

John Seigenthaler Oral History Interview – JFK #4, 2/23/1966
Administrative Information

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Biographical Note

Seigenthaler was aide to Robert F. Kennedy during the 1960 Presidential campaign and Administrative Assistant to the Attorney General, Department of Justice (1961). This interview focuses on the relationship between the Attorney General's office and the FBI, minority employment in the Department of Justice, Hickory Hill Seminars and Robert F. Kennedy's 1962 state visits, among other issues.

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John Seigenthaler

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John Seigenthaler
JFK #4

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Fourth Oral History Interview

with

John Seigenthaler

February 23, 1966
Nashville, Tennessee

By Ronald J. Grele

For the John F. Kennedy Library

[SESSION IV, TAPE VI]

GRELE: What were the relations like between the Attorney General's office and the FBI?

SEIGENTHALER: Well, after we went over, the Attorney General [Robert F. Kennedy] was interested in having good relations with J. Edgar Hoover and the FBI. Shortly after we went over, I had a number of FBI men – a number of former FBI men – who came to me and made all sorts of charges about Mr. Hoover. They said, for example, that Mr. Hoover had employed FBI men to help build a house, that they served as his valets and

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his personal servants and his lackeys, and that this had resulted in a number of FBI men leaving the Department of Justice. I said that I thought that it was very interesting. I didn't give any of them any encouragement. I simply said that I'd bring this to the Attorney General's attention. I did. He said that J. Edgar Hoover was completely honest; that he thought that in any organization over a long period you're going to have some dissidence and that there were some people who no doubt thought these things were true, but that he knew from first-hand experience Hoover was honest; that he'd been offered many jobs outside the

government; that his father, at one point, had offered him a hundred thousand dollars a year to get into a position out of government and that Hoover had declined that; that he thought Hoover was a dedicated public servant; and that he didn't have any desire to do anything that

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would question his integrity. This was really before he was sworn in as Attorney General. After he was sworn in as Attorney General, he asked me if I would talk to Hoover and Carmine Bellino. I went over one day and did talk to Hoover. Mr. Hoover indicated that he was glad that the Attorney General had accepted the job and then talked about newspapers. He rambled on for about a half an hour, and nothing very interesting came out of that, but it gave me insight into Mr. Hoover's personality. I thought he was a very talkative person and also a very interesting person. Subsequent to that, maybe three or four months afterward, stories began to appear in the press that a disagreement had developed between the Attorney General and Mr. Hoover. I don't know what caused this. Ed Guthman [Edwin O. Guthman] and I had the feeling that all releases by the FBI should be coordinated through the press office of the Department of

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Justice, and that procedure was implemented. Guthman worked very closely with Deke DeLoach [Cartha D. "Deke" DeLoach], who was Hoover's public information director and who was a very able fellow. Courtney Evans was assigned to be the personal liaison between the Attorney General and the FBI and Mr. Hoover. I thought the arrangement went rather well. The FBI cooperated. There were difficulties and differences of opinion at times, perhaps about how public information might be handled or what should be published. Byron White had some reservations about some of the effect of Hoover's statements – or the effect of FBI statements – on potential juries. Guthman and I agreed that there was nothing from the newspaper standpoint that raised such a question. It would only create problems for the FBI. Nothing really serious ever happened. However, stories began to appear in the press that a great difference of

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opinion existed between J. Edgar Hoover and Robert Kennedy. Now, I wouldn't say that they were close by any means, but I thought that they were, especially in the beginning, affable.

An obvious campaign to keep Mr. Hoover as director of the FBI started all across the country, and letters literally poured in from all around the country.

GRELE: Was this a spontaneous campaign or was it felt that...

SEIGENTHALER: Well, no. I think it was spontaneous on the part of some people who read the press stories, but many letters from a given city, for example, were identical to other letters from that city, maybe from another county in that same state. So there was some coordinated effort. I read them until I got sick of

it. We replied to all of them; said that the Attorney General had great confidence in Mr. Hoover and so did the President [John F. Kennedy], that their relationship was

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good and that there was no intent, that these reports were in error. I never really knew where the reports came from, but just one thing comes to my mind. One day's reading, I read these letters, and there were four letters from people in the same family. But I'll say this; it produced a mountain of mail – the support to keep Mr. Hoover. And what was so interesting to me was there was no effort to get rid of him. Nobody would dare to get rid of him. President Kennedy had named J. Edgar Hoover the first thing, as I said yesterday, to remain in that job and the reason he did – one of the reasons he did – was because Bob Kennedy advised him to. And one of the people Bob Kennedy went to see before he took the job as Attorney General was J. Edgar Hoover. So I thought they had a pretty good relationship. After the President's death, I did get the impression from people I talked with that Hoover was

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definitely interested in who was President of the United States and went to Lyndon Johnson with a number of rumors and other things. An interesting thing about Hoover, I thought, was many times when there would be a story in the press criticizing Hoover a memo would come in within a day or two, which would say something like this – it would be addressed to the Attorney General – “I'm sure you saw in the press yesterday in the *Des Moines Register and Tribune*, or maybe you didn't see, an attack on the Director of the FBI.” And then it would quote that article, or maybe it wouldn't. And then it would say, “The author of this article is So and So. This is the same individual who...” and then he would recite that he'd been arrested for driving while drunk in Mobile in 1928 – just anything they had on the guy. And then it would wind up with an assurance from the Director that this was not so. Now,

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I may be exaggerating the background, but it was obvious that, whenever he could, he'd show that those people who were attacking him had some ulterior motive; that they were either left-wingers or.... I guess it was a natural reaction to defend himself.

GRELE: Did he send up the Fred Cook articles in the *New Republic*?

SEIGENTHALER: It seems to me the Fred Cook articles came after I left, didn't they? When would that have been?

GRELE: It was syndicated in the *Post* [*New York Post*]. I don't recall offhand when they came out.

SEIGENTHALER: This was the book, *The FBI Nobody Knows*, or something? Yes, I

remember. I guess maybe I was still there. I think he probably did. They don't stand out in my mind. There were a number of them. There were several memos from the Director over a period – not necessarily of a writer; maybe it was somebody who made a speech. Somebody in the civil

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rights movement might say, "The FBI is consorting with police officials in Southern states." I don't remember who said this but it was said, "Because of their arrangement among law enforcement officers in the Southern states, they are not doing a good job on civil rights investigations."

GRELE: Was this true?

SEIGENTHALER: I think it probably was. It certainly was true that they had this very close relationship with law enforcement officers throughout the South to investigate crime. They had built this relationship up over twenty years, and it was a natural thing that you would expect. Now most of these Southern officers – or many of them – not most of them, but some of them at least, were involved in Klan activities. And all of them were controlled by the power structure in these Southern towns who didn't want any change and thought these Negroes were

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outside agitators. And yes, I think it did happen. I don't think there's any question that it happened. But I would say that it changed. I'd say that Kennedy required that it change and that Hoover accepted that requirement. I would say, over a period of time, the attitude in the FBI over a period of a year changed, I thought, dramatically. There was a good deal of complaining, I think. I don't believe they liked this because it was making it more difficult for them to control crime in these Southern States, they say. I remember the big question came up about how many Negroes Hoover had in the FBI. He always said, "Well, I just don't keep files on it." And he didn't keep files on it, but there were no Negroes in the FBI. Well, There may have been some reasons for that, you know. As undercover agents, they had no desire for them. Somebody said he had a chauffeur who was a Negro.

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Well, the first time I began to get into this.... Shortly after the Attorney General came to the Department of Justice, he began to make tours of the divisions. Maybe at 1 o'clock in the afternoon he'd come into my office where I was seated and say, "Let's go see what's going on." He'd get up and we'd just go visit the divisions, go from office to office. He'd go in and shake hands, "I'm Bob Kennedy. What are you working on?" He'd meet the secretaries, and this fellow would have a case in front of him maybe – or he wouldn't have – and they'd sit down and talk about what the case was he was working on, what the facts were, maybe a five minute discussion. He'd say, "I've got five minutes. Can you give me a

brief summary of the case you're working on." They seldom ended in five minutes. I remember one day he walked in on a fellow who was reading a paperback novel. [Laughter] I never saw

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a fellow who was more embarrassed. He was even more embarrassed by the time the Attorney General got through talking to him. He was a lawyer in one of the divisions, and his office was back around the corner where you'd never thought you'd find it, you know. He was sitting there with his feet up on his desk reading this paperback novel. He was so embarrassed. The Attorney General let him know that he thought he was wasting time. The fellow came up and apologized. He thought he was going to lose his job, but he didn't. He'd been there for some years. But generally, the people were hard at work. I think the Attorney General was greatly impressed with the fact that they were hard at work, that they knew their cases, and that they were working on their cases. I think again, over a period of a year, you got the definite impression that moral built up, not just because he took an interest in what was going on down

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in these divisions, but also because at the lower level there began to be the feeling that if a case came up and it had merit, there was no string going to be pulled somewhere along the way to knock it out. And that happened again and again. Those cases came up. I mentioned two of them yesterday, the Chacharis and Keogh cases. The Chacharis case had been kicking around a long time, and everybody was afraid, I think, to bring it up because of Ray Madden. I don't know that, but I always suspected that. That's the first thing Ray Madden said when he came it. You know, "This thing's been investigated for eight years, and nobody's done a thing about it."

