

August Heckscher Oral History Interview – JFK#1, 12/10/1965
Administrative Information

Creator: August Heckscher
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Biographical Note

Heckscher was the Special Consultant to the President on the Arts, the first White House cultural adviser, from 1962 through 1963. In this interview Heckscher discusses John F. Kennedy [JFK] and Jacqueline Bouvier Kennedy Onassis as an “inspiration to cultural life”; Heckscher’s involvement in government affairs prior to becoming a Special Consultant to the President; the invitation of 168 artists to JFK’s 1961 inauguration and its impact; how Heckscher came to work for the White House; discussing Heckscher’s position with Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr.; the reasoning behind the creation of the new position of Special Consultant on the Arts and the favorable public reaction to it; enlarging the definition of “The Arts,” especially regarding architecture; Arthur Goldberg; the establishment of the Freedom Medal; creating the President’s Advisory Committee on the Arts through executive order; personal impressions of JFK; setting up Heckscher’s office and staff; how Heckscher was meant to advise JFK and what his position entailed; the Cultural Center [Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts]; conversations with JFK; Mrs. Kennedy’s expansive work for the arts; the arts as part of national policy; working with other White House staff members and other Departments; designing special postage stamps; what the President’s role in the arts should be; and the Fine Arts Commission, among other issues.

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4 May 71

Oral History Interview

with

AUGUST HECKSCHER

December 10, 1965

in the Library of The Twentieth Century Fund

New York, New York

by Wolf von Eckhardt

for the John F. Kennedy Library

MR. VON ECKHARDT: Mr. Heckscher, did you meet President Kennedy before you were appointed to be his cultural advisor?

MR. HECKSCHER: No. I'd heard him speak, of course, and I remember one small dinner at Freedom House where I talked with him briefly in sort of a receiving line. I don't think he would have remembered me. Insofar as I know, he would have thought I was a complete stranger.

MR. VON ECKHARDT: Did you have hopes that President Kennedy would do some of the things that you described in your book, The Public Happiness.

MR. HECKSCHER: Well, no. Let's see how the time schedule worked on that. I wrote the book in the summer of 1961 and it was about Christmas time of that year that I'd finished the book and it was at the printer when I first got word from Arthur Schlesinger that something of this sort was being cooked up in Washington. Would I be interested in coming down if it really worked out? So, to say that I had hoped for it would be a little inaccurate because I didn't really foresee in any way what

was going to come about. I thought afterwards -- the book was published in the middle of my time in Washington and the last chapter was called "Art in Politics" -- it seemed rather a nice coincidence that I should have ended those thoughts on a theme which then were to become my major preoccupation. Of course, the book would have been a much better book if I had written it knowing about the Washington work. I would have made the first chapter "Art in Politics" and built the book much more systematically around those ideas.

MR. VON ECKHARDT: You say you did not have any specific hopes. You didn't think that President Kennedy would become the sort of inspiration to the cultural life that he has become?

MR. HECKSCHER: Well, it's hard always to reconstruct one's exact mood. At that time, in the summer of '61, Mrs. Kennedy had not become prominently identified, and the President had not become prominently identified either, with the arts. In the autumn of that year -- let me go back over some of these things -- Arthur Goldberg became involved in the Metropolitan Opera labor dispute and made the first statement on behalf of the Administration which laid out the broad lines of a contribution to the arts in which private sources, foundations, business, and others, would join with government in a big partnership to support

the arts. But that partnership hadn't occurred. What had occurred by the summer of '61 and which I know had moved me greatly at the time, and I am sure was in my mind as I wrote, was the Inauguration. I felt afterwards that it was the Inauguration which really had begun everything. Everything that was done in this field of the arts -- everything President Kennedy did in regard to it -- was a trial step. President Kennedy would do something; he would be surprised by the reverberation it caused, then he would go on and do something else. I don't think he ever had any grandiose -- he would have hated the word 'grandiose' -- any large plan from the beginning. So, when one hundred and fifty eight scholars and artists and creative individuals were invited to the Inauguration, I don't think he had any idea of the stir it would cause in the country. I don't think he had any idea of the reverberations or the expectations that it would create in the mind of the artistic community itself. They all said, now the President has done this, what is he going to do next? And I felt later on that really I had been called down to Washington in large part to see that the expectations evoked on that first day were not let run out in the shallows of frustration, that it would not look, in the end, like an empty gesture but would

look like a real beginning of something important.

MR. VON ECKHARDT: You don't believe then that it was premediated?

Certainly there were no indications of this cultural renaissance, if we can call it that, during the campaign.

MR. HECKSCHER: No, not in the campaign. I watched it all very closely and I think I was sensitive to anything in this direction. I had already taken part at that time in an evaluation of ^{the} government's role ^{and} the strength and weaknesses of the cultural scene. That was the report that I did for President Eisenhower's Commission on National Goals. So I was alert and sensitive in this area and I was, of course, interested in politics in general and in international affairs. One thing which Kennedy did do during the campaign ~~---~~ I think he did in a somewhat off-hand way and it somewhat plagued him later ³ he came out in favor of a National Arts Foundation and I don't think he did that very seriously. My recollection was that it was in an article in Saturday Review where the two candidates were asked their position in regard to the cultural life and to the arts in general. But I don't think that was a very seriously made statement and I don't think that he came to power committed in any way to establish a National Arts Foundation. Later on, however, I did feel that having it on the record, we could emphasize that more strongly.

MR. VON ECKHARDT: It proved to be quite helpful.

MR. HECKSCHER: It did.

MR. VON ECKHARDT: Well, do you suppose that the invitation of these one hundred and sixty eight artists to the Inauguration was the President's own idea? What influences do you think....

MR. HECKSCHER: Well, I only can say what I understood to be the case. It was obviously cleared with President-elect Kennedy, as he was at that time, but I know that the telegrams were framed and the list was drawn up by Kay Halle, who had, I think, been a friend of President Kennedy, who lives in Georgetown, ^{is} was a person of cultivation and wealth herself, and who was one of those who looked forward to seeing the Administration come in with a good deal of glory. So the thing was done and then it was afterward that the effect of it began to be known. Two things happened as a result, closely connected with this: one, Kay Halle wrote to all the people who had come that day and to others who had been invited but couldn't come and asked them whether they would send the President some kind of a note or a message expressing their feelings about him or about the day. Then she collected those in a handsome volume ^{and} there were some quite wonderful messages and quotations ^{and} and she presented that to the President. So that sort of

helped to isolate in his mind and emphasize what had been done. Then, also, a little later, I believe that Pierre Salinger wrote to that same list of people and asked them whether they had any ideas as to what government could do that would be fruitful in encouraging the life of the arts in this country. Again, my recollection is that a number of those answered. Many of them were pro forma answers, but when I went down there Pierre Salinger handed me a file and there were a number of letters written by these same visitors to the Inaugural and some of them had ideas that were useful. Many of them suggested ways in which the government might recognize achievements with some kind of medal or order of some sort. I think there were suggestions of subsidy and help through fellowships to artists and various things of that kind. But I must say frankly that I never found enough in these letters to form the basis of any real program and after a while we put them aside and made all the plans of our own.

MR. VON ECKHARDT: I don't think we should dwell too long on this incident in which you weren't directly involved. Yet I think it is interesting. Who drew up this very excellent list of these one hundred and sixty eight people? Was this Miss Halle?

MR. HECKSCHER: I think it was. Whether she had -- what -- Arthur Schlesinger-

MR. VON ECKHARDT: Because it was really electrifying.

MR. HECKSCHER: Yes, it was. I just don't know. I heard the story really more from Kay Halle later. I want to see her from time to time when I was down there, to have dinner at her house, and she was always interested in developments in the field, and, as I say, I heard most of the story from her. I would think there had been some kind of a gathering at her house, probably not more than a week or so before the Inauguration.

MR. VON ECKHARDT: It was that impromptu?

MR. HECKSCHER: Again, that's my impression.

MR. VON ECKHARDT: Bill Walton was mentioned a great deal in Washington.

MR. HECKSCHER: Well, I would guess he had certainly been at that meeting. Again, my impression only is that the meeting took place in Kay Halle's house and that the telegrams were framed there.

MR. VON ECKHARDT: How long before your appointment ³ actual appointment ³ did you receive word from Mr. Schlesinger that it was in the air and would you be interested?

MR. HECKSCHER: Well, I think to be truthful that I had had a talk with Arthur the spring of 1961. We were speaking about writing the book that summer. I really had some intimation of it before I was working on the book. But I didn't treat it very seriously. I talked with Arthur a number of times ⁵ he's an old friend of mine ³ and

there had been some talk in the papers. Curiously enough, I don't ever remember anybody mentioning it directly to me -- about my being made Librarian of Congress -- of having the post of Librarian of Congress restored to something of what it had been in the days when Archie MacLeish had it -- not a professional librarian but a spokesman for the cultural aims of the Administration. Arthur had spoken to me about that and I think he had said, "Well, maybe we're going to be able to work something out and if we do, would you be interested?" I think that happened in the spring of '61. Then I was up lecturing at Cornell in December, early December, my recollection is the first week of December or so, and Arthur put a call through to me there from the White House and said, "A letter has been signed by the President asking you whether you will take a post in the White House in connection with the program of the arts and I just want you to know it's coming and hope you will be sympathetic and feel you are able to do it." So then a week or so later, I guess, the letter arrived. I don't remember the exact date.

MR. VON ECKHARDT: What was your immediate reaction to this? Did you have any concept beforehand of what you wanted to do? Did you have any concept of what was on the President's mind?

MR. HECKSCHER:

No. Well, the letter which I am sure Arthur had drafted -- knowing afterward how things were done, I'm sure also that the President had made some changes in it -- the letter set forth fairly specifically what they had in mind and it was a very modest scheme that was proposed at that time. Again, this is characteristic of President Kennedy and I am sure that Arthur and Pierre Salinger and maybe one or two others in the White House had talked this over and had sold it to the President on the grounds that it was a modest tentative essay in this field. The letter said, of course, it would be in the files, it said, he, President Kennedy realized that whatever the government did, it always would have to be "marginal" -- that was the word -- that he hoped that I would undertake whatever I did without fanfare. That's another textual word, because the word 'marginal' and the words 'without fanfare' I often remember afterwards. But he said he did want to make sure that those responsibilities which the government could play in this area were not being neglected and that he hoped I would be willing to consider some kind of survey and recommendation, a series of recommendations, in this field, and if I was at all hospitable to the idea would I come down and talk with the two who were mentioned,

Arthur Schlesinger and Pierre Salinger. So I went down. I suppose by then it was early January, and talked to...

MR. VON ECKHARDT: This was January '62?

MR. HECKSCHER: Yes. It may even have been in December. I just can't remember now. It was a very cold day, though, I remember. And I talked with Arthur and I must have talked also at the same time with a few of my trustees here at the Twentieth Century Fund because the President, I think, had proposed a half-time assignment and my hope was that I could do it in conjunction with the work here at the Fund and they were agreeable to it, many of them being very sympathetic to the Administration. Many of my trustees, like Francis Biddle, the ex-Attorney General, had played roles in the Roosevelt Administration and I think they were pleased to think that the Twentieth Century Fund would be involved in this way in the New Frontier, so they were very sympathetic to the idea. I went with that encouragement to Washington. I talked it over with Arthur and I remember saying that I thought I could do it on a half-time basis but I would need somebody there ³ I would need a little office. I would need continuity; I just couldn't go down in the morning to Washington and stir things up and go home. I needed at least one

full-time assistant and one or two secretaries there. And Arthur said he thought that could be worked out but he was himself very vague about what money might be available or even how one went about getting such money as did exist within the White House because it was all to be, of course, on the White House budget within such free funds as they had. But Arthur said he thought that could all be worked out. And then there may have been another exchange of letters and I went down again to see the President.

MR. VON ECKHARDT: And do you remember when that was?

MR. HECKSCHER: Well, perhaps I should have reviewed these things before.

MR. VON ECKHARDT: No. No, that's all right.

MR. HECKSCHER: Well, it was getting on now, I believe into February. I think there was a delay after I saw Arthur because whether it was getting funds out of the White House or getting something getting my clearance or --- but there was a delay. I know I was going abroad myself that year toward the end of January and I think Arthur was going down to Puerto Rico, so it was about February when we really got squared away. But the delay had a certain interest because it meant that the situation developed a little further so that when it finally became public there was much more interest attached to the post than there would have been if it had been

announced in December. Mrs. Kennedy, principally, had made her famous tour of the White House on television, and that extraordinary program had raised a great deal of popular interest in Mrs. Kennedy and the arts and in the President, himself, who joined in the program at the end. Indeed I remember at that time, the reporter asked Mrs. Kennedy, as they were walking through the White House, looking at paintings and all. "Mrs. Kennedy, what do you think government's relation to the arts ought to be?" And I thought to myself, "Oh, gosh, she's going to say something, she's going to ruin everything or make my job much more difficult." And she answered it so perfectly. She said, "Good heavens, that's much too complicated a question for me to answer. But, look, here is a painting that I think is very beautiful." So then what happened was, there was a delay and the White House for some reason didn't seem to get the story clear and the Times broke it, actually without my knowledge, though having checked around very carefully among my friends, and ran it as a front-page story. It never would have had, I think, so much prominence if it had been simply an ordinary White House statement, but this was something that the Times itself had ferreted out and was interested in.

They got all the details about my trustees here at the Fund and so on. They played it up. And I think the rest of the papers in the country played it up much more because the Times had it on the front page than they would have if it had come out in the ordinary way. So the thing got off to a good start.

When I next saw the President I remember being a little worried. That shows the way I was naive, perhaps, because he had said, "Now, we must do this very quietly and without fanfare," and here the thing had burst really with a disproportionate amount of fanfare, I thought. But instead of being annoyed, of course, he was very pleased because all the public reaction to it was favorable. There had been very good editorials in the newspapers and a nice profile of myself in the Times and a nice editorial and so on. So it was important in indicating the whole approach to the thing. The President would take a step and then if the reaction was good, he would be encouraged and would be willing to take another.

MR. VON ECKHARDT: Do you think he appointed you with a genuine concern for the cultural program or as a good public relations....

MR. HECKSCHER: It wouldn't be either of those. I think he was certainly persuaded by his staff in the White House but there was a great deal of correspondence growing up on this subject which nobody there could deal with and I think

they had this idea which went a little bit beyond merely answering letters which they thought could bring a certain amount of funds to the Administration. And they undoubtedly sold it to the President.

MR. VON ECKHARDT: Because you said in your book that President Kennedy wasn't really a connoisseur of the arts ³⁾ Mrs. Kennedy was. What was your own feeling in this respect ³⁾ that you would help the Administration politically or that you would help the New Frontier and the country culturally?

MR. HECKSCHER: Well, I felt there was a lot that could be done by just having one man in the White House. I was very glad at the moment that I was that one man. As far as the President himself was concerned, he certainly in private life would have seemed a little bit like the average husband, sort of being dragged by his wife to do a lot of cultural things which he really didn't enjoy doing very much. Music, for example. It was not only that he didn't particularly enjoy it but I think it was really painful. I don't mean only painful for him to sit, because of his back, for any length of time ³⁾ I think it also hurt his ears. I really don't think he liked music at all except a few things that he knew. Other forms of art, however, he felt very differently about. Painting I think he looked on with a certain

amount of good nature as any man would look upon something which his wife both practiced and appreciated. Ballet I think he looked upon the way any normally healthy man would look upon it, as something that was really quite beautiful and exciting to see. Poetry he liked very much because when you get into poetry you get into a whole world of words and images which he was dealing with professionally and dealing with superbly, and of course, that lead, in turn, into history. So, it was a shading really from music, which I think he found painful, into poetry, which for various reasons he found both challenging and quite fascinating. The theater, I think again if it had been in private life he wouldn't have gone very much to the theater. He would have been too busy and all that and he didn't have a great love for the drama. But I think he came more and more to feel that the theater was somehow important in expressing communal views [;] keeping the great community somewhat more closely knit in allowing it to carry on a dialogue with itself and to confront basic values. I say that less on the grounds that he explicitly said that to me ^{that}. But he was always willing to approve anything that I said along those lines and in general he began increasingly I think, to look upon the arts as the element within the community that

created → I won't say unity -- but created a confrontation of basic issues in people's lives. He saw these arts / the theatrical arts + as being public arts which were part of the public dialogue of the time.

MR. VON ECKHARDT: You didn't mention architecture.

MR. HECKSCHER: Oh, yes. I think one of the useful things that I did in that whole time I was down there was to enlarge the definition of "The Arts." I was always careful to maintain that they weren't simply painting, the ballet, the opera, and the theater, but that they included the whole environmental condition of the nation's life and that architecture and city planning and so on were very important. I did that partly because I was interested in that myself and one always inevitably stresses what one is interested in, but also because when I began to look around and see where you could build something usefully within the government, it was obvious that the federal government does very little in the field / virtually nothing in the field of the performing arts. That's changing a little bit and I think it will change in the future. But at that time government was doing nothing in the field of the performing arts, but spending billions of dollars on architecture. So here was a good place to begin and something which I thought also people were increasingly inclined to respond to

and appreciate. We already had the very good program of the State Department Foreign Building Operation for the consulates which were built abroad and it seemed to me a very natural step that we should next build handsome buildings at home. After experimenting on those unfortunate foreigners, we could now benefit our own people.

MR. VON ECKHARDT: Do you think President Kennedy was aware of this? Was he interested in architecture?

MR. HECKSCHER: Yes. This is something that he ---

MR. VON ECKHARDT: Lafayette Square had happened before you came, hadn't it?

MR. HECKSCHER: Well, I believe that happened just before I came or just after I came. I remember feeling a little badly that I had been sort of left out of that whole thing. The Franklin D. Roosevelt Memorial issue also had happened before I came and I felt a little badly that my own views were directly opposite both to Bill Walton's and to the President's on that. I remember when I was called up, I think specifically by the New York Post, the night that the announcement came out and one of the first questions they asked me was what I thought of the Roosevelt Memorial. I said that I thought it was an absolutely magnificent thing and that if we built it, people would say one hundred years

from now, "How could they have done anything so marvelous back in those old times?" I was anxious to go on record that way. But there would have been no possibility of persuading the President or Mrs. Kennedy. I think she was very much opposed to it. And, of course, Lafayette Square was another indication of a conservative taste in architecture. But in this case, applied to the preservation of old buildings which I thoroughly agree with, and to the development of a good modern building at a sort of a second level (2)

MR. VON ECKHARDT: Well, I think it expresses modern concepts of urban design.

MR. HECKSCHER: Yes, I would say that. But I don't think that was the reason, the primary reason why they liked it.

MR. VON ECKHARDT: They liked it because they wanted to preserve the old buildings on the Square.

MR. HECKSCHER: That's right, yes. So those were the things (2) and, of course, it must be said -- I remember being chagrined when the President and Mrs. Kennedy built their own little house in Virginia. It was kept as a secret and as unpublicized as possible but it was a very conservative little ranch house type of building. So all of that, you have to put on one side. On the other side, there was certainly to an increasing degree, as the President worked in this area and up to the end of

his life, there was an appreciation of public architecture in the best sense and the recognition that you simply couldn't build nice little things. It would have to be on the grand scale, it had to be in tune with the times, and you had to be ready to innovate in architecture just as you had to be ready to innovate in other fields of social development. So I would say that what began as a rather conservative view toward architecture was really developing into a much more broadly based feeling for the public scene at the time of this death.

MR. VON ECKHARDT: Wasn't the greatest influence in that respect Arthur Goldberg? And hadn't a good deal of the cultural prodding gone on before you arrived in Washington?

MR. HECKSCHER: Yes. I think Arthur Goldberg deserves the most Justice Goldberg ³/₂ deserves the most enormous credit and I have for him the most enormous personal gratitude. It is said that the Pennsylvania Avenue plan was suggested to President Kennedy by Arthur Goldberg on the day of the Inauguration when they motored from the White House down to the Capitol through that obviously half-baked and tawdry Pennsylvania Avenue. Then the second thing that Arthur Goldberg did was to take the practical problem of how to get rid of the temporary buildings and how to house the Government workers that

would be displaced. He took that perfectly practical assignment and turned it into a statement on architectural policy to which the President subscribed and which was very far-reaching and was a constant guide to us. It said the Federal planning must be in conjunction with local cities and localities. It said that new buildings must be in spirit with their own times and with modern building technique, and so on. Then, as I think I said earlier, Arthur Goldberg participated in the settlement of the Metropolitan Opera strike and issued a statement at the end which foreshadowed a partnership between government and the private sector. In these things, maybe there are some other things which at the moment slip my mind, he had generated an enormous interest. He told me that no other thing which he had engaged in or touched when he was head of the Department of Labor caused anything like the amount of correspondence or the degree of public acceptance as the statements he made in the arts. So, when I went to Washington, this is the point I was going to make, he was the one who was associated with this cause. And I remember saying to Arthur Schlesinger, "Indeed, with Arthur Goldberg doing so much, is it necessary really to think of someone like myself coming down?" And I remember Arthur saying, "Well, the very fact that what

Arthur Goldberg has been doing is so successful proves more than ever that we need somebody here in the White House to really head up this thing and become wholly identified with it. So when I went to Washington, one of the first things that I did was to go to see Arthur Goldberg, of course. One of my private worries was that he might/resent my coming down and sort of taking the ball away from him. But it wasn't that way at all. He was very generous. He immediately said, "Now, I want to give you every help I can. It's very important that this work be done. We must push the Pennsylvania Avenue thing very hard." But he never, so far as I know, did anything except to try to give to me and give to my office the kind of public recognition which had been coming to his office. I remember his giving a dinner for me and introducing me to people in Washington. It was a very generous thing ^{and} and I came to like him personally so much in the midst of all that. It was not only, I thought, perhaps that he was being very faithful to the President in this, but he was certainly also very generous in his own personal attitude.

MR. VON ECKHARDT: The chief liaison in these matters was Pat Moynihan*, wasn't it?

*Daniel P. Moynihan, Assistant Secretary of Labor

MR. HECKSCHER:

Yes. Pat. Again, I always understood and I certainly got the impression from talking with Pat that he was the man who was Arthur Goldberg's idea man in this sphere. I am sure Pat drafted the Metropolitan Opera statement and the architectural policy statement and so on. And Pat was a very fascinating person to work with and to talk with. Obviously, an individual of ideas. He, too, would hardly have predicted that his major interest for a time would have been in the field of the arts. But he, we all, I think everybody, felt that this was an edge that created a great deal of public interest wherever it went. And another thing of Arthur Goldberg's in which Pat Moynihan played a prominent role was the creation of the Freedom Medal and its change into an order or decoration which would include artists and creative individuals of various kinds. That's a story in itself.

MR. VON ECKHARDT: Was the Freedom Medal suggested to the President before you arrived?

MR. HECKSCHER: Yes. This was one of the very prominent suggestions which had been made by people coming to the Inauguration and I know it had been written in by others also. My recollection is that the President said to me that this was one of the things that interested him. Well, I must admit that I didn't seize on that with complete

enthusiasm. I have seen, in private organizations and so on -- the Woodrow Wilson Foundation and others with which I have been connected -- how difficult these medals are to award and I perhaps myself under-estimated the usefulness of it on the national scene. But Arthur Goldberg and Pat Moynihan went about it in a very good way. (end of tape one)

Tape Two

MR. VON ECKHARDT: We were talking about the Freedom Medal and your feelings about it and how it was established.

MR. HECKSCHER: Well, the point I was going to make was that Arthur Goldberg and Pat Moynihan took a medal which already existed, which had been awarded at the discretion of the President to distinguished Americans, mostly generals, and they broadened that medal, the base of that award, with the understanding that the names would be announced every Fourth of July and a proportion of those names would be people who were distinguished in the arts and letters.

MR. VON ECKHARDT: Well, you said they proposed and it was then done. I think it might be of interest to hear just exactly how these things were done. But perhaps this is not the right illustration. Maybe you should tell about that in regard to a project that you were more personally involved with. The Freedom Medal was already established as a policy.

MR. HECKSCHER: No, this was done after I was down there. But I think it was conceived of as not being primarily a medal for the arts so it did not come directly to me. When I heard about it, I called Pat Moynihan and I said, "Look, we ought to discuss this because part of the new medal which concerns the arts is something which I certainly would like to know about." And he set forth the way the thing would be awarded. He made the point which I thought was an excellent one, that this would be done at the discretion of the President, that the names would not be recommended by any professional society and therefore you wouldn't get politics of literary academies and so on mixed up in it. It would be almost like a personal favor bestowed on the great men of the realm. And I thought all that was a good idea and later collaborated in drawing up a list of recommendations. But I did not draw up the order which is the sort of constitutional document of this new Freedom Medal.

MR. VON ECKHARDT: Who did, Mr. Heckscher?

MR. HECKSCHER: I don't know. It was done, as I say, in Arthur Goldberg's office or in Pat Moynihan's office, anyway.

MR. VON ECKHARDT: But, generally, ^{were} are these things first discussed with the President and then he says, "Yes." Or how did this work?

MR. HECKSCHER: Yes, informal discussion, I imagine, first and then he said, "Yes, this is a good idea." The President was always sympathetic -- if you had an idea -- and this was one such which he had been involved in and was interested in. So you brought it up to him and he would react very quickly and say, "Yes, go ahead and draw something up." He would first make sure that no large amount of money was involved because he was always careful about anything that was going to cost any extra money. But if he could be convinced that it would receive a good public reception, would do something really useful for the cause, and that it would not involve an undue expenditure of funds, he would say, "Go ahead and do it." And when you brought it back to him he would ask you a few questions which would be penetrating. Sometimes he would touch the one point which you were not sure of, which was always embarrassing but in the end, if he approved it, he would approve it very quickly and that was all there was to it.

MR. VON ECKHARDT: And then the order would be put on his desk and he would sign it?

MR. HECKSCHER: Yes, he would sign it.

MR. VON ECKHARDT: Do you remember any instance where he asked you any such penetrating question?

MR. HECKSCHER:

Well, the negotiations which I would chiefly remember are those which were to create by Executive Order a President's Advisory Council on the Arts. There had been a Bill for an Advisory Committee on the Arts before the Congress and it had been turned down and it was once again before the Congress but with very little chance of success. He said to me when I brought it up to him, "Fine. I think we can do it by Executive Order. But be sure that I won't be accused of bypassing the Congress, of taking something that is under active consideration out of their hands and doing it as an Executive Order, and then bring it back to me." And so I worked quite hard with certain members of the Congress, both Republicans and Democrats, to be sure that they would agree to having this done by Executive Order. John Lindsay*, for example, was a Republican who had had a deep interest in this legislation and John said, "Augie, don't take this out of our hands until I have made a final check and I'm certain that there's no chance of getting it done in this session of the Congress." And he made that check which is quickly told but took a long time to work out, and he finally said, "You have absolute clearance to go ahead in the White House and I would never criticize it." Indeed, I think you must

*John V. Lindsay (Representative from New York)

go ahead. So, after that type of negotiations with John Lindsay and a few others, I was able to go back to the President after having talked it over with various staff people in the White House, and he was very glad to sign the Executive Order. Again, when the Executive Order came in, I remember his going over it and questioning the number of people whom we had provided on the Advisory Commission; I remember his questioning what its functions would be. He said, "What is this really going to do?" And so on, but he went ahead and signed it and we got it out.

MR. VON ECKHARDT: Perhaps you should come back to that again in chronological order. Actually, we got stopped just before your appointment. I gather your first personal meeting with the President was when you finally came to Washington to accept the appointment and receive your instructions from him. Is that correct?

MR. HECKSCHER: Yes. I had talked it over with the people around him and it was only then that I went in to see him. And at that time there had been a favorable reaction ^{and} he was quite warm to the whole plan. But he said, "Go ahead and make some plans and then we'll have a chance to talk them over." Again, he didn't sit down with me and say ~~→~~ I think you ought to do this and that. I don't think he knew exactly what we ought to do. He

may have repeated briefly what he had said in the letter but left for the future the development of the actual program. So I remember doing a memorandum shortly after that in which I made three or four points and that went to him directly and --

MR. VON ECKHARDT: Do you recall your personal impressions? This was the first time you saw him as President of the United States. Was he as you expected him? You made some very interesting remarks in your speech* about the difference between actually meeting a great person and having seen him on television.

MR. HECKSCHER: Well, the sad thing, in a way, is that today there isn't a great deal of difference. When you finally make your way into the Oval Office of the White House you find the man somewhat to your surprise that you have seen on the television screen and who has become familiar to you and to the whole rest of the population. And yet always there are some differences evident. I think you are first of all impressed by how small the office is and how low the ceilings are in that whole West Wing of the White House. So, you have an impression of almost unexpected modesty in the surroundings and partly because of that you have an impression of almost unexpected grandeur in the man himself. I do remember

*Address by August Heckscher on November 20, 1964

feeling strongly that Kennedy was taller than the public image of him in photographs or newareels or television had ever given you the impression. And I remember thinking also that this was a man of greater elegance ²¹₅ elegance both in the way he carried himself and in the way he was dressed. He was immaculate. It was so obvious that his suits had been tailored by the very best tailor and that everything about him was fresh and clean and spruce looking. You felt that in a way which, I think, you didn't feel if you just watched the newspapers. But also you felt, I think, about him something which perhaps didn't get across so well though, since his death, it's often been commented on, and that is a kind of courtesy and personal consideration which the man showed in his private dealings with individuals. With me, perhaps more so than with some of his staff because I was always something of an outsider, but with me he was always extraordinarily courteous. He received you almost as if you had done a favor in coming to see him and he was very considerate always of your feelings in little ways. If he made a change in a list of names or in a draft of something you had, he was very clear in wanting it. There was no question that what he wanted would go, but he always was anxious to make sure that you saw the reason for

it or that you consented to what he was doing.

MR. VON ECKHARDT: Did you feel any sense of disappointment that he didn't give you instructions or indications of what he expected beyond the letter?

MR. HECKSCHER: No. In a curious way ³ I say curious ³ it seems curious to me looking back on it ³ I wasn't disappointed. I think perhaps I should have been. I think I should have gone down there with perhaps more illusions or expectations than I did. But I didn't. My real interest in my life has always been in politics and international affairs and I think from the beginning I had the idea that this should be only one small part, and perhaps a very small part, of the great task of the Presidency and I certainly didn't have any idea that the President was going to give a lot of time to this or that he would have thought out all its implications. In other words, I thought from the beginning that the job would be pretty much what I could think up and what I could do and the only thing I hoped was that I would get support from him as I went along. And beginning with those ideas, I saved myself from what otherwise might have been a certain amount of frustration because it was to the degree that I thought up things and did things and got some public reaction that I then could go to the President and get his approval for something

that was needed. If I just sat around and waited to be called upon by him or to be told what to do by him, I would not have done very much.

MR. VON ECKHARDT: I gather then this first interview was relatively short?

MR. HECKSCHER: Well, yes. That was a relatively short interview. I remember going in with Arthur Schlesinger and, I remember, it was a curious interview because he talked to me and told me he liked the editorial in the Times and so on and a few other things. Then a discussion went on in the office while I was still there about some current political matters. It surprised me that they should go on so frankly and I was rather embarrassed and tried to escape. The actual issue was whether Jonathan Bingham should run for Congressman from the Bronx and the President was actually furious. He said, "Doesn't Jack Bingham have a good job at the UN?" And so on. And he and Arthur Schlesinger discussed this for a little while. Jonathan Bingham is an old friend of mine from Yale, but I didn't say a word. But it indicates a little bit the informality of the office and perhaps also the confidence that he needed place in those that were to be his staff, even though, as I say, I was a newcomer and not related to these problems at all. Evidently, from the beginning Kennedy felt an obligation to Buckley and two

years later, of course, Bingham did run and Robert Kennedy did come into that primary campaign in the Bronx to my horror and backed Buckley. But Bingham won the primary and went to Congress.

MR. VON ECKHARDT: Now by this time you did have the office set up? You had Miss Donald* as your assistant. Was that all settled?

MR. HECKSCHER: Yes.

MR. VON ECKHARDT: You were really ready to start now?

MR. HECKSCHER: Yes. That was one of my ideas -- that once we did start and once this fairly excited publicity had come out that we ought to get going. And I was lucky in being able to get Barbara Donald who had worked with Bill Bundy on the Goals Commission and I had known her in that capacity. Before that she had worked with Walter Lippmann as his research assistant for more than ten years. So she knew her way around Washington. She helped me staff the office and do all the administrative details that nobody in the White House, certainly not Pierre Salinger or Arthur Schlesinger, had the faintest idea how to go about doing, such as getting office space and getting desks or getting even a temporary budget approved. And I must say that there are a lot of people down there who weren't very interested in

*Barbara Donald

what I was trying to do, who weren't very anxious to clear the office space. The Executive Office Building was filled to the last square inch it seemed at that time. It took a little in-fighting to get settled but we did. In fact, before we did get settled we carried on the office for a short time from the Washington headquarters of the Twentieth Century Fund. I remember having interviews there and getting some of the original plans made in that way.

MR. VON ECKHARDT: Until the office in the Executive Office Building was open?

MR. HECKSCHER: Yes.

MR. VON ECKHARDT: Did the President indicate to you just how you were to advise him about the technicalities? Did he say, "Call me up on the telephone anytime you want to?" How did this work?

MR. HECKSCHER: No, there was never any comment on that. Actually, I always worked very closely through Arthur Schlesinger. I mean, one looks around in a situation like that for not only the person who is most interested but has the best access. Pierre Salinger was always very helpful if I wanted to see the President for short visits or get in by the back door if I wanted to ask him a question. But if it was a major thing, I would always get Arthur Schlesinger's advice ahead of time. I was a little

bit puzzled myself as to how you approach the President and on what kinds of things you advised him, and Arthur Schlesinger made it fairly clear to me in the beginning that you didn't go to him unless you had a matter of very great concern and that you didn't offer him gratuitous advice.

MR. VON ECKHARDT: The main thing, aside from drafting the report, ^{that} the public would assume ~~that~~ you would advise the President on, are the things that came up and had cultural implications. In order to do that, you had to know what was going on, what was being proposed to him by others and so forth. Did this function fairly well?

MR. HECKSCHER: Well, I would have to say in all candor that the sort of day-to-day advisory thing didn't work very well. That was in part because during a good portion of the time I was there, the congressional campaigns of 1961 were being prepared and were being waged. And that stopped everything pretty dead on its feet and it was up to me --

MR. VON ECKHARDT: 1962?

MR. HECKSCHER: 1962, yes. And it was up to me to carry on pretty much as I could. But, of course, in a way you advised the President by simply representing him in your talks with agency heads and people who were working in the various departments and so on. Advice is a kind of

two-way thing. It's really a contact, a liaison, if you will, between the President and those who are carrying on activities which affect, directly or indirectly, the arts in this case. So, I was acting in the role of the President's advisory when I talked with the people in the Postal Department about better designs for stamps, when I would talk to the people in GSA about better designs for public buildings, and so on.

It must be said the President did not think always of asking my advice about certain areas where I thought he should have. For example, the architectural design for the Federal pavillon of the World's Fair was announced at the time I was there and it was unveiled by Charles Luckman, the architect, and by the Department of Commerce which had sponsored it, to President and Mrs. Kennedy and they thought it was lovely. Well, it was a perfectly terrible thing, actually and I immediately began to say this is an impossible design. Architectural Forum came out and condemned it and a second design was then planned. But it always remained an undistinguished building. It seems ironical to me that the building at the Brussels World's Fair done under Eisenhower was a very fine building, designed by Ed Stone, and the building done at the very high point of the Kennedy cultural renaissance for the

World's Fair in New York was an extremely bad building.

MR. VON ECKHARDT: What recourse did you have?

MR. HECKSCHER: Well I didn't go directly to the President on that. I perhaps should have. I think it may have been a mistake. But it was made clear that he and Mrs. Kennedy had approved it and I went to talk with Arthur and some others about what could be done and I was particularly in close touch with Mr. Klots*, who was the Assistant Secretary of Commerce, in whose office this whole building had been engineered, and I told him that I didn't like it and that we would really have to do something else. I had gotten wind of this editorial coming out in Architectural Forum. They didn't even have a picture of it but they condemned it in the most outright terms. So by that time I think Klots was pretty well convinced they'd have to have something else. But by that time also he was committed to Luckman as the architect and I don't think Luckman would have done a good building no matter how often he tried. ^{at} And the reason why Luckman had been chosen is, of course, a difficult question. Basically it was because Congress was very slow in making its appropriation for the World's Fair ³¹ the Federal Pavillon at the World's Fair ³¹ and Luckman had been

*Herbert W. Klots

willing to do advance planning for the Department of Commerce without any fee, and in that way when the appropriation finally came through he was the lead man, and that was all there was to it.

MR. VON ECKHARDT: Wasn't there a very similar situation with the Cultural Center? Not under Kennedy, but under Eisenhower, that the architect really wasn't chosen but, you know, sort of fell into....

MR. HECKSCHER: Yes. I think that is always -- if you don't have competition or you don't have a design panel of some kind, the question of how you choose an architect is always a somewhat obscure and difficult one. The first plan for the Cultural Center Kennedy, of course, turned down and he did that largely on fiscal terms. He thought it was too ambitious -- seventy million dollars -- which I must say never seemed enormous to me if it is going to be a public monument in the center of Washington, but he wanted something more modest and less costly. I guess it will cost more than thirty million in the end. And that too, that was unveiled to Mr. and Mrs. Kennedy by Ed Stone himself and they approved it enthusiastically and I don't think there ever was the kind of discussion which would have been useful.

MR. VON ECKHARDT: Were you consulted?

MR. HECKSCHER: No. I saw that at the same time that I saw the

Warnecke plan*. There ^{was} ~~is~~ very little by that time you ^{could} ~~can~~ do.

MR. VON ECKHARDT: Actually, as I recall, the Cultural Center was unveiled at Hyannisport. Were you present?

MR. HECKSCHER: No. I could have -- I was invited to that but I couldn't go. I was speaking somewhere else.

MR. VON ECKHARDT: Well, was that one of your major preoccupations, the Cultural Center?

MR. HECKSCHER: It was major and peripheral at the same time because Kennedy looked upon the Cultural Center as being an enterprise in which the government had only a minor or small interest. He felt ultimately the government would have to take a large responsibility for it but he was very anxious that private financing be carried out to the end before any public financing be brought in. He felt that if about fifteen million dollars were raised in private funds he would then, as he said, call up Bill Fulbright to see whether he couldn't get the other fifteen million and he was perfectly certain he could. But meanwhile, he was anxious to stand off a little bit from it and not to get too much involved. When he realized, for example, that I was on the Advisory Committee for the Cultural Center, which I had been before going to Washington, he said, "I think

*John Care Warnecke's design for Lafayette Square

it's a good idea to resign from that because I'll be asking your advice about how the fund-raising program is going and about other matters in regard to the Cultural Center and it's better if you are not advising both me and them at the same time."

MR. VON ECKHARDT: On what occasion did he say this and how did he say this? Did he call you on the phone?

MR. HECKSCHER: No. I think that was really the first day when I went down there and we talked in his office. It was an indication to me from the beginning how very clear he was. He didn't say a great deal and you didn't see him very often but you felt that he always knew the heart of the problem and was building on the right precedents so that the relations between us and the relations between me and other institutions would be absolutely clear and firm.

MR. VON ECKHARDT: Now, in the course of your -- all told it was about eighteen months that you --

MR. HECKSCHER: Yes, about eighteen months.

MR. VON ECKHARDT: Would you recall how often you saw the President?

MR. HECKSCHER: Well, eighteen months is a little misleading because I actually submitted my resignation to him after fourteen months and he asked me at that time whether I would stay on in a more or less nominal capacity because we

expected my successor, who was then to be Dick Goodwin* to be named almost momentarily but there was a hitch in the Peace Corps appropriation on Capitol Hill. So that dragged on for another four or five months and I was still holding the post when the President was assassinated. But in that year or fourteen months, I don't think I saw him more than five or six times altogether. I had three long interviews with him formally, having made the arrangements in advance, and then I went in perhaps four or five other times through the back door, through Mrs. Lincoln's office. Mrs. Lincoln would look in and see whether he was busy and if he wasn't, you could get clearance on something.

MR. VON ECKHARDT: Were all these interviews at your initiative or did he call you in?

MR. HECKSCHER: No, they were all at my initiative.

MR. VON ECKHARDT: And what were some of the problems that you discussed?

MR. HECKSCHER: Well, the great issue was getting the work cleared away, getting the general outlines of what would be my position, getting the report accepted by him in the end, and getting the Advisory Council on the Arts set up. There was both the Executive Order which had to be signed and then there were the actual names ^A we were working on a list of thirty ^A — which had to be approved.

*Richard H. Goodwin

So each one of these required a conversation with him. In the question of the thirty names, he sat down and we went over every one of them carefully. He added some and others he took out and then, finally, he did get a little tired and he said, "Well, if you think these are all right, let's keep them on." And on the question of the Executive Order, he went over it very carefully and I remember there were certain points that he changed there. He was always careful that we should do nothing that would encroach on the Congress and nothing which would cost any money unnecessarily.

MR. VON ECKHARDT: In these conversations, I gather from the speech you made recently, to the Larchmont Temple[†], you also had occasion to discuss broader issues, not just your immediate job.

MR. HICKSCHER: Yes. Well, that is one of the surprising things. I mentioned the fact that there was this conversation about Johnathan Bingham on a purely informal day. I was standing up, as I remember, but I couldn't get out of the office without making it fairly conspicuous. On another occasion, the only time I saw the President angry, when one of his aides had slipped up on making arrangements, as I recollect, for the son of a foreign diplomat to go to a certain hospital in Washington.

*November 20, 1964

And when he discovered that had not been done, he was very angry, and he said get so and so on the telephone and someone said so and so is off on vacation and he said, "Get him on the telephone!" And that time I did flee from that room! But, at least on two other occasions, sitting down with him, he ranged with an extraordinary sense of ease and spaciousness, as if he were not pressed. I think on one or both of these Arthur Schlesinger was with me, on one certainly. This was in the beginning of the congressional campaign and we sat down and he wanted to know whether Arthur had done the work that he had asked him to do in regard to looking up the experience of Presidents in the mid-term campaign; what role they had played, how many speeches they had made, and what had been the results of their campaign activities in congressional elections. He asked Arthur how that was going and he discussed that for a little while. It was in the early part of the summer of 1962, and things weren't going very well in the Administration. He was quite discouraged that day. It was then he said what I quoted in the speech to which you refer, he said, "Think of Franklin Roosevelt. We always imagine him as being a man at the summit of energy and confidence." And then he paused and he said, thinking obviously to himself, "But there must have been times in between," and he felt this was a time in-between for him when he was sort of

waiting around for the congressional campaigns to begin, rather anxious to get himself out into the battle and feeling frustrated in not getting his programs through the Congress as he would like. One of the nice talks I had with him was when my boy was on his Easter vacation and I said to Pierre Salinger, "Do you think if I bring Charles along, he could shake the President's hand just at the beginning of the interview?" And he said, "Why, yes, I think it would be fine." So, of course, the President not only greeted this blue-eyed blonde boy but he insisted that he sit down and during the whole conversation which lasted at least three-quarters of an hour that afternoon, and we did do a lot of business. I remember that was the day we approved the list of thirty people. That was the day that we agreed on who was to be my successor. He asked Arthur and me but we didn't have any sense that we were really satisfied with for this post. I was very anxious to get back to the work at the Twentieth Century Fund. And the President said, "Well, Jackie and I have been talking about it and we wonder whether Dick Goodwin wouldn't be a good person." And really it was the first time that either Arthur or I had thought of that and it struck me as a good idea largely because of the fact that he would have a direct and easy line to the President. He was on close personal

terms with the President and had worked with him on speeches and so on. And he's a young man, obviously very bright and very capable of learning. So I said I thought it sounded like a very good idea and sort of looked over at Arthur and he said he thought it would be a very good idea and that was that.

But before we came to this business, the President commented on the fact that I had been a Republican. He began to talk about the Republican Party. He talked about civil rights in the South. He said, "There's been a Congressman in today." I forget who it was. He said, "They're always blaming the situation in the South on somebody else. If only the Northerners wouldn't go in, if only Bobby wouldn't stir things up, if only I didn't say things, then they'd settle these problems by themselves. "But," he said, "obviously they've had a hundred years and they'll never get any of these things settled." And I said to him then, and this was curious, looking back on it, he was obviously tried and tired by this whole problem, and I said, "Mr. President, it must be a wonderful battle to be in because this really is one of the great moments of liberation in our country's history." And he looked at me in a very strange way. He didn't like a generalization of that sort. He was always concerned with winning the particular battle and

finding his way through a particular thicket of trouble. He looked at me in such a puzzled way that I remember saying, "Well, this is one great struggle in which this country is involved where we can do nothing but win. In France, they've lost Algeria. In England, they've lost an empire in the great movement of liberation. But we can only come out a stronger country." And I think he understood what I was saying and I think he even liked the point. But it wasn't the way in which he naturally talked. He really liked to keep fairly close to the realities of the political scene. I remember that day we talked about the Profumo affair. He said ^A this amused me and it amused my son who was sitting there in awestruck silence in a corner of the room ^B he said, "Isn't it strange when you think of it that nobody told MacMillan what was going on?" And then he paused and said, "But, as a matter of fact, of course, nobody ever told me what was going on." Then he paused again and he said, "But then, the CIA never does tell me anything."

MR. VON ECKHARDT: But in all these conversations as you relate them now, there is really very little on culture or the arts. Did you, for instance, discuss with him what this Cultural Center should be doing? Aside from the building and the money it cost. Did he have a concept of

the role a National Cultural Center in Washington should play?

MR. HECKSCHER: I would say no. The only thing we really discussed in those days was getting the money raised and getting the thing built. One problem was that we began at that time to feel very dissatisfied with the location of the Center, which is the location where it is now being built. I hope it will turn out all right. And he said to me ^J I think I have ^{had} made some public statements in which I held out the possibility of a review ^J he said, "No, if we don't get it built now, we'll never get it built during my Administration. It's either going to be here or obviously it's not going to be anywhere. We've got this land from the Congress and that's an extraordinary thing. Congress has never done anything so palpable."
(end of tape two)

Tape Three

MR. VON ECKHARDT: We talked about the Cultural Center, now called Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts. Do you feel -- you said he was anxious to get it built, in effect no matter where, just to get it built. So there was a cultural ambition. There was a historical sense that he, John F. Kennedy, wanted to make an imprint on the culture of the country?

MR. HECKSCHER: Oh, there's no question about that. He cared. I don't want to give the impression in anything I've said that he didn't care very deeply about these things. I would say really that he considered the cultural effort of his Administration to be broader than my office, which it really should have been. I was there doing a part of the job. But I am sure he felt; in the way he handled himself, in his own speeches, in his use of words, in his almost every day contacts with historians and so on, that he was showing an interest which was really broader. He was right in not trying to siphon everything through one man in one little office.

MR. VON ECKHARDT: Yes, but I'm sort of curious about the personal taste that might come through. For instance, did you ever discuss the work of a particular architect or artist or -- well, music you say, wasn't of particular interest to him -- but you didn't have occasion for that?

MR. HECKSCHER: No, the discussions were all outside of the immediate almost administrative business of the office, they were all on questions of broad national policy.

MR. VON ECKHARDT: Policy -- administrative questions -- politics, ~~and~~ personality.

MR. HECKSCHER: Yes.

MR. VON ECKHARDT: So that really the cultural interest was really more Mrs. Kennedy's, was it? The taste aspects of it?

MR. HECKSCHER:

Well, seeing this whole thing from the inside, one couldn't help but being impressed by how small things in a way seemed from the inside ^{and} that seemed very large from the outside. Obviously, what would be a dinner party in private life would be a front page story when it happened to be held in the White House. So my going there which was really a very small thing in many ways was construed by the public -- and I think it did indicate some new interest on the part of government ^{at} in that way it had an influence greater than anything that I represented and greater even than anything President Kennedy did directly. I mean he just ^{at} all he had to do was ask me down there and then that set in motion waves which carried quite far. He didn't have to worry about it from one day to the next. But as far as Mrs. Kennedy went, of course, she too was a somewhat ambivalent figure in all this. In the first place she was devoted to the private life that she could keep for herself and to her children and yet, on the other hand, she found that she was becoming more and more the representative of a bright flame of cultural interests in this country. Sometimes she seemed to draw back as if she didn't want to get too much involved in all this. The public had the impression, for example, that Mrs. Kennedy was doing an enormous amount for the

arts, was busy every moment. But Mrs. Kennedy herself was much too wise to be busy every moment promoting the arts. She would do one thing with superb taste and it would have a tremendous impact. And we were always — I say 'we' in this case for I was working very closely with Tish Baldrige*, her social secretary. We were always trying to get Mrs. Kennedy to do things which she wouldn't do; to receive people at the White House or to ask certain people for dinner, and she would plead that she was busy or that she wasn't having any State dinners at that time, or one thing or another. I remember being disappointed, for example, when I finally did persuade Mrs. Kennedy to invite some poets who were gathering in Washington for a convocation at the Library of Congress, to come to the White House for sherry and she agreed to that. And then that fell just at the time of the Cuban Crisis and she cancelled it. I always regretted that because I think it would have been a glorious thing if we could say now that at the moment when the President was facing this supreme crisis in the nation's life, the White House was filled with a great gathering of leading American poets. But that isn't quite the way it was.

*Letitia Baldrige

MR. VON ECKHARDT: Didn't Khrushchev at the same time go and see the American ballet?

MR. HECKSCHER: Yes, I remember that same moment when Mrs. Kennedy was cancelling the visit of the group of poets to the White House, pictures appeared in the papers showing Khrushchev going behind the scenes at the opera in Moscow and greeting American singers who were there. And it was too bad we did that. Mrs. Kennedy, on the other hand -- now I didn't see her a great deal -- partly, in the beginning I wanted to be sure that I had done everything I could to establish good relations with the President because I didn't want to be thought of as being down there to help Mrs. Kennedy decorate the White House or become involved in that. What was new in my assignment was that we were thinking in terms of national policy and not merely in terms of the immediate entourage and the details of daily life. Of course, I saw Mrs. Kennedy. I saw her informally on many occasions ^{at} many, I say enough ^{at} but I had one long talk with her and curiously enough, only one. And she was wonderful then. She told me then how much the President did care about the Cultural Center as it was then called and she said that he had recently said to her, "All right, Jackie, I guess now we've got to call in all the fat cats that I've been saving up for the

campaign." In other words, they were getting contributions. They had these receptions in the White House for certain people in the Congress. And he was willing in that case to ask money for the Cultural Center from people he would have preferred to save up for the campaign ahead. Mrs. Kennedy was awfully nice to me. She said, "Mr. Heckscher, I will do anything for the arts you want." (She said it, but it didn't work out that way, and wisely perhaps.) She added characteristically, "Except road bills." I told Mrs. Kennedy, "Don't worry about the bills, you know, the legislative bills." Then she did go on as I remember, "But, of course, I can't be away too much from the children and I can't be present at too many cultural events." Then with sort of a smile, she said, "After all, I'm not Mrs. Roosevelt." I couldn't help but laugh at that.

She was very affectionate in referring to the President and I was struck by it. We were discussing some dinner that was to be held and she said, "Well, we can do it almost any time but not in," I think it was, "the early weeks of April, because that's near Easter and that's going to be Jack's vacation and I want to keep that absolutely clear." She was thinking ahead and very thoughtfully about him.

MR. VON ECKHARDT: Very nice. Did you have a sense of accomplishment after you left your White House job?

MR. HECKSCHER: Well, yes. I felt that the time I spent there had been tremendously worthwhile. When I'd finished, I had done a report for the President which had been well-received by him and well-treated by the press. It looked as if this report was not going to be one of those that just lay on the shelf because the President had agreed to the thirty names which would make up the Advisory Council, and that ^{the} Advisory Council was to be appointed in the very near future, and would take up this report as their first order of business, to see how it could be implemented and what portion should be given priority. The President had, at the same time, which was crucial to me, agreed to name a full-time successor in my place, which was the one thing which I had asked. So I could feel that, quite apart from a vague sense of having people respond to certain things I'd said, the things I had asked for had all been accomplished. Maybe I'd put my sights too low but I had gotten the Advisory Council on the Arts, I'd gotten the report, and I'd gotten a permanent successor. From the first day I said to the people in my office ³¹ Barbara Donald, Nancy Newhouse ²¹ "When you make up the files you must realize that we are not just putting up

files; we are really starting something -- an office which I hope will continue here in the White House forever." And, in fact, it looked as if that had been achieved. But it must be said that after I had half left the office -- because, remember the President asked me to stay on even though I was going to Washington less frequently -- in the interval between this sense of accomplishment and the President's death, things had already begun to slip very badly. On leaving Washington, I said, "I think I am the only man that ever left Washington completely satisfied that he had achieved what he felt it was reasonable to hope for." Three months later I felt very differently. The names of the Advisory Committee had not been approved; Ken O'Donnell had held up the security investigation ^{and} had kept the names in his desk.

MR. VON ECKHARDT: This is O'Donnell? In the Bureau of the Budget?

MR. HECKSCHER: No, no. He was the President's chief aide, really the top of the Irish Mafia. And he had always been rather hostile to this work. That ~~June~~ ^{July} I was going out for some conferences in Aspen and for a vacation and when I came back, the thirty names that the President approved had not yet been sent to the FBI for clearance. I said to Arthur Schlesinger, "Where are they?" And he finally found them on Ken O'Donnell's desk. So that was a disappointment.

MR. VON ECKHARDT: On what grounds do you think he was hostile to the program?

MR. HECKSCHER: I just think he didn't feel it was very important. I had never been able to get an appointment to see the President through him. I always had to go through Arthur or Pierre or directly to Mrs. Lincoln, for example. And I would try to get things done for my office, either a raise for one of my assistants or an extra secretary, and I could never get anything accomplished through him. I would always have to go around him. I thought he was the terrible no-man, as far as I was concerned, in the Administration.

MR. VON ECKHARDT: How were your relations with the other key staff members?

MR. HECKSCHER: Well, on the whole, very nice. I used to, of course, see them all at the staff mess. There was Bill Dundy, Pierre Salinger, Ralph Dungan, Carl Kayson, Walter Heller. A lot of these people I knew through work here at the Twentieth Century Fund and so on. I think they looked upon me as sort of half an outsider, half an insider. I think they were always rather amused at the degree of good will ^{by} pleased by the degree of good will ^{that} came to the Administration and amused by the fact that it cost so little money and did require --

MR. VON ECKHARDT: Money seems to have been a concern?

MR. HECKSCHER: Well, they all seemed to worry about money in those days. It was curious --

MR. VON ECKHARDT: Was this fear of the Bureau of the Budget or --

MR. HECKSCHER: Well, no. There was a general feeling that money was low, especially White House funds. Free White House funds were not very plentiful or at least the President never would let us think they were very plentiful. And the other thing, of course, was that I couldn't go to the Congress. I mentioned a few negotiations before and I hoped that ultimately we would get a bill, but they were struggling to get everything from aid to education through, medicare, urban affairs and so on. They were failing but meanwhile these little things in the arts seemed to be going along great guns.

MR. VON ECKHARDT: Were there any sort of systematic discussions on cultural affairs?

MR. HECKSCHER: At the White House mess they would always ask me about the Cultural Center and about the Advisory Council and about the whole White House program. Tish would be there usually at lunch and there would be a lot of discussion about what we could do to get some new grand event at the White House. I had an idea, for example, of a concert that would be given at a State dinner and be made up entirely of music that existed in Thomas

Jefferson's musical library -- all compositions which he had.

MR. VON ECKHARDT: Was that ever done?

MR. HECKSCHER: No, that was never done. We never could find the right moment. And then when Tish left that was a disappointment because she was full of enthusiasm. But she was always getting her ears pinned back a little bit. I would see memoranda ^{at} Tish would send up some idea to Mrs. Kennedy and Mrs. Kennedy would just write "no" with an exclamation point on it.

MR. VON ECKHARDT: Simply because it was too much for her --?

MR. HECKSCHER: I think that's the way things should work. There should be people who are pushing ideas and yet, obviously, if somebody in Mrs. Kennedy's position were pushed around by too many ideas, she would have been distracted and I think also the great thing is she would have lost her impact and effect.

MR. VON ECKHARDT: Were there any specific ideas contributed to your report by members of the White House staff?

MR. HECKSCHER: No.

MR. VON ECKHARDT: Your main task was to prepare this report. This was what the President had asked you?

MR. HECKSCHER: Yes, I think that was his idea that I would go down there and do a report. But I wasn't very enthusiastic about doing a report. There had been a report done

under Truman about ten years before. And, after all, I've done enough reports in my life about enough things. The only thing ~~at~~ the only way there would be anything interesting to report on, was by doing things during the year I was there and summing up that experience in the report. I think that's what made my work interesting and what gave the report itself some feeling of reality. For example, when I went down one of the first things I did was to ask the Bureau of the Budget to make a survey of arts programs, with a dollar value on each item, that had been carried on by the various departments and agencies in government. Well, that looked like a very nice idea and everybody was rather enthusiastic about carrying it forward. But in practice it turned out to be quite deceptive because most of the arts programs are indirect and are not recognized as such. I mean if you build a building, it can be a work of art or it can not, depending entirely on the way its conceived and carried out. But you wouldn't put the cost of that building down as an art program. You might conceivably put the architectural fees or you might put down the cost of the special competition of some kind if you had held that. And so that didn't work very well but I had very good relations with the Bureau of the Budget probably as a

result of this inquiry. And then I made it a point to work with the people in the Treasury in regard to admissions taxes, and ways of being able to spread the income of artists over a number of years to adjust their income tax more favorably. We worked, as I think I mentioned, with the Post Office Department on stamps; we worked with the Library of Congress ³ I remember I asked them one time whether they would get together for me an exhibition of posters that had been done by government departments with the idea of seeing which were well-designed and which were badly designed and perhaps giving a little recognition to those that showed some sense of good design. They did that with great pleasure. We worked, of course, a good deal ² saw a lot of Bill Slayton* in terms of the urban renewal plan. I was able to ask Bill Slayton how many cultural centers were being planned as part of the urban renewal thing, and he would write me back a memorandum almost immediately and give me that sort of information. He was very anxious that I do one speech for which he and I could never find quite the right occasion in which I should affirm the importance of good design. I did it many times in more general discussions, but he wanted me to do one at the opening of one big housing development.

*William L. Slayton, Urban Renewal Administrator

We worked very closely together. What I really tried to do was to find within the Federal establishment ^A given the limits of time and all that ³ the men who were sympathetic to an approach to the arts and sensitive to good design. And to create good relations with them, to encourage and strengthen them, to make them feel there was somebody in the White House sympathetic to their work who would encourage them to go further, who would help get any plea of theirs up to the highest levels ^A ₃ indeed, to the President himself. The things which used to come across my desk and the calls which I used to get were interesting and showed how an office of this kind could develop into both a busy and I think a very useful center. It seemed to me that I was always being called to be told that some federal highway was just about to be built through an historic building and could I divert the federal highway, or that a very good building was going to be torn down because a bad federal Post Office was about to be built on the site, or a college campus of a liberal arts college was about to be --

MR. VON ECKHARDT: Pleas for preservation?

MR. HECKSCHER: Yes, preservation and for the performance of these great federal functions with a sensitivity to cultural values and the cause of the arts. I can't say that I

ever did stop a federal highway. But we did do some things. I mean I worked, for example, on trying to get the Federal Center here in New York adjusted more nearly to what we thought would be a good plan, so that the Federal building would tie in with the plan of the local people here in New York. And there's no question that if one ^{7/1} that if the person in that office has time enough to, and the right sense of dealing both with the White House itself and with these agencies, he could make sure that in all sorts of quiet ways cultural values are taken into account when decisions are being made. They won't be the only values that are being taken into account and the cultural cause won't always win out. It shouldn't always be the determining cause. But, at least, if we tear a good building down we will know what we are doing; we will know that we are paying a price in order to achieve something else.

MR. VON ECKHARDT: It's a day-by-day quest. Details can at times be more important than bread policy?

MR. HECKSCHER: Yes, that was my feeling. I mean those were the things I was anxious --

MR. VON ECKHARDT: Do you think that the President, President Kennedy, went along with you on this?

MR. HECKSCHER: Oh, yes. He was very sympathetic to all this and I think I made this clear and it was when he felt in the end that it should be a full-time job. That was of course the concept that I had gotten across. What I called day-to-day surveillance.

MR. VON ECKHARDT: In the pursuit of excellence?

MR. HECKSCHER: Of excellence, yes. And to reward sometimes with a letter some department that was doing something very well to get -- we did get some of the first good stamps designed by --

MR. VON ECKHARDT: You were responsible for the fact that Hans Albers and Buckminster Fuller, and others were invited to design a postage stamp commemorating "Science?"

MR. HECKSCHER: Yes, yes. I say I was responsible.

MR. VON ECKHARDT: You initiated it?

MR. HECKSCHER: Yes.

MR. VON ECKHARDT: Was there any particular aspect of your report that the President liked better than others? He read everything very carefully that was put before him, he accepted it, he must have -- did he comment on anything?

MR. HECKSCHER: No. He said he liked it, that he thought I had made it realistic which was a very high compliment, that he thought we ought to begin on the first things and get

those done ^{and} then it was always his idea, as I say, that the Advisory Council itself should take up the other issues and details as well as the large plan like the Foundation for the Arts, and that in that way we would have a continuing progress towards certain general goals which I had laid down and to which he had given his approval. I myself felt that was the way to go about it. He said, "Of course, you're going to need legislation." I mean he was very clear that we would have an arts bill of some magnitude sometime. But he was never anxious ^{to} and I think he was right in this ^{to} to get out and fight a lonely battle for culture in advance of an interest which had already been shown by the public at large. He was determined to build step by step. I saw that in the smallest ways in my own relations with him. Whenever there was something that had been accomplished and well received, he was then ready to go on and do something else. But as you indicated earlier through a question, or elicited from me the opinion ^{that} he didn't call me. His staff occasionally called me when they were preparing a speech. I remember one amusing incident when they called me from Hyannisport because he was going to meet with a music group on the lawn of the White House. They wanted a statistic about how many people saw baseball

as opposed to how many people went to concerts. Well, I got the statistic which is usually given that more people go to baseball games than go to symphony concerts but, speaking off-the-cuff next morning, he said, "I was told that more people go to baseball games than go to all concerts." The Times picked that up. They called me and they wanted to know where the President got that statistic and so on. I felt as if there was going to be a big headline next day: "Cultural Advisor says the President misquoted him," or something. But they handled it very nicely. One of the ideas he liked and repeated to these children on the White House lawn was the idea that art is hard work; you have to work just as hard to be a good artist as to be a good athlete or a good anything else in life. And I think that is what he came to feel increasingly. That was the way he tied in the arts with his general emphasis on excellence and on discipline. The feeling that the arts were a form of highly trained activity carried on by disciplined people who pursued a goal and were able to carry it out with skill. He valued that kind of skill, in his own life and in others.

MR. VON ECKHARDT: Very definitely. Would you think that the role of the White House advisor should be to perhaps push the Presidency more into a position of leadership in the

arts? I mean you indicated that really President Kennedy with all his interests sort of followed along and wanted to know that the general public was ready for each little step. Do you think that a President, that your successor should be more aggressive as a taste maker?

MR. HECKSCHER: Well, I don't think --

MR. VON ECKHARDT: In the educational role, let's put it that way. Maybe "taste maker" is an ugly word but in the educational role --

MR. HECKSCHER: I think yes. A person in that post ought to be ready at any moment to push the President on small matters to be sure that when some bill affecting the arts is signed you have a little ceremony in the White House and that the thing is properly prepared and given its due weight. I think he ought to try to make sure that certain people receive recognition from the President, and I think he ought to urge the President to speak at appropriate occasions ^{at} the dedication of a great library or something of that kind. All that he should be ready to call to the President's attention but I don't think you can really change the style of the President. If he isn't already predisposed to do things, you can't push him very far.

MR. VON ECKHARDT: Well, you can guide his interests in some ways.

MR. HECKSCHER: Yes, and as I say, you keep calling his attention to opportunities that if he is ready to take them, are there. And that, of course, we were doing a good deal at that time. We were always looking for dinners comparable to the Nobel Prize dinner which had occurred just before I went down and the Andre Malraux dinner which was a great occasion when I was there. It was very important to be sure that not only the right members of Congress were invited but the right people from the outside world. In all those matters, it wasn't a matter of social entertainment in the White House at all. This became a matter of recognizing great talent, regarding great achievement in the cultural field. In all that, of course, I did my best. Again, you have to work closely with people in the White House. Mac Bundy was very helpful. Schlesinger, Salinger, one or two others.

MR. VON ECKHARDT: Do you get the feeling in the new appointments to the Fine Arts Commission, for instance, that here really a new generation of Americans have taken over?

MR. HECKSCHER: Yes. Now there was one thing, of course, I did. That was prepared entirely, those nominations, by Arthur Schlesinger, Bill Walton and myself. We sat down two or three days at the White House --

MR. VON ECKHARDT: I would gather not too many of these names were known to the President before, were they? People like Gordon Bunshaft.

MR. HECKSCHER: Yes. I don't know; I think Mrs. Saarinen was known. Anybody who had been in the papers, anybody who was at all in public life, whether it was in the field of architecture or not, he knew.

MR. VON ECKHARDT: Because it was such a decisive break with the Beaux Arts minded previous Commission and here were really modern people that the young generation would accept. Was he conscious of this?

MR. HECKSCHER: Oh, yes. He was very conscious of this. That was a very clear assignment ³ that we were to ^{create} do a Fine Arts Commission that was really new and I must say he was wonderful too with the names for the Arts Commission. He never wanted anybody there merely for political reasons. Oh, there were one or two people whom he, for personal reasons, liked or owed something to. But really even there he was either a little apologetic with me and said, "I just have to do this," or else it would be somebody whom he knew personally but also was so unmistakably qualified for an Arts Commission that his substituting him for somebody I had on the list in no way affected the quality.

MR. VON ECKHARDT: Who are some of the names? Do you remember the more significant names in the art field to indicate style?

MR. HECKSCHER: You mean whom he wanted?

MR. VON ECKHARDT: Whom he wanted, yes.

MR. HECKSCHER: Well, for example, he was very anxious to have Katherine Hepburn on. He thought Katherine Hepburn would give some glamour to the Arts Commission and he was very anxious to see her. And I think we finally persuaded him that Julie Harris would be a better person. And he was interested in ^A one of the people he apologized a little bit for — this will all be off the record I trust — was Mrs. Buffy Chandler out in California, because she, of course, had done an enormous amount ^{of} money raising in the Los Angeles Cultural Center. He said, "She even got me to give money to that thing so I think she must be good and we have to get her on the Commission." I wouldn't say that he apologized for her because after all we did have public citizens and she qualified but there may have been one other person whom he was anxious to have and whom he had made some kind of promise to. She was a Republican, of course.

MR. VON ECKHARDT: Who would have been on the visual arts?

MR. HECKSCHER: I just don't remember that. That list, of course, is in the files but we revised it so often that it obviously gets mixed up in my mind with other lists that we were

always making. But we had thirty people whom he --- I think that list is there in the files with his initials on it --- and will stand and will look very well.

MR. VON ECKHARDT: You think it will look very well?

MR. HECKSCHER: Yes.

MR. VON ECKHARDT: There was discussion about the Smithsonian. I think that was a very important change, wasn't it? The appointment of the Secretary of the Smithsonian?

MR. HECKSCHER: Yes. I wasn't in on that. But the result was that my roommate at Yale was chosen. I wasn't in on those discussions.

MR. VON ECKHARDT: But his feeling was to replace wherever possible --- the Library of Congress, for instance, still hasn't been done. I mean actually ---

MR. HECKSCHER: Well, Fred Keppel, of course. Fred Keppel is Commissioner of Education and was somebody he was very interested in having down there, and I know was very pleased to get. Nobody ought to underestimate the role that Arthur Schlesinger was playing all the time. He, after all, was the President's link with the intellectual world, the world he valued so much, of writers, historians, people in education and so on. Arthur must have been seeing the President at that time, I won't say daily, because there were certainly

periods when I would guess he was unhappy he didn't see him more often. ⁵ But he always had access to the President through the back door, through Mrs. Lincoln's office. He was the real keeper you might say of the intellectual tone of the White House. And I was there doing a somewhat specific assignment, working closely with him. We never had a disagreement.

"Kennedy: The Man Who Lives On"
Address by August Heckscher
Larchmont Temple
November 20, 1964

Friday

John F. Kennedy desired above all to go down in history as a man of definite and measurable accomplishments. It was his nature to mark off his victories, like an old frontiersman cutting notches in the handle of his gun. The vague impulse toward good, the well-meaning but ineffectual gesture, he tended to disparage in others, and to avoid so far as possible in his own case. Some of us, for this reason, felt that he underrated the educative role of the presidency. Woodrow Wilson he set lower among the great presidents than contemporary historians are inclined to do. One day we asked him why. He said, in effect, that this was because Wilson's greatest battle was not won. He seemed unwilling to grant that Wilson's noble struggle for the League of Nations was one of those shaping influences which by themselves can transform defeat into victory.

I stress this view of President Kennedy's because it was one of the sad and yet touching ironies of his years that in the end his example counted for as much as his deeds; his supreme gift was the quality and grace of his leadership. The victories he sought and upon which he counted so much were in large measure to be denied him. The narrow margin by which he was elected in 1960, the tragic shortness of the thousand days, made his administration an episode in our national history, rather than the substantial and rounded chapter upon which his hopes were placed. Yet who shall say, as the poignant anniversary of his death comes by, that in

in the impulse brilliantly expressed, in the fleeting gesture and the aura intangibly spun, there is not something as valid as finished undertakings, as enduring as much that has been signed and sealed.

At the very start of his quest for the land's highest office, John Kennedy set forth his conception of what the American Presidency should be. It was, above all, in his view, a place of action; a focus of responsibility and power. The United States he saw ready to embark upon new voyages of discovery: discovery within its own life and borders, discovery in the realms of science and the intellect, discovery in the sphere of international relationships. The theme of the 1960 campaign was that it was time "to get America moving again"; and the fulcrum of the great effort required of us all was to be - inevitably had to be - the White House itself. The Inaugural Address was conceived as the trumpet call to a new generation. Around the young President, freshly installed in the place of power, gathered as dedicated and brilliant a group of men as ever have served an American Chief Executive.

Later, somewhat plaintively John Kennedy was to say that the lesson of the first two years in office was that power was not wielded with certain results, that the complexity of the world and of the American political system frustrated easy hopes and assumptions. Certainly he had had his share of disappointments. Congress was difficult; despite his own experience in the Senate he did not have the taste for the endless negotiations and unremitting pressure from which his successor has shaped legislative accomplishments. The citizens, whom he had urged to think primarily of what they could do for their country, sometimes seemed remote, and sometimes, as in

the unhappy confrontation with the managers of the steel industry, seemed to move to a different music than his own. Abroad, there were setbacks, too. The Bay of Pigs lay like a dark shadow over the first year. Khrushchev at the meeting in Vienna was at his most harsh and intractable. Laos and then Viet Nam were constant and exhausting preoccupations.

I remember one conversation in President Kennedy's office, when the talk had ranged far beyond the immediate business on which I had come to see him. It was the summer of 1962, before the Congressional campaigns of that year had caught up the President in the exhilaration of fresh battles. He was in a relaxed and rather quizzical mood. We always thought of Franklin Roosevelt, he said, as a man at the summit of energy and accomplishment, but there must have been times, perhaps long times in between. . . . A year and a half later I recalled that day and that mood when, at the funeral service in Washington, there was read the great passage from the Bible which proclaims that there is a time for everything - a time to speak, and a time to be silent; a time for action and a time for those in-between periods when a man must summon inner reserves of faith and strength to endure the waiting and to bear the long frustrations of life.

But this was only one side of the Washington of that bright and glorious interlude. While the complexities and difficulties were piling up, John F. Kennedy, almost in spite of himself, was reminding us all of what it means to live well, to preserve the courage that is grace under pressure, and the gaiety that is part of good purposes and sound resolves. I say "almost in spite of himself," for JFK was the last man who would have wanted

to set himself up as a model. He was shy of the hortatory and abhorred any touch of pretentiousness. His wit was most often turned against himself and was rapier-quick to undercut the poses which a public man almost inevitably falls into. Yet nothing could disguise his fresh, vigorous and salty way of looking at the world. Newspapermen began to wait at press conferences for the unpredictable sally. The public began to sense that here was a man who was not deceived by false hopes, yet would never lose his zest; who was not sentimental but was filled with a deep love of his family and a sense of kindness and good will toward those around him; who was detached and even cool on the surface, but in whose nature burned strong fires and an often disarming impatience.

A story he told more than once reminds us of the double edge of the man: the passion to get on with the work, combined with a skeptical realization that no easy solution or quick results could be assured. The great French pro-consul, General Lyautey, had told his gardener to plant a certain tree in his garden. