART: Did you ever get involved with local political people asking to include or not include certain items or certain issues in his speeches?

KRAFT: Yes, repeatedly, and sometimes...

STEWART: Was this a big problem or...

KRAFT: Yes. For example, I think I was the one—I'm pretty sure I was the one—who wrote the statement he made in Niagara, where I think there was a Bell helicopter plant, which was then used in California to argue that he was going to take contracts away from California and give them to New York. That kind of thing was cropping up all the time. I remember that it cropped in Tennessee when he said something about, "We're going to keep TVA [Tennessee Valley Authority]"—and I think I suggested this when we got to Nashville—"We're going to keep TVA right here where it belongs." And that drew a protest from—this is the headquarters—I think it was Senator Sparkman [John J. Sprakman] in Alabama. That kind of thing would happen a great deal. I think, I don't know, there's no way of avoiding it I guess. But probably the less you do of it the better off you are.

STEWART: But did you continually have people presenting or asking you to...

KRAFT: You always have people asking you to push for special issues, for recognizing special people. It seemed to me in Utica there was a question of whether the candidate was going to pay a tribute to a guy who, as I remember it, had been in prison. Being a brilliant fellow, I recommended against that. That kind of thing would happen all the time, but

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those kind of judgments I assume were made by the political people. I would sometimes flash a warning, but that was certainly not my main job.

STEWART: They had that pretty well mapped out, I assume, from the start.

KRAFT: Yes.

STEWART: Well, is there anything else really significant about the campaign that you can think of that we haven't hit on?

KRAFT: I think we've covered everything that I had to do within the campaign.

STEWART: Do you agree with the statements that have been made that he picked up steam as the end approached, that he was actually feeling better physically and mentally, I guess, during the last week of the campaign?

KRAFT: Yes, I think that that's true. Certainly, physically he was feeling an awful lot better. He was in pretty rough shape, it seemed to me, at the early stages, particularly with his voice giving out and was concerned about little things. I think he picked up a lot of strength of confidence as he went along. Although, I must say, the atmosphere in general was pretty good and pretty easy. The problem the Stevenson people had, I think, was basically the problem of serious people fitting into what was a much, much easier atmosphere. No one was knitting their brows or worrying about things all that much. It was a very relaxed, a lot more relaxed atmosphere.

STEWART: Although I assume everyone was realistically confident. I don't assume anyone was overconfident about the outcome, but at the same time...

KRAFT: I was certainly overconfident about the outcome. Again, I suppose, you know, I would say.... There were a lot of people who weren't I suppose, but if you looked at the polls, for example, that we kept getting, as I remember it, they would repeatedly indicate that we could

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sweep Oklahoma, we were on the verge of pushing over California so that there was, I felt, a built-in dynamic inside the campaign that made you lose your sense of proportion and judgment. I was very surprised that the election was as close as it was, very, very surprised.

STEWART: Was there anything particular about election night that you recall that hasn't been thoroughly documented, thoroughly written up? Did you see the President at all that night?

KRAFT: No. No, the only thing I remember about election night was that I introduced Sorensen and Goodwin and Feldman to the answer game.

STEWART: The what?

KRAFT: The answer.... You know, you give the answer and someone else will give the question.

STEWART: Oh, oh, oh. Yes.

KRAFT: That was about the only thing that I remember.

STEWART: Okay, moving on. After the campaign you, I assume, went back to....

KRAFT: I went back to New York where I was busily writing.

STEWART: You were still with the *Times* or you gave that up?

KRAFT: No, I left the *Times*, and I was writing a book. It became my first book, the book on Algeria, and I had almost no contact with the Kennedy people at all. I did do a draft of the Inaugural at Ted's request, some of which got used but all of which got transformed, and I did come down for the Inaugural. Sorensen gave us his six tickets to the box behind the President so we saw him there. We then went back to New York. There was some talk, and it was really nothing more than talk, about my going to Tunisia as ambassador. I was interested in doing that, but that didn't work out. I sort of hung in as a possible job candidate until at one point in the

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summer Ralph Dungan [Ralph A. Dungan] called me and asked if I would be interested in going, I think it was, to Gabon, it was Gabon or the Central African Republic or something like that. At that point, Polly and I began looking it up and looking at the ages of our children and contracted out. Then about a year later I came down to Washington as the *Harper's* [*Harper's Magazine*] correspondent.