Now, to get back to the employment situation, one day we came back from this tour and Bob said to me, "Did anything occur to you as strange in our visit around to these offices?" I said, "Well, I'm impressed that

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everybody's working so hard." He said, "Yes, but did you see any Negroes?" I said, "Now that you mention it, I haven't." He said, "You get me a study of how many Negroes are working here." So I went to see Sal Andretta [Salvador A. Andretta], and we had about seven Negro lawyers in the whole Department of Justice, and the only one who had any rank at all was Macy O. Walker. All Negroes who were employed had custodial jobs; only a few secretaries. I believe – not eight lawyers – I believe it was eight Negroes in the entire Department of Justice. I can be wrong about that, but there's a written report on it that I made. I bumped into some problems with the FBI. I never thought I got a full reply from the FBI, but I got a full reply from everybody else. We got names and addresses. Then Bob, after telling his brother about it, how surprising it was, after all these years of talk about equal opportunity, that we had no

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Negroes there. Sal Andretta, who'd been there, of course, was so embarrassed about it he said, "Well, we just don't get any applications." Several people came in and said that they had applied.

Well, we wrote letters to the deans of all the law schools – Bob did. He wrote a letter to the dean of every law school in the United States. He said, "We're not seeking to give Negroes preference, but we're not getting any applications, and we want these young people to know that they will not be excluded because of their race. We're glad to have anybody in your school, but as you let the people in your school know that there are opportunities for them in the Department of Justice, will you please make a special effort to let Negroes know because we fear that over a long period they have been excluded." In June we got some applications, and we brought some Negroes in, a substantial number.

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GRELE: When you were in the Department of Justice, had the reports begun to come up from the FBI to the Attorney General? The reports on the private behavior of the officials in Washington?

SEIGENTHALER: Which officials?

GRELE: The President.

SEIGENTHALER: The President? Had they begun to come up?

GRELE: YES.

SEIGENTHALER: Had they started coming up?

GRELE: I don't know.

SEIGENTHALER: You mean had they started coming up at that time?

GRELE: Yes.

SEIGENTHALER: Which reports are you talking about? Yes, there were some reports that came up, but they were always reports that were second or third-hand. As I remember, the ones that I saw, they were always designed to infer that somebody was talking about the President, not that there was any validity to the charge. I

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mean there was one, for example, about somebody said he took a picture of JFK outside somebody's house, and that this was being circulated. Hoover sent that over not, as I remember it, to try to show that JFK had been there because the picture obviously, to me, it was not. At any rate, Hoover's effort, I thought, was to show the Attorney General that somebody was talking about his brother.

GRELE: What was the Attorney General's reaction to this?

SEIGENTHALER: He laughed. I remember one day Sam Rayburn called him about this business with the previous marriage. Rayburn was greatly concerned, had to talk to him, and it was a matter of great privacy and great confidence so Bob talked to him. He said, "Well, I don't want to talk to the President about this, but I want to tell you that we've got documented proof that the President was married." He

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said, "Well, what is it?" He said, "Well, there's a bibliography and somebody's family tree, and she says she married John Fitzgerald Kennedy at such and such a date." So Bob said, "Send it over, and I'll take a look at it," and he laughed. He said, "I don't believe there's anything to worry about." So he let Sam Rayburn [Samuel T. Rayburn] know he didn't think there was anything to worry about. And that passed.

GRELE: Were you at all involved with the Attorney General when he took on the special assignment of investigating the defense establishment after the Cuban missile crisis?

SEIGENTHALER: Yes, well, I was involved with him. I was involved with him only to this degree: he suddenly was not able to be at the office as much as he had been before. As a rule, he came in at 9:00, 9:30 in the morning and stayed till 7:00, 8:00, 9:00 at night. Now he came in late in the afternoon and stayed until maybe 9:00 or 10:00 at night. He was

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rarely able to make a staff luncheon, for example. He completely devoted his effort to that work.

GRELE: Did he ever comment to you on how effective he thought that committee was, and what the problems were?

SEIGENTHALER: He was greatly impressed with Taylor [Maxwell D. Taylor] – he was greatly impressed with everybody that worked on that committee.

GRELE: What did he feel were the problems of the defense establishment in the

Bay of Pigs?

SEIGENTHALER: Well, I think he felt it was just terribly bad intelligence.

GRELE: Anything further?

SEIGENTHALER: I think that's basically my impression of it, my memory of it.

GRELE: Moving on now, from the Justice Department. Earlier you mentioned ending the Hickory Hill Seminars. What were those, and why were they organized?

SEIGENTHALER: Well, I don't think I went to many of them.

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Did I say that I attended....

GRELE: You just mentioned them offhand. Why didn't you go to many of them?

SEIGENTHALER: I don't know. Maybe I was doing something else or something. Anytime I wanted to go, I was welcome, but I only remember two or three that I attended, and then I was on the periphery. Basically, it was an effort that he made to get the people in the Administration into a dialogue in a wide variety of subjects. He recognized that they had some of the great brains in the nation there. He thought I would be helpful to bring them together. The only comment I ever remember making to him was one night we were sitting out on the stairs just outside the door, and he came out right in the middle of it and said, "Don't you want to come in?" I said, "No, I'm more comfortable sitting right where I am. There's a great crowd inside. He said, "What do you think?"

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I said, "This should be on tape. You should have television cameras in there." He laughed.

Another time I remember, it seems to me that George Ball was there and he and Arthur [Arthur M. Schlesinger] – well, I'd rather not recall a memory – got into a discussion about, as I remember, about Southeast Asia. Did I mention the Security Council meeting I went to in which they talked about Laos?

GRELE: No.

SEIGENTHALER: Well, I guess it was the only Security Council meeting I ever attended, but I went over with him one day. He said, "Come on and go," so I

went. The discussion was Laos. Dulles [Alan W. Dulles] was into it. Dulles said he had some people that were in trouble. This was really at the critical time of the Laotian problem. There was a wide ranging discussion. The President called on many of the key people around the table. He asked Rusk [Dean Rusk] what he thought; he asked Dillon [C. Douglas Dillon]

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what he thought.

GRELE: What did they think?

SEIGENTHALER: Well, the general consensus was that it was a landlocked war, and you couldn't very well do much and that you were going to get hurt if you got into a landlocked war. That was generally the discussion. Dulles, I remember, was up at the board with a map, and he had this stick in his hand, and he was pointing this way and that way. And it was a pretty grim discussion. Halfway through – I was sitting behind Bob – I remember he sketched a little note. Maybe I wrote a note and handed it to him about something. Maybe he had a meeting or something, and did he want me to call? At any rate, he took the note and I have it somewhere. I don't know where it is. But he returned that note, and it said, "Now you know why I always have such a happy smile on my face." So we came out. At that time there was an investigation going on in New York into

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Adam Clayton Powell's tax problems. It seems to me we walked out on the front porch and he said, "That's why it's hard for me to concentrate on things like Adam Clayton Powell."

Shortly after that – my mind is wandering over a variety of things. This is interesting I think, a good story. Adam's tax problems were of great concern to Adam, and Louis Martin kept calling me about them. Adam Powell's former wife – I guess it was Hazel Scott, the singer; maybe that's not who, but anyway it was a singer, and she'd been to Europe – came back to town and she wanted to talk about Adam, and Adam knew she wanted to talk about him. So Louis Martin said, "Look, I've been handling this political contact. It looks like it's going to get sticky. What are you going to do about this?" After talking to the Attorney General, I said, "If she talks and the evidence sticks, his

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tail is going to the penitentiary." Louis, as always, took it like a real champion. But I'm sure he conveyed that to Adam. At any rate, things went along. She came in and talked. I guess Louis called me three or four or five times that day and I just didn't tell him anything. I told Bob, and he laughed about it. Late that afternoon we heard that she hadn't given them anything, but we still didn't tell Adam. In a couple of days we went over to Sam Rayburn's office for something to do with Sergeant York [Alvin York]. Sergeant York, as you know, had all sorts of tax problems himself. And there was an award. Joe Evans, a congressman

from Tennessee, was there. The effect of it was that we got Sergeant York administratively out of his tax problems and raised some money for him to pay off his debt and maybe to get him on his feet financially so he wouldn't have to die in disgrace. Bob wanted to participate in that

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although, again, he forced those who were involved to make sure that it was done within the framework of the law. We came out of the Speaker's office, and Powell was waiting to see him, I'm sure about some legislative matter. Bob ran into him, and they shook hands and he said, "How are you doing, Adam?" Adam said, "I don't know. How am I doing?" And Bob said, "I don't know," and he turned to me and said, "How is he doing?" I said, "I don't know. I haven't heard." Adam said, "Hell hath no fury like a woman scorned." And Bob laughed and passed on by him and turned around and said, "Pray for me, Adam." And he said, "I do," and we went on. It seems to me that Dave Broder [David S. Broder], a reporter, was standing there too, but he never reported it.

GRELE: What was the final resolution of Adam Clayton Powell's situation?

SEIGENTHALER: She just didn't have anything – she just

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wouldn't say anything. She gave them a lot of conversation, but nothing you could rely on.

GRELE: Back now to the Hickory Hill Seminars, you said George Ball and Arthur Schlesinger had some...

SEIGENTHALER: I really don't remember what that was about. It was a difference of opinion, but that was not unusual. You know, there was a general roundtable discussion across the table.

GRELE: How were they organized? Were they organized around a principle speaker or just general discussion?

SEIGENTHALER: No. My memory of it was that they just came in and.... I think sometimes, yes, they would have a particular discussion, and one person would head it up.

GRELE: Arthur Schlesinger in his book talks about the Hickory Hill Seminars in terms of the style of the New Frontier. Was it ever consciously thought of in these terms at the

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time?

SEIGENTHALER: Not consciously. I mean nobody thought, "This is another plank in the program of the New Frontier." I think it was simply that you had a number of industrious, energetic people who were involved and also that you had, as I said before some of the really great thinkers of the world. There's no question but what Bob himself initiated the idea and brought them together as he did in so many things. I mentioned that National Security Council meeting. I don't remember what the difference of opinion was, but there were two substantially different points of view, two different ideas. He remained silent throughout the meeting, and the President didn't call on him until the very end. They were almost getting up and ready to go, and the President said, "Do you have anything to say?" He then said, "Yes, I think within the next forty-eight hours we should

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get these two people together to talk about this subject and come up with a recommendation for us." And they did that.

I think he was a catalyst, brought these people together and.... He initiated the Hickory Hill Seminars. Before they were noticed, they were going on. There were several sessions before news of it leaked out.

GRELE: In that meeting of the National Security Council did you get the impression that the relationship that the President had hoped to establish when he'd talked to his brother about becoming Attorney General had indeed evolved?

SEIGENTHALER: That what?

GRELE: That the relationship that the President had hoped to establish when he chose his brother to be Attorney General had evolved.

SEIGENTHALER: Yes. Yes, but I had every reason to believe that before that meeting. God only knows how

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many times they talked about how many different things that nobody ever knew about. Everything from Cuba to Teddy's [Edward M. Kennedy] candidacy.

GRELE: Were you ever privy to any of the conversations concerning Ted Kennedy's candidacy?

SEIGENTHALER: Yes, I remember right after Eddie McCormack [Edward McCormack]

started hitting very hard – when did Teddy run?

GRELE: In 1962. He announced it in March or April.

SEIGENTHALER: Yes, that's right. McCormack began to hit hard – really rough stuff – and there was a push on. I had the feeling it was a push largely from members of the Mafia, to hit back. I remember Bob talking to the President and to Teddy on the telephone about it, saying, "Hell, don't do it. He now is in the posture of a South Boston battler, and you've got the posture of a statesman. And I wouldn't get into it with him." And so he didn't. Once again, I thought that was that

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same political judgment: "Don't run the *New York Times* editorial. Don't hit Eisenhower on playing golf." I mean it just was perfectly obvious to him that good political judgment came to the fore. You know, sure they were pushing you, sure they wanted you to hit him back, sure they want you to claim that he's somebody's nephew and that he's not his own man. You know, you're saying what you're going to say. Keep on saying it. Keep it on a high plane, keep it on a positive plane. Ignore his taunts. And that's what he did.

GRELE: In the spring of 1962, you took a good will trip abroad with the Attorney General. Why was that trip taken? Where did you go?

SEIGENTHALER: Around the world. Was this the trip around the world? What was the month? What was the year?

GRELE: It was announced in February and in April...

SEIGENTHALER: Of '62?

GRELE: Yes, '62.

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SEIGENTHALER: '62. Well, sometime in 1961 we made a trip to the Ivory Coast. The Attorney General headed the delegation from the United States government. The State Department was sort of looking around for a figure to go to see Houphouet-Boigny [Felix Houphouet-Boigny]. Did I get into this before?

GRELE: No.

SEIGENTHALER: Houphouet-Boigny is really a dynamic African leader, and they wanted to pay a tribute to him. So we went to the Ivory Coast. The visit was a smashing success. The State Department had not really expected that he would do the job he did, I don't think. But he went and he did a good job.

“Soapy” Williams [G. Mennen Williams] went. John Johnson, the owner of Johnson Publications, *Jet* and *Ebony*, went and was a delegate. It was a good visit.

GRELE: Was this just a visit, or were there policy issues to be discussed at the same time?

SEIGENTHALER: Well, I think there were some policy issues

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to be discussed. This was French West Africa, and all of the former French West African colonies were sending representatives, and they came from all over Africa. It was a good opportunity for him to be exposed to them – for the President’s brother to be exposed to them. It was a good will mission, but it also involved some policy talks with Houphouet-Boigny. I think the State Department was elated with the outcome of that visit. The next year when he decided he wanted to go to Japan, he let the State Department know that he was going to go to Japan and the State Department arranged it.

GRELE: Why did he want to go to Japan?

SEIGENTHALER: Well.... Did I mention Doctor Hosono [Gungii Hosono] in the earlier tape? Gungii Hosono is a Japanese. When President Kennedy went to Japan as a young congressman back in the 1940s and arrived there in Japan, he was just one of a number of visiting dignitaries. The

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embassy there was faced with the problem of taking care of many dignitaries. Gungii Hosono sort of took the President under his wing, wrapped his arm around him. He took this young congressman and showed him Japan as it was growing and really was extremely kind. After the President came back to this country, he never forgot it, and they exchanged letters and exchanged visits. On Inauguration Day, as they were watching the inaugural parade, Mr. Hosono was across the street. The President sent over and got him, and he came up and stood in the observation stand for a period with the President while the parade passed. During the campaign, Gungii Hosono arranged for the former Japanese commander who split PT 109 in half to send the President a letter of best wishes.

Well, after the election and after the Attorney General accepted a position in the government, Gungii Hosono began to come in to

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see him. He’d come in every time he had a chance, and every time any Japanese came to the United States, he had to come by and urge the Attorney General to come to Japan. The Attorney General said, “Yes, I’ll come. I’ll come. I’ll come.” Finally it got down to, “Well,

when are you going to come?" and he agreed to go. My memory of it is that it was February of '62. We must have spent the month of February of 1962 on that trip.

GRELE: Why was Mrs. Donald Wilson asked to go with you?

SEIGENTHALER: She was supposed to do a story for the *Ladies Home Journal* or *Saturday Evening Post*. It was a very interesting trip. I went over in advance to Japan and Indonesia. It ultimately turned into a trip that included visits also all around the world – to Berlin, Bonn, Paris, Rome.

GRELE: Did the Attorney General have any instructions from the President?

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SEIGENTHALER: Oh sure, they talked about it at length before he went. I'll get into that. The group in Japan formed what was called the RFK Welcoming Committee, and his visit there, I thought, was the most fantastic welcome he ever received anywhere. As you'll remember, it had only been a year and a half before that that Hagerty [James C. Hagerty] had been stopped and that Eisenhower [Dwight D. Eisenhower] cancelled his trip, and there was some fear that Zengakuren was going to create problems for him. But the RFK Committee was....the first time I ever saw them it was like walking into political headquarters. We agreed to go, and I came over to advance the trip and arrange the schedules. I came over maybe the first week in January and then went back and came again. I went to Japan and Indonesia. But I walked into this hotel office, a room in this hotel, to meet with these fellows. The only picture of Robert Kennedy they had was one that we had sent them some

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time back and they had reproduced it. It was an awful picture, and they had blown it up, and it was all over the wall: Welcome RFK Committee. I sat down with them and told them what kind of schedule the Attorney General wanted; one that kept him busy, one that got him out meeting the people, one that gave him exchange with students, with labor groups, one that paid courtesy calls on officials of government, one that put him in touch with the future leaders of Japan, one that put him in touch with the power structure of Japan; that he wanted to be kept busy. As you know, the Japanese are a very formal people, and they stand on ceremony. This trip, in that regard, was precedent breaking. I remember the first thing I said to them was, "Now what do you want Mr. Kennedy to do while he's here?" And they said, "We want him to tell us about the making of a president." I said, "Well, he will tell all of you about

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the making of a president." They said, "We want him to tell Japan about it." I said, "Well, you get him in touch with the people. He wants to meet the people." And they did a great job.

They arranged for him to visit every segment of society; ceremonial teas, religious places of worship, skating rinks, wrestling classes. It was a fantastic experience. He did pay the official visits of state. Then he went on to Indonesia. While he was in Japan, as you know, he was widely heckled at one of the universities.

GRELE: I was going to ask if this was the trip that he debated the Japanese students?

SEIGENTHALER: Yes.

GRELE: Did he have any afterthoughts on that debate?

SEIGENTHALER: Well, maybe I should put it in the context in which it occurred. There were two speeches that day as I remember it. Perhaps the first one was the day before. At any rate, he spoke first to a group at Tokyo University, I think

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it was – maybe it was fifteen thousand kids. It was a massive arena – tiers straight up – and the place was packed. These kids were given a Japanese translation of the speech before he began. There's nothing like hearing fifteen thousand people turn the page at the same time, and the first time it happened, he stopped. He couldn't tell what it was, a massive ripple. At any rate, he spoke and he was applauded repeatedly, throughout the speech and after the speech, and it was a tremendous visit.

Then he went to Waseda, which is a smaller place, and they had an auditorium – really sort of a small theater type place that seated a thousand, twelve hundred people, and it was crammed. The aisles were jam packed. In that crowd there were about fifty or seventy-five members of the Zengakuren. All that morning and all the day before the CIA people and the embassy people began to get these reports that there was going to be a

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demonstration, that this was going to be the big place. We went into the place, and immediately there were cheers. And after the cheers died these kids who'd been taunting throughout continued to taunt: "Kennedy go home," "Free Okinawa." He began to speak, and they continued to jeer. The fifty or seventy-five kids were well placed all over the auditorium wherever there was a microphone. The television cameras had been set up in advance, and this was all on live nationwide television. Wherever these microphones had been set up these kids had stationed themselves. You can listen to the thing now and hear, right in the middle, the furor, "Kennedy go home," "Go home, Bobby." At any rate he got up to speak and this one kid down front – a skinny little Japanese boy, tense, shouting, shouting, shouting, screaming at the top of his lungs, really red-faced – just completely wrought up emotionally. So Bob went

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over to him and reached out his hand and pulled him up on the platform. He took him over to the microphone and said, "I'm glad to see you. I wonder if we couldn't see if you have a question you'd like to ask. I know that you must believe in free exchange and have something to say. Perhaps you could make your statement and ask me a question and then give me an opportunity to answer." So the kid launched into about a ten minute tirade against everything; every Communist assault he could think of on the United States government: imperialism, atomic bombs, nuclear proliferation, the whole bit. Finally, they got so loud Bob said, "Do you have a question?" And he really didn't have a question, but he stopped talking. Bob took the microphone and began to answer point by point that the kid had made to give the United States point of view, and suddenly somebody pulled the light switch, and all the power went off. Fortunately, a

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fellow named Osborne who was there had brought along a bull horn. He gave it to Bob, and Bob spent the next little while speaking to them through this bull horn. There was a delay of about twenty minutes before we got the bull horn while we were just waiting for the lights to come back on. At any rate, his speech was heard and well received. At the end of it a cheerleader jumped up on the platform and led the entire student body in the signing of the school song. He stood in front of them and went through these wild gestures, and all of us stood there behind him. One of these wild gestures caught Ethel [Ethel Skakel Kennedy] in the pit of her stomach – really a terribly vicious blow – and there are films of it. You look at the films, and you see this blow – clubbed her right in the stomach. She doubled up, stood up immediately, smiled and went on. She's a real champion. A few days later we were at this Karate exhibition, and

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she got hurt again, very slightly. Somebody shook hands with her, and she went to shake hands and wound up getting her finger bent. But she has that great facility to bounce back and to smile....

This pretty well killed, I thought, the Zengakuren's effort to spoil the visit. Bob's guts, his obvious willingness to let this boy talk – the Japanese are a very fair-minded people, and it showed, came through. They didn't like what had happened and, as I say, they were so popular there. Fantastic crowds would turn out all along rural roads. There'd be this crowd of Zengakuren, maybe ten or fifteen, standing out there with pickets about Okinawa and atomic weapons, and they'd yell, "Go home, Kennedy, Go home, Kennedy," as we'd come by. Then one of them would yell, "Where's Ethel, Bobby?" so that we had the feeling we were even getting through to them. It was a tremendous visit. I think, looking

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back on it, he felt that the trip was a great success; that that particular meeting at Waseda was difficult but that it had helped make the trip a success. He met with all sorts of people there, a complete cross-section, and the members of the RFK Committee were tremendously elated over the results of the tour. Reischauer [Edwin O. Reischauer], a great ambassador, really worked terribly hard to make the trip a success and told him he was elated. He told him that it was really a major victory, in Reischauer's eyes, for the United States government, that whole visit.

GRELE: From Japan you went to Indonesia.

SEIGENTHALER: We went to Indonesia.

GRELE: Did you meet with Sukarno [Achmed Sukarno]?

SEIGENTHALER: We met with Sukarno twice.

GRELE: What was the reaction, both ways?

SEIGENTHALER: I was not present at the first meeting, sort of a welcoming. We had planned to go to

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Indonesia as a guest of the Attorney General of Indonesia, Mr. Gunawan, but instead we went as a guest of Sukarno. Halfway through, Sukarno elevated it to a state visit, to a presidential visit. There were several reasons for this. One, I think he probably was reading the press and saw that this brother of the President deserved special attention. Two, Sukarno didn't want anything to happen in Indonesia that would embarrass the brother of the President. When we went in the "Kennedy go home" signs had been painted off all the walls. You could see them only in a few places. The difference between the two visits was just fantastic. Indonesia is a dead country; no dissent, no opposition. There was not then. I hear there is now, of course.

Sukarno welcomed him the first day. I didn't attend that meeting. They had a discussion and talked about many things. One

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of the things they talked about was a fellow named Pope [Allen L. Pope]. Do you know about this?

GRELE: No.

SEIGENTHALER: Pope had been held prisoner by the Indonesian government because he had flown an airplane that had been on bombing runs during the

attempted coup to overthrow Sukarno. There was a strong feeling on the part of Sukarno that he was an agent of the CIA, and so he was in jail. There was some fear that his wife was going to create some problems for him. Sukarno, when he had been to the United States, had told President Kennedy he would release him, that he would release Pope. The first day when Bob went in to talk to him and had this meeting with him and talked to him about Pope, Sukarno had been noncommittal on that. He did invite the Attorney General to see his daughter dance that night. We went to that affair. We stayed in the palace.

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The details of that visit Bob has written about at length in his book *Just Friends and Brave Enemies*. He said in there that he thought Sukarno was a benevolent dictator who was trying to do the best he could, but that there were major problems, major limitations, and that in many ways he was not moving as he should. The second meeting with Sukarno I attended.

GRELE: At the early stages?

SEIGENTHALER: Yes. Sukarno not only had welcomed Bob, but he

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had also shown him through the palace and had been very friendly with him. Sukarno went out of his way to be friendly. He did invite us to this dance with his daughter. His daughter danced for us, and they had two or three other girls who danced for us. One of the fellows who was sitting on the back row – there were three rows of people, I was sitting on the second row, and Ethel and Sukarno and Bob were on the front row. Somebody who was sitting behind me kept telling the visiting newsmen that the first girl who danced was the girl who had gone with the President some place out of the country last year, and this one was the one who was going out of the country with him next year. I had the impression that Sukarno was not there so much to see his daughter dance as he might have been to see these other girls dance. His daughter did dance, and she was an attractive little girl.

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At one point, Sukarno showed us through the palace and showed us the only picture he ever painted. He said he had painted it. Most of the pictures on the walls were of naked women. I had the feeling that he just had a dirty mind and that he didn't really care a hell of a lot about his country and I think generally – he may have expressed it in nicer terms but perhaps not – that that was the feeling the Attorney General had. Among other things Sukarno invited us later to a breakfast at Bohor.

At any rate, the visit went on and their relationships were.... Let's come back to their relationship in just a minute because I've got another event I want to tell about. It was the same sort of schedule that Bob had planned in Japan, but, of course, you go in with labor

leaders in Indonesia, and labor leaders really didn't give a damn about what the people were getting. They were worried about what the

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government wanted them to do. They didn't ask any questions. There was no vigor in any of their programs or in their attitudes. We visited among the conversation people and talked with them. The student groups were pretty good. Everywhere we went there was a massive array of armed soldiers, shoving people out of the way, getting them back, and Bob was very anxious to meet the people and let them know that he was friendly. He would reach out to them whenever he had a chance, even over the shoulders of the soldiers and over their bayonets at times, and it got across. I must say that by the end of the week they were really going out of their way to embrace him, and they recognized him. He went all over the place. He went out to a road project where men were working for sixty cents a week and made the effort. They'd wait to see him. He visited a bookstore and visited all around town – really made the

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effort. At any rate, we were going into this meeting at one of the schools surrounded by soldiers, but visitors were jammed outside the place.

[END TAPE VI, SIDE I.]

[BEGIN TAPE VI, SIDE II]

SEIGENTHALER: Going into the auditorium, suddenly this little wraith of a kid – tall, slender boy, broke through the lines of people and, standing at a distance of about fifteen feet, took a full windup and let fly a piece of hard shelled fruit, which hit Bob on the end of the nose. It was thrown full force – I mean, he looked like Bob Feller. Immediately, the police grabbed him, twisted both arms behind him, turned him upside down and rushed him out to a car. We never saw or heard of him again. Bob told Gunawan, the Attorney General, that he hoped that they wouldn't do anything to harm him.

 I was confident that we were going to get

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bombed in there at that speech, and throughout the speech, I sat scanning the crowd. I knew at any moment they were going to get up and throw it. He never flinched. The only time he took a backward step was when it hit him; it knocked him back just a step. He turned around to me and said, "Did you see that little s.o.b.?" I said, "Yes," and he sort of put his eyes up in the top of his head and he said, "Whew." And so we went on in, and he spoke. Never once could you tell – could anyone who was in that audience tell. Several people from various agencies of the United States government were there, and they said afterwards that they had no idea of what had happened outside. I thought he had demonstrated great courage that day.

At any rate, many things happened on that trip. But that was the only manifestation of opposition other than an occasional sign that you could see has just been scrubbed off. It looked to me as if

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Sukarno had had them scrub the signs off so that you could see that he'd scrubbed them off, but you could still see what they said.

At any rate, the second meeting with Sukarno at the palace was an interesting meeting. Those present were Ambassador Jones [Howard Jones], Bob, I was there, and Juranda, Subandrio [Raden Subandrio] and Sukarno. It was a very formal sort of meeting, friendly, and they discussed various matters they had talked about before. Sukarno was interested in aid, of course. After they talked about everything that Sukarno wanted to talk about, and after the Attorney General had thanked him for his kindness and courtesy during the trip, after they had this discussion about the problems of Indonesia and Bob mentioned such things as letting some capital come into the country and to help build up Indonesia, Bob raised the question about Pope, which I knew they had discussed at their first meeting and which Sukarno said that he would think about.

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There was a long pause and Sukarno said, in effect, "Well, let me tell you, Mr. Attorney General, you're just going to have to let me handle this in my own way." Bob said, "Well, Mr. President, that's fine, but could you give me some indication so that I might tell President Kennedy that you do have in mind standing by what you've already told him; that you are going to let this fellow out? I had hoped that I'd be able to tell him that you would let him out a week from now, two weeks from now, or two months from now. I recognize that you don't want to let him out while I'm here because it would look like we worked out some sort of a deal, and I don't want to have anybody think that about you or about me." But he said, "I would think that you could tell me something so that I might tell the President."

Sukarno sat there, and there was a long pause, and he said, "Mr. Attorney General, you're going to have to

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leave this to me to handle in my own way and I will handle it in my own way." He [Bob] said, "Could you tell me whether you're going to stand by your promise to the President of the United States?" and his voice was getting a little testy about this point. Sukarno repeated his statement, "You're going to have to depend on me to handle this in my own way."

I never really had the feeling that Bob was angry because I know him so well, but I had the distinct impression that Sukarno thought he was angry. I would say that he did react as if Sukarno was going back on his word to the President of the United States, and he told him. He said, and again, I'm just paraphrasing this, "I'll just say to you, Mr. President, that it is extremely disappointing to me to hear that you're not willing to say that you're going to stand by your word to the President of the United States. You told him

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so many months ago, that you would do this. You were a guest in our country when that happened.” And his voice was rising steadily, and he was just about to unload on Sukarno as nobody ever unloaded on Sukarno, I’m sure, in the history of Sukarno’s reign as president of Indonesia. He said, “Now I’m just asking you if you’re going to stand by your word to my brother. You told him your going to do this. Are you going to do it?” And Sukarno gave him the same answer – generally the same answer.

Bob explained to him that this was a very difficult political situation with potential problems; that the United States government wanted to be helpful to Indonesia; that the United States government recognized that Indonesia had great problems and that we could be helpful; that we weren’t tying any strings to anything we did for the Indonesian government. The Kennedy Administration didn’t want to do that. But this man had a family and

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this man’s family could create problems in the Congress, should she or others in his family seek to create those problems. “Now I’ve told you that this is a possibility, and I would think that you would have some interest in that and that you would try to resolve this matter as quickly as possible before that happens,” he said. “But the thing that I can’t understand; if you take all of that aside – our national friendship, the possibility of problems, the potential that we can help you if we don’t have these problems, that we might not be able to do that if this becomes a great national issues in the United States – take all those things aside, I don’t see how you can separate the word you’ve given to the President of the United States that you’re going to let this fellow go from what you’re saying to me now. Am I to go back to the President and say you will not tell us that you’ll stand by your word?” At this point, he

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stood up. “I can’t understand that. Everybody tells me that you’re a man who stands by his word; that any time you say something that people can believe you, and the President of the United States believe that, and now you’ won’t say that. I’m his brother. He sent me here as his representative. I’m speaking for him when I’m asking you want you’re going to do about this – are you going to stand by your word? And you won’t tell me. I can’t understand it, and I wish you would explain it to me.”

We were sitting there in a circle. I looked at Howard Jones, and I thought he was going to fall off his chair. Bob walked out on the veranda, and there was a very embarrassed silence, and Jones said – I thought he showed great poise, Ambassador Jones – “Mr. President, let me just say this. Mr. Kennedy is very close to his brother and devoted to his brother. You may not know this, but he is

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perhaps the closest figure in the United State government to his brother. I think you will understand that he doesn't understand your position on this. The Attorney General obviously is concerned and well motivated in what he..." By this time Bob walks back in off the veranda, and I get up and go over and join him, and he says, "Let's take a little walk." So we walk out and leave Jones in there. We walk down a hallway to a sort of balcony area.

At this point, he's not feeling very friendly toward Sukarno, and he said, "I think he ought to let him out of here. I can't understand why he just doesn't let him out while we're here, but it looks to me like he should be willing to make some statement. Do you think what I said to him is going to have any impression on him?" I said, "Oh sure, I think it's very definitely going to have an impression on him." He said, "Well, the think I'd like to do is make sure that when I leave here,

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he knows how strongly we feel about this. That kid belongs out. He doesn't belong in Sukarno's prison. He ought to be free an hell..." So Jones comes out. Jones says, 'Look, you feel strongly about this. He also feels strongly about it. I remember riding out with him on a boat one time, and he showed me out under the water where a ship had been sunk, and he said, "that's the work of your CIA agent, Pope.' You can't leave him in there like this. You've got to go back in." Bob said, "Oh, I'm going back in. Don't misunderstand, Mr. Ambassador. I'm not upset at all, but I want him to know that his is a matter that holds some potential danger." So he said, "Well, will you come back with me now? I think we've been out long enough." So we walk back in.

We get about ten feet from the door, and Juranda comes out of door and slams it. Jones knocks on the door, and Sukarno says, "Come." We go in and sit down. Bob said,

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"Mr. President, I must apologize for the outburst." He didn't call it an outburst. He said, "I must apologize for stating so strongly my position, but I feel strongly about my position. If I have offended you by my bluntness, by my candor, speaking so forthrightly, I certainly apologize for that. You've been extremely nice to me here. You've been very nice to my wife. I want you to know we appreciate that, and I want you to know too that I've enjoyed my visit here, and I think it's done a great deal of good for my country to have me come here. The press reports in my country about my visit here and your courtesy to me are helpful. But I could not leave without saying to you what I feel about this, what my brother feels about this, and what we will continue to feel as long as Mr. Pope is in prison." Sukarno waited a long time. He had that hat sort of cocked down over his eyes. He said finally, "Mr. Attorney

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General, you are forceful and you are young; I am forceful and I am old. I appreciate your position, and I will give it my fullest attention and consideration. I am hopeful that I can do something that will be proper, but I simply am not in a position at this time to say any more than that." So we got up and walked out on the porch. The press, of course, was waiting

there, and they were like two foxes. I mean, they just smiled and shook hands, had a conference. Before we left, Bob took Sukarno to one side and said, "Mr. President, I certainly hope that nothing that I've said would serve to offend you to the degree that you would further keep this man in prison. I do want to impress upon you once again that there is a potential for problems at home in this regard." Sukarno said, "I understand that, and I can assure you that it won't in any way detain him longer than it otherwise might have."

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GRELE: Was he released?

SEIGENTHALER: About six months later he was released. I'd already left the government. But the day it was announced he was released, I called Kennedy on the telephone. He later came to Kennedy's office and talked to him about it. But as I say, he in effect accused Sukarno of going back on his word to his brother – and not only said it once, he said it several times, each time more forcefully than before. And it had an impact on him. Subandrio was absolutely frightened to death. Subandrio was as frightened as Jones. Subandrio kept saying to Jones and me, "I can't understand what brought this on. I can't understand. If I'd had any idea of this, I would've notified the President in advance of what he would've said." Subandrio had indicated before we went in there that Sukarno was going to give us something a little more firm that we could go with. Bob had gone in there convinced that if he didn't,

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then he was going to make the strongest possible appeal, which he did.

One other thing that's interesting. I remember sitting in Sukarno's palace one afternoon in Bob's bedroom. We began to talk about the problems of the countries in Asia and the difficulties we were having in understanding those problems and in translating their problems into language we could understand and, at the same time, getting across to the people in that country that we had political problems at home. He began to talk of the need to send other people to Asia to engage in discussions in a dialogue. He mentioned people like Hubert Humphrey and Walter Reuther, Justice Douglas [John W. Douglas], Arthur Goldberg and others. And when he came back, he recommended this, and some of those people went on behalf of the government. I think Walter Lippmann, for example. Did he? I think he did. I could be wrong about it. At

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any rate, John Glenn [John H. Glenn, Jr.], on his trip abroad, followed that pattern and talked to Bob about it before he went. But anyway, at one point Bob said something that I think is significant; something that I'm sure he brought home to his brother because he said it again and again to me. That was that the reactionary right wing couldn't make a point with the developing nations of the world on behalf of the United States government. Anybody who represented a point of view such as Barry Goldwater could create a major diplomatic

problem for the United States government if he talked at home. He said, "How do you think Barry Goldwater would go over in this part of the world?"

GRELE: Where did you go from Indonesia?

SEIGENTHALER: We flew all night, it seems to me. Well, we went to Kuala Lumpur briefly. We spent the day in Thailand, and then we flew all night

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to Rome. The whole trip was commercial airline. The President had offered us an airplane. People don't realize it, but Bob Kennedy is terribly economy minded. Part of that trip was second class, and I never got so cramped in my life sitting in those second class seats. But finally the strain began to tell, and much of the trip was first class. We stopped in India, and because we stopped in India, we also had to stop in Pakistan. These were just airport stops. They meant absolutely nothing. The State Department wanted to make sure we didn't offend one. We stopped at 3 o'clock in the morning maybe at one place – 11 o'clock at night and 3 o'clock in the morning maybe.

GRELE: Did you meet any other national leaders along the way?

SEIGENTHALER: It seems to me he talked with Sarit [Thanarat Sarit]. I'm sure he did. At the time he did, I was talking to some lawyers at the Palace of

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Justice. I think Brandon Grove may have accompanied him when he talked to Sarit. He did meet the officials of the Japanese government. We stopped in Turkey for a few hours, two or three hours. Then we went on to Rome, and he saw the officials of the state there, and he saw Pope John XIII. Then we went on and he met with de Gaulle and he met with Willy Brandt and he met with Adenauer [Konrad Adenauer]. Nothing as exciting as the meeting with Sukarno.

GRELE: Do you recall anything of note that happened at any one of these meetings, in terms of policy or personalities?

SEIGENTHALER: Teddy, of course, was getting ready to run, and Teddy met us at Bonn, I believe. Maybe he went to Berlin and Bonn. At Bonn, I think Teddy met us. I was impressed by Teddy Kennedy for the first time. There was a series of meetings with various segments of the population. I remember going into meetings

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with businessmen in Bonn, and later into meetings with, it seems to me, a faculty group. Teddy invariably seated himself in the second row, in the background. He took out his notebook and took copious notes on everything that was said and never asked a question and never made a comment. He literally was learning, and he didn't make any bones about it. He recognized that it was the Attorney General's trip, and it was not necessary, but he did subordinate his position. He did it very quietly and without any show and not in a way that anybody would say, "Teddy is trying to give Bobby the spotlight." But he did it. I mean, I noticed it. I'm sure Brandon Grove probably noticed it, who was traveling with us from the State Department.

GRELE: What was said at these various meetings? Say, with the businessmen in Bonn?

SEIGENTHALER: Well, generally it was a discussion of the

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Common Market, economic problems, trade barriers.

GRELE: Would you say that one of the reasons the Attorney General had gone to Europe was to gather the necessary background for the Trade Expansion Act?

SEIGENTHALER: No, I would say he was really on a pulse-feeling tour. He was coming through these areas, and I think he wanted to learn as much as anything else. He also did an awful lot of work preparing himself for the trip on every part of the world we visited. So I would not say necessarily that he brought back anything that went into the Trade Expansion Act.

GRELE: Did he ever tell you what he felt the pulse of the members of the Common Market was at that time?

SEIGENTHALER: No. I remember that he had the feeling that de Gaulle [Charles de Gaulle] was extremely cool; that Adenauer was a man of great conviction, great faith, and great courage, and that de Gaulle was not nearly

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so affable. I remember, however, at the time of the President's death that Bob was extremely impressed with the fact that de Gaulle had come, and he said so to me.

GRELE: Shortly after this trip you left the Justice Department. Why?

SEIGENTHALER: I had an opportunity to be editor of this newspaper, and I talked to Bob

about it. He knew my first love was the newspaper business, and he knew that I'd started on this paper as a cub reporter, part time copyboy. So when the job was available, I asked him what he thought about it, and he said, "It's what you've always wanted to do. Why don't you do it?" Ethel didn't want me to do it. Ethel told me she thought it was a great mistake.

GRELE: Did you ever feel it was a mistake?

SEIGENTHALER: I've never felt it was a mistake. I was torn about taking it. I was torn because I was completely dedicated, terribly happy in the work I was doing, involved in many things that

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were interesting and important. I felt it was important. While I was not what you would call, by any means, a vital part of the process of government, from my point of view it was worthwhile, broadening, interesting, and I think I made some contribution in some of these areas from time to time.

GRELE: Could you tell us about your direct contacts with President Kennedy while you were in Washington and afterwards?

SEIGENTHALER: Yes. They were limited in number. I think I've discussed most of them. Sometimes I would be in Kenny O'Donnell's [Kenneth P. O'Donnell] office or Ralph Dungan's office on a matter, and he would walk out, and he'd always be warm and friendly. I remember on one occasion after I left the government I was back up there. I was with Bob, and he was going to the White House; or maybe he called and told me to meet him at the White House, and I did meet him. We went into the President's office and Ted Sorensen [Theodore C. Sorensen] was

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there. They were having a party that night and I didn't have any idea that they were. The President said, "Are you coming tonight?" I said, "No, Mr. President, I'm not able to come tonight," and let it go at that. By the time I got to Bob's house – I was staying there that night – he had had someone call on the telephone and say, "We're expecting you tonight. Do come." Let me see if there's anything else. Oh, when he came here to Nashville. There had been racial demonstrations the week before. This was in May of 1962, six months before he was killed. No, it was later than that.

GRELE: Is this the trip to the TVA?

SEIGENTHALER: Yes. But I had had a number of conversations back and forth. Wait a minute. But I remember he got off the plane. As I say, there'd been a

number of problems about whether Nashville, Tennessee, was going to erupt into a blood bath, demonstrations, and we worked hard here to get the situation ironed out so that it

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wouldn't be a problem and it was not. But I remember he came off the airplane, and there were three or four people in front of me shaking hands with him. He shook hands with me, took one step over, away from where they were, and said, "How is Nashville, Tennessee, John?" I said, "It's just fine, Mr. President." He looked at me, and he smiled and said, "I mean, how is Nashville, Tennessee, really, John?" I said, "It's fine, Mr. President. I think you'll have a great visit." He said, "That's good. That's good." I walked over with him to the fence. We had about five thousand people out there, and we went along the way.

One other contact just came to mind. At one point there was some consideration about making Buford Ellington Postmaster General and Kenny O'Donnell had called me several times about it. I told him that I thought Ellington was terribly popular with Southern governors

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and that it would be a pretty good move; that Ellington was pretty popular here. We talked about it several times, and finally Kenny said to me, "Well, what's the down side of exposure?" and I said, "Well, he ran as an old-fashioned segregationist for governor, was elected with only thirty-one percent of the vote. I'm sure that if he's named, you're going to get hit with a controversial fight in the Senate about an old fashioned segregationist being Postmaster General." So he said, "Fine. Fine. I'll let you know. I'll be in touch with you." Time went on. One night I was here in the office about 7 o'clock, and the telephone rang. Mr. O'Donnell was calling. I picked up the telephone and said, "Kenny?" There was a pause, and the operator said, "No, just a minute." "Hello?" and I said, "Kenny?" He [John F. Kennedy] said, "No, this is not Kenny. This is uh, uh, me." I said, "Oh, how are you?" He said, "I'm great. How are

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you?" And we had a conversation about it. He said, "I'm thinking seriously about offering this to him. Do you think he'd take it?" I said, "I'm sure he'd jump at it." I'd made some inquiries and found that he'd be delighted to come in. He said, "Well, let's talk about the segregationist thing." We talked about it for maybe ten minutes and he said, "Thanks a lot. I really appreciate it, John."

I would bump into him in Hyannis Port maybe, at dinner at one of the girl's houses. He'd come in. Once there was a problem in the Justice Department about the raids on the so called Key Club in Boston. CBS television did a program. The Justice Department apparently had cooperated with them on it. An effort was made to embarrass everybody about it, primarily some of the politicians in Massachusetts. I got a memo from him which – turn it off. It may be in the file. Well, at any rate, this

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memorandum came over from the White House directed to me, asking for an explanation of the events leading up to the raid of the Key Shop, as I remember it. I went into it and prepared a memo which I sent back over. I'm not sure I sent it back over. I may have talked to Kenny O'Donnell on the telephone about it. I may have given him the background on the memo. I had prepared a memo, but whether I sent it over, I don't remember. At any rate, shortly after that, I ran into the President with Bob and mentioned to him the fact that I'd gotten this memo, and I wanted to know if he'd gotten the information. He said, "I guess so." And I had the distinct impression he never knew that the memo had come over, even though it was supposedly from him. Subsequently, I asked Kenny if he'd told the President and he said he had. But I always had the impression that maybe the President didn't ask for the information.

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Another time he called me on the telephone. One day I answered the telephone. Susan Stankrauff, who is my secretary, said to me, "The White House is calling you." I picked up the phone, and he was on the phone. You know, stories go around that this is what he would do. If he wanted to find out something he'd simply, if he had the time, pick up the phone and call himself. It would take two minutes. This had something to do with a ruling in connection with the New York, New Haven and Hartford Railroad. Do you know anything about that? Do you have any background on that?

GRELE: The petition to merge before the Interstate Commerce Commission with the New York Central Railroad?

SEIGENTHALER: That's right. Do you want to turn it off? Maybe you can refresh my memory.
At any rate, the President called and

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asked some question about who the man was who had been set up there and who selected him. He said, "This is, of course, a matter in which I personally am interested." I think he mentioned Governor Roberts [Dennis J. Roberts] as a person who had talked to him about it. He wanted to know how the decision had been reached and how this person had been selected. My memory of it was that Louis Oberdorfer had left it up to one of the people far down on the list. The President said, "Well, you find out about it. I think there's a possibility that there's more behind this than meets the eye. Maybe there's not." I called Oberdorfer, and Oberdorfer sent up to me the man who had made the selection, and I had a conversation with him about it. I said, "I had a call from the White House this morning, and he wanted to know." The man was shocked and frightened to death. He had absolutely no knowledge that it had any

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political interest or ramification at all. So I called back to the White House. He had told me to call Evelyn Lincoln and give her the information about it and I did that. She said, "I'll tell him right now." She called back and said, "Well, he's glad to know that. Don't worry about it."

There may be three or four or five other contacts that I had with him. Those are the ones that stand out in my mind. I remember once Bob and I were over there....He had a sun lamp. I guess it was just before we went on that trip. We were getting ready to get our shots. We ran into him, and he said, "You're going to get sunburned. You ought to go downstairs and get under that lamp." And he said, "Now, you be very careful, Bobby. You've got a very pale completion. That thing's going to burn you badly. I wouldn't stay under there but two or three seconds. You've been staying

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indoors so much. You look just very palid." We went downstairs and did get under it. Fifteen seconds, I guess, was the most he'd stay under it.

GRELE: When were you appointed to the U.S. Advisory Committee on Information?

SEIGENTHALER: After I came back here.

GRELE: What was this committee to do?

SEIGENTHALER: Just oversee the activities of the USIA.

GRELE: Did it involve any more than a titular position?

SEIGENTHALER: We met once a month, and we talked about the work of USIA. It involved monthly meetings, really, to talk about the problems of USIA. It involved contacts with Ed Murrow [Edward R. Murrow].

GRELE: How effective was Ed Murrow?

SEIGENTHALER: Well, I thought he was effective. We were critical of him in one of the reports; more critical in the second report, really, than I thought he deserved. I thought he was

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terribly effective. He had some staff problems, but he recognized them. There was a good deal of conversation among members of the committee that Ted Sorensen's brother Tom

[Thomas C. Sorensen] didn't belong in the high position he was in, and that Donald Wilson was not good. In those meetings, I didn't know anything about Tom Sorensen, but once I found about him, I found out he was a terribly bright guy. I thought he was pretty good. Certainly, I didn't know anybody who could have performed better. If he was weak on administration – and I guess he was – that was not the only thing his job entailed. There's nothing really, in the business about the USIA that I think would be helpful except that I served and went to the meetings and appreciated the President appointing me.

GRELE: That's just about the end of my questions. I know that there are a lot of loose ends that we'll have to either pick up or else you can

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put them into the transcript when you get the transcript back.

SEIGENTHALER: All right. Let me just see what else I've got. I mentioned Ellington being Postmaster, didn't I?

GRELE: Yes.

SEIGENTHALER: I mentioned yesterday the Hoffa [James R. Hoffa] group that was working under Eisenhower. The fellow that headed that group was a guy named Doub [George C. Doub], and it seems to me that after the decision was reached not to pursue the Test Fleet case, he resigned, and maybe one or two of the others resigned with him.

Another thing regarding the State Department. Do you have anything about the Wieland case?

GRELE: No.

SEIGENTHALER: I probably should research it because it's so important. Would you ask when you get back if there is? Maybe I ought to have another session. Let me just think how it came up. The Eastland Committee began to have a secret hearing about the situation in Cuba, and this fellow who's name I believe was Wieland – he had been a Sumner Wells protégé – was criticized by some of the witnesses before the committee. A couple of ambassadors, I guess, maybe Smith [Earl E.T. Smith] – was he our ambassador? At any rate, a couple of them were

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critical of the government and critical of his role. The thing that comes to mind particularly that came out of the hearings was the fact that on one of Milton Eisenhower's trips – I believe the name was Wieland. I believe it was W-I-E-L-A-N-D. But anyway, he was an advisor. Maybe he was on the Latin American desk, at that time, at the State Department. At any rate, the testimony was something of this sort: that during the visit, in the belly of an

airplane, Eisenhower was being told by various Latin American representatives on the scene that Castro [Fidel Castro] was a Communist; that he was surrounded by Communists; all the people around him were Communists; and that he was going to be a Marxist Communist if he was elected, at which point Wieland became angry. He said, "There is absolutely no evidence of that; no evidence at all to indicate that's true." He was very bitter about it, and as I remember it, one of the witnesses said, "Well, he stood up and he walked to the back of the airplane he became so angry. It was embarrassing for Milton Eisenhower, and so he ended the discussion." And there were some other indications to make one believe that this fellow, for one reason or another, didn't

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believe that Castro was a Communist. And that was fine. There were a lot of people in the State Department who didn't believe Castro was a Communist.

Eastland's [James O. Eastland] committee got into this. The transcripts came over to Bob and he was asked to read them and Bob turned them over to me and asked me if I'd give him a summary of them and then find out what was what. So I got into it. I contacted Brandon Grove over at the State Department and asked him to look into it. And subsequently I came across a report that the State Department had made on the case. Bob talked to Dean Rusk about it. Dean Rusk got into it. I guess the big thing was that Wieland was getting ready to take another assignment – and one of importance. I guess he was going to be the second man in the embassy in Bonn. I don't remember exactly. It's confused. Maybe I'll sort my thoughts out on it. As I go along, I'll try to straighten them out.

But at any rate, I made a study of it and also studied the report on this fellow that had been made in the State Department. And there were some pretty wild things in there about him. One, that he'd been a homosexual; two, that he'd been a newspaperman in the early days in South America

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and that he'd been fired by the United Press for stealing off the AP wire; that he'd changed his name from de la Negra or something like that, to Wieland, and that this was one and the same man; and that he was a security risk because he was a homosexual. And there were all sorts of stories about orgies, and pretty gory details about him. All of this had led to a three man committee being named by the State Department to investigate the whole case.

As I understood, it was a precedent setting procedure for the State Department to do this, but they had done it in this case. The results of it were these: that there was absolutely no evidence to substantiate the charges that he was a security risk, or that he was a homosexual or that he was involved in this behavior – or even that he had ever been fired for stealing off the wire of the United Press, or Associated Press, or whichever it was. However, they found that he had been at various places in South America over the year – Bogota, among others; that Castro during these years had been moving around; that Raul [Raul Castro] and Castro and this woman that had moved with them in the early days had been at least one or two places that he had been; and that he had filed

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back to the State Department, as part of his report on the Bogota riots and the visits of Castro, newspaper clippings that included statements by Raul Castro – perhaps even Fidel, by the woman – which left no doubt, that early in their lives, that they were indeed Marxist Communists. They had adopted Communist philosophy and the Communist approach that they believe in it then. The findings of this committee – based on perhaps other evidence too, but largely that – was that at the very least this fellow was responsible for those reports which were filed.

I think the men who filed the report probably thought that he had forgotten it, that he had bad judgment in not including it in his report – not that he was in any way sympathetic to Castro. Probably, like a lot of people in the State Department he despised Batista and all that Batista stood for. But if he had been an effective officer of the State Department, he would have remembered what had happened; that in fact, these details about Castro were in the record that early and had been filed by him, some of them; that he should have known about it, and they recommended some sort of disciplinary action.

Well, I brought all this to Bob's attention,

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and some time after that I got a report. That was when we heard that he was going to Germany to be second man in the embassy – after this. I was upset about it, and I went to talk to Bob about it. I said, "I can't believe they're going to do this. Hell, their own report found that, at the very least, he's negligent." So Bob talked to Dean Rusk about it. He said, "Just look at the record about it." Dean Rusk looked at it and said, "I'll have a couple of men come over and talk to you about it." Two fellows came over from the State Department to talk about it, and it was a rather stormy session. They didn't know that we knew that they had run this check. Bob said, "Do you know that your own people have said that he was grossly negligent? I'm just asking you whether you think this man deserves to go?" Well, they said, "Listen, we can't go back to the days of McCarthy. This is going to upset the whole State Department. They're all going to be disturbed about McCarthy if you do this, and they'll say that this is McCarthyism and you're responsible." He said, "I don't give a damn about that. I'm telling you I think the man is incompetent. I think your record shows he's incompetent, and I don't think he should be given

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that post."

Bob talked to Dean Rusk about it again, and Dean Rusk said, "Well, I have the same feeling about it. I'm concerned about what my people are telling me over here, that this is going to be another McCarthy case and it will get blown up all out of proportion." "Look. You're talking about this Administration and what it stands for. And one of the things we're saying is that we don't want incompetence – people who have records of negligence in key positions. I'm saying this guy doesn't deserve a promotion."

I was greatly distraught about it. It was the only time I was ever in the government that I remember I really felt deeply about something. I thought the record was pretty clear. But they bent over backwards inside the State Department to rule out all of these stupid allegations which had no bearing on this particular issues even if they were true, and I agreed completely that they were not. They were probably grounds for an indictment but certainly not a conviction. But they had found that he'd been negligent. I was really exercised about it. I talked to Bob, and I remember I said, "You know, if they do this, if they promote this guy under these circumstances

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after all they've said, we'd just as soon throw up our hands and quit. There's no telling what they've got."

GRELE: Did they appoint him?

SEIGENTHALER: I was very angry. I went home on Friday. They were going to make up their minds over the weekend. He called me at home on Sunday and said, "I thought you'd be interested to know this guy's not going to Germany."

Interesting thing – shortly after that, maybe two or three months after that, May Craig [Elizabeth May Craig] got up in a press conference and asked the President about it. She said, "I understand he's in a very high position in State." She threw him and somebody else in it, too, "He's analyzing papers with high government importance." And the President said simply, "You're mistaken, Miss Craig." I had the feeling that they put him on some desk studying Chinese or one of the exotic languages, or something, just to make time until he could retire.

I have heard since then that he does have an overseas appointment now. I don't know whether he has or not. But Bob was concerned about that. I remember after those fellows left, he told his brother that they had been there and he talked to

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his brother about it. He said to me, "Do you think those two fellows who were in here think that I'm the biggest son of a bitch in the world?" And I said, "Yes, I think they do." He said, "I think they probably do too." I'm just thinking at random now. There was a letter from Cyrus Eaton – or maybe a statement from Cyrus Easton – about something. I can't remember what. Bob wrote Eaton a letter in which he invited him to leave the country. He said, 'I'm always reading that you're very critical of this country, and I don't know whether these statements are true or not. But if you'd like to go to the Soviet Union and live, or to Hungary and live, or to Rumania, I'd be glad to expedite it with our passport people.' The letter was written and signed and came through my desk to read and approve. So I put it in my desk and kept it for forty-eight hours and went back in, hoping – not hoping, but thinking – that perhaps he'd cool off. I said, "My mother once told me whenever you write a letter in anger, save it for twenty-four hours before you mail it, and I've saved this for twice that. I just want

to be sure you want to write this.” He laughed and said, “Yes, I think he’s got it coming.” So we sent it, and that letter is in the files

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somewhere. And it’s an interesting letter – very courteous but very curt.

GRELE: Did you ever get an answer?

SEIGENTHALER: Interestingly enough, a short time after that – it seems to me it was the FBI that came up with it – there was a clear indication that one of the satellite embassies either had a copy of the letter or was aware of the letter that he had sent back to Easton. Bob talked to me about how interesting.... They were going to try to use it to embarrass him in some way, according to Hoover’s information. It never developed. I guess they figured that it would embarrass Eaton as much as it would Bob.

Did we talk about the controversy with *U.S. News*? We probably ought to have another session.

GRELE: Okay. Do you want to wait until you get your transcript back?

SEIGENTHALER: Yes, why don’t we. Because there are two or three things, for example, after the assassination. Are you going into that?

GRELE: No, we haven’t gone into that at all yet.

SEIGENTHALER: I mean is that part of the file?

GRELE: Yes.

SEIGENTHALER: Yes, well, I went up from here after the assassination and stayed with him, and there are a

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couple of things that are interesting. If we could have another session, I think it would be helpful.

GRELE: We can.

SEIGENTHALER: But I’d like to think about it again, You know, there’s so much that’s in here now that’s just vague. I’m not sure that I’ll ever come to it, but I think if I get the transcript, I’ll be able to. Would you leave these tapes, and I’ll have a transcript made here?

GRELE: Yes. Thank you very much.

SEIGENTHALER: Thank you.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

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