STEWART: And you were intimately involved in covering the White House.

KRAFT: I saw a lot of White House coverage and saw the President from time to time.

STEWART: You wrote a book, of course, mainly focusing on the Trade Expansion Act and undoubtedly have gone into that to some extent. Just let me ask you, are there any questions now that you feel haven't been answered as far as the formulation and the passage of the Trade Expansion Act?

KRAFT: Yes, I think that one of the questions that ought to be asked is to what extent the enormous effort that was required to get that thing through was seen by the people involved, and particularly by the President, as a useful fiction, as something that you had to do in order to get this difficult thing by the Congress, and to what extent it was believed, because I think that, in my own case certainly and in the case of a lot of people, the experience of ginning up the, of becoming identified with the ginning up of the propaganda for the act—one tended to believe this, one believes one's own propaganda. I would suspect that American policy toward Europe was fairly slow to change, was slower to change than it had to be, fell further behind events than was necessary, was more committed, for example, to getting Britain into the European community, and had done less in arranging alternatives because of the enormous effort and commitment that was required to get this bill through the Congress. So one large question that I would want to ask was to what extent were the people who did this operation, to what extent did they become the victims of their own propaganda.

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STEWART: Do you feel in general that the timing was right on that? It's been suggested that it interfered with Great Britain's negotiations for entrance into the Common Market and that it conceivably could have been delayed?

KRAFT: Yes, I don't believe that at all. I really don't believe that. I think that, well, the British problem is a problem of General de Gaulle [Charles A. de Gaulle], and I think the rest is just moonshine. I think one might have adjusted more rapidly to the de Gaulle reality if one hadn't been so enraptured by what was going on. But that might be just my own personal diagnosis of where I was led astray. Let me see. I don't think, so far as I know, there haven't been.... The kind of deals that were made with Senator Kerr [Robert S. Kerr], for example, have not been—I certainly didn't.... There is an interesting case study to be written on how you push something through the Congress that Tom Finney could perhaps do, or Mike Rashish [Myer Rashish]. I don't think that has been thoroughly done. It strikes me as being particularly interesting now because I think you have exactly the same problem with the East-West Trade Bill. But a lot of work has been done in that field. I think there's more to be done.

STEWART: This whole problem of just how many commitments they were forced to make and what effect this had on the domestic program to get the trade bill through is certainly...

KRAFT: That's right. The price they had to pay to get it through I don't think has been fully counted.

STEWART: No, and it undoubtedly was significant. What about access to the members of the White House staff? Pierre Salinger, of course, makes quite a bit of

this in his book, that this was a new policy, and that he presumably was quite proud of the fact that members of the White House staff were more accessible to correspondents than they had been.

KRAFT: I found them very easily accessible, but of course I knew a lot of them in the campaign. But I did find them very easily accessible.

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STEWART: He also mentions that you, among others, were given background briefings on a number of crisis situations such as Cuba and Berlin.

KRAFT: Pierre said this? I didn't even notice it.

STEWART: Yes.

KRAFT: I think maybe I was given.... I mean, I think maybe Ted did give me, but I don't think I used them. I'm fairly confident I didn't use them.

STEWART: He says quite specifically that you, among others, were given special treatment, so to speak, as far as White House correspondents in general were concerned, or Washington correspondents.

KRAFT: Yes. Well, I certainly didn't have a hard time with the Kennedy Administration. I was able to see.... Well, Ted I got to know quite well, Sorensen. I didn't know Pierre particularly well. Now, for example, on Cuba, I happened to be having lunch with Ted Sorensen and Mike Feldman in the White House the day the President came back from his speaking tour in the '62 elections which he cancelled. I knew that something was up, but Sorensen did not tell me what it was, and neither did I guess. He had not told Feldman at that point. I think he told him a little bit later that day. But I was certainly not told about that. Now it is true that midway through the crisis Ted came around to the house for dinner and told me about the five different alternatives, but I wouldn't regard that as a special briefing. It is also true that with respect to Berlin—well, Sorensen wrote the Berlin speech, the 1961 Berlin speech, at our house in the country. He came down and spent a weekend and read it to me before it was delivered. But I'm really astonished to hear that I got special briefings. I think that's wrong. I really think that that's wrong. It's true that I certainly didn't spend much time talking to Pierre because I knew other people. But I don't think many people did.

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STEWART: Did you feel in general that the whole problem of news management and censorship was handled as well as it probably could have been under the circumstances?

KRAFT: I've never been impressed by the problem of news management and censorship. I wasn't impressed then, and I haven't been impressed under the Johnson administration. And I'm sure that if I looked back at the things I was writing under the Eisenhower Administration, that's not a problem that's impressed me. My whole attitude has been that the problem is to understand things. The air is just full of information. Now that I think of things, perhaps the only.... I think I was the first person to write about President Kennedy going to Berlin. That was something that was not given me by the White House staff. It was given to me by a guy in the State Department. My general impression is that anything that I was given by the White House staff I tended not to use. I suppose I leaned over backwards. Now it may.... In a way one knows this thing, and you almost don't know what was given to you. But, you know, I don't know, that just sounds wrong to me. For example, I think, insofar as I tended to rely on those things, I'm not sure that I did very well. I wrote an article about the State Department that obviously made much too little of the fight between Bowles [Chester B. Bowles] and Rusk [Dean Rusk] because at that time that was what the White House wanted one to think. I remember the President once talked to me about Berlin, but I can't even remember what he said about the Berlin crisis.

[BEGIN SIDE 2, TAPE 1]

STEWART: You, of course, have a chapter in your book, *Profiles in Power*, on Dean Rusk, and you describe him as having the qualities of those whose place depends entirely on the good opinions of others. Did you feel that President Kennedy and people around him knew the type of person, in effect, they were getting when they appointed Dean Rusk? Do you think there were surprises or do you think this was specifically the type of person they were looking for?

KRAFT: I can't really answer that question. I've heard views of people who were involved, but they were retrospective and I really can't answer the question.

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I think that, looking back, one can see that they got what, whether they knew it or not, they were looking for.

STEWART: But you had no definite indication from anyone at that time?

KRAFT: Sure, I got definite indications around that time, or at least a little bit later, from Dick Goodwin, but Dick had been involved in fights with Dean Rusk. The only.... Let me see, what did I get? I did get some indication from some people that.... Well, early on Bowles told me his whole story with Rusk. I tended to write that off very much. I did get from Ted Sorensen the impression that he felt that Rusk was someone who was trying to prove how tough he was by leaning over to favor the military. But most of what I got was from Goodwin, Schlesinger [Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr.], and Galbraith [John Kenneth Galbraith] and I'd identify that as probably a single source.

STEWART: Did you ever have any indication that Rusk would have left in the second term?

KRAFT: Nope, none that I would regard as reliable at all. I had later heard that Rusk had accepted in 1965 the post of president of George Washington University, but I've never been able to confirm that.

STEWART: I never heard that. How often did you see the President during the three years?

KRAFT: Very infrequently. On formal interviews, I saw him, I think, twice in his office. I saw him the first, I guess, the first night we came down—or the first week or so that we came down to Washington, we went to a party and he saw me and talked to me and talked to my wife. Then we saw him at a party for Tish Baldrige [Letitia Baldrige]. I'd just begun doing my weekly newspaper column, and he told me he liked that a great deal, that it was a good column. I think that's about.... I remember I went in to see him a couple of times alone. And I think that was about it. None of these were occasion of any moment. I saw him, I remember, once at a reception for I can't remember what, I think it was for Atlantic Union or something

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like that. I can't even remember what the substance of our discussions were.

STEWART: Of any of the two...

KRAFT: The private interviews. I can't. It seems to me that one had something to do with his European trip, and I'd been one of a few journalists who was in favor of it. I know he sent one of my columns over to the Attorney General [Robert F. Kennedy], who I gather had raised some questions about the wisdom of going abroad, but I can't even remember what. I had a regular trouble with the White House in that very often they would take credit for things that had come to one on one's own. I had that struggle, never with Pierre but with Bundy [McGeorge Bundy] occasionally. They rather liked to think that they did control the press, and I think it was a way for some of them to try and make points with the President.

STEWART: Then you would probably agree with the comments that he was extremely interested in the press in general?

KRAFT: Oh yes. Oh very, very much so. Oh very much so. I have no doubt about that. But basically, insofar as I saw the White House at all, it was largely through Sorensen whom I got to know in the campaign and came and visited with us, who was extremely discreet as I can remember.



STEWART: Did you feel that the President and others around him tended to overemphasize the influence of the press in general and certain writers in particular?

KRAFT: Sure.

STEWART: In influencing events?

KRAFT: Yes. I mean, I was a beneficiary of that over-emphasis, but yes it did seem to me that he did a great deal.

STEWART: They were just overconscious of who was writing what and so forth?

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KRAFT: Yes, very, very conscious. But I must say I remember one time when Feldman called me up to bawl me out about a column, and I shot back something to him about “Why don’t you say something once in awhile about a column you like?” Which he then acknowledged was a just.... I think a lot of it.... I mean, I just don’t have the sensation of having a great deal to do.... I think I know more about—I’ve seen President Johnson much more than I saw President Kennedy. I have the sensation that I have a better grasp of what’s going on politically inside the White House than I did then, although I knew the people better then.

STEWART: It seems to me, didn’t you mention in your book that this personal relationship of journalists to the people at the White House was one of the problems of the Washington press in general?

KRAFT: My view of this is that this is bound to happen or it’s going to happen more and more and more and the healthy relationship is a kind of in and out relationship where some portion of the press corps will have these relationships and another portion will be left out. I don’t think that you pass a self denying ordinance for the whole press corps. I think that what you do is get a balance that’s achieved by some people being in and some people being out and a general turnover that way. I think these efforts to achieve retrospective virginity are really pretty ridiculous. As someone who has been in and who is now not in, I’m not sure that it makes all that much difference. When you’re not in, you’re free to do some things that you wouldn’t think of doing when you are in. I would suspect that it balances out.

STEWART: Over a long period of time.

KRAFT: Well, I was never that closely in, but I suspect that I probably knew Sorensen as well as any other journalist and was as friendly with him.

STEWART: Is there anything really significant that you feel you could point to as a

contrasting feature between the two administrations as far as their relationships with the press in general?

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KRAFT: Oh yes. I think that there was a deliberate effort on the part of the Kennedy Administration to communicate through the press the President's own engagement in the substantive problems that he faced. There was no doubt that he was the one who was making the decisions. They didn't—at least with me anyhow—they didn't play games. They didn't try to pretend that it was somebody else. I think that there is not this deliberate effort to show the President's personal engagement in all these problems. Rather these things got deliberately fuzzed over most of the time. It's only retrospectively that a success is claimed, but there's no sense of the President struggling with the problems. I would say that's a critical difference. I would say *the* critical difference.

STEWART: I'm jumping around a little bit, but you also had a chapter, of course, or an article in your book on McGeorge Bundy, and you stressed his flexibility in the article. Do you feel this was something that Kennedy particularly admired in people? Do you feel this was one of bonds, so to speak, that helped them to get along so well?

KRAFT: Yes, I would think.... Look, I think you can be a good deal more precise than that. I think that there were two elements that probably favored that relationship. The Kennedys, it seemed to me, are celebrity collectors, and Bundy was a celebrity so that was one important element. But another important element was that the President I think felt embarrassed by a lot of these heated, old-fashioned, political and moral arguments, and he wanted, if he possibly could, to translate these onto another level. So that instead of an adversary relationship, instead of the.... He liked to promote a dialogue to use a phrase that was very in at that point. So that instead of having an argument bounded by an affirmative and a contradiction, he would get everyone around on one side looking at how you accomplished it. He wanted to translate what had been traditional moral and political arguments into technical arguments. Now that is what Bundy did. Bundy was very able to do that, is able to do that, and it's one of the things that McNamara [Robert S. McNamara] did. I was an intense partisan of that point of view, and I guess I still am, but I must say I have some doubts. Walter Heller [Walter Wolfgang Heller] did that, too. You see, they took these traditional arguments and translated them

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into untraditional, technical arguments—and to some extent found new solutions. But I wonder when.... And in that sense they reduced the myths to realities. I must say, looking back now, I wonder how really successful this was. Maybe you could say that it was something that was successful for President Kennedy but that couldn't be successful for other people. I would say, looking back now, that it's a legitimate question to wonder whether

President Eisenhower, for all the crudity of his arguments, didn't control the military rather more than Secretary McNamara for all the brilliance and virtue of his arguments.

STEWART: What about Kennedy's decision to buck, as you call them, the "never-again" club, especially in Viet Nam?

KRAFT: Well, I wouldn't, no I wouldn't.... I wonder how much that was a Kennedy decision. I think that that was an outlook that was particularly congenial to a certain group—to Harriman, to Forrestal [Michael V. Forrestal], and to Hilsman [Roger Hilsman]. I think that for a brief period they were able to hold the President over on their side. They had one big triumph which was the landing in the fall of 1962 in Thailand. I don't think they ever were really able to stamp what they were doing—and I guess this would be the case I would make against all of the people who tried to translate moral arguments into technical ones—they were never able to stamp what they were doing on the public consciousness, so that they didn't leave a clear sense of what the right policy was. They were there, they left, and much of what they did got washed out. Now you have the same old moralistic arguments about a tax increase or a tax decrease. You have the same—you know, for all of McNamara's decimal points you have the same kind of training that went on in the Eisenhower Administration. So I myself wonder about the durability—the durability of the approach, I don't wonder at all about the durability of the accomplishment. I guess I would, in retrospect—you see, I argued in my last book that the most important thing about the Kennedy Administration was this approach. I wonder how much of that approach endures.

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STEWART: This probably ties in with what I guess will be my final question. What particular problems do you think historians will have with the Kennedy Administration or with the career of John Kennedy? What are the major unanswered questions right now that you feel people are going to be struggling with in ten or fifteen years?

KRAFT: I think the Nassau problem is going to be a real problem, how he happened to do that, what effect that settlement had on his relations with the Germans, on his relations with the Soviet Union, on his relations with the French, what impact it had on the proliferation problem. Nassau, I think, will be a very, very difficult matter to settle. My impression watching them at the time was that the success of the Cuban Missile Crisis went to their heads, and they were spitballing all the way down to Nassau and came up with a settlement that really didn't work out very well, and they were in the process of beginning to unwind it when the President was assassinated. But Nassau, I would say, was a very, very severe problem.

What he would have done about Viet Nam I think is a real problem. My own strong impression—I just don't see him having gotten in this deep. But I can't prove that.

I think that another problem would be to what extent he was responsible for the pathbreaking legislation that was passed. It is my strong impression that he was responsible

for the tax bill and for the civil rights bill in '64. I think both of those were going through just the way they went through. But I think that's going to be a critical issue.

I think the issue of where he was going to go—he'd opened up some maneuvering room with the Soviet Union. He had some momentum because of the test ban. Where he would have gone with that I think is a very important and interesting question, although it's possible that he might not have gone anywhere. It's possible that the fall of Khrushchev [Nikita Sergeyevich Khrushchev] overtook whatever progress was possible. I just don't know. I think that he was beginning to get control of the military and was beginning to move very, very strongly into the area of peace. I think that many of the... Well, if you want to erase all this, this is all just opinion. I don't know. There are areas that I think will be of interest.

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STEWART: Okay, unless there's anything else, I'm out of questions.

KRAFT: I think that covers about what I have, too.

STEWART: Okay, thank you.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

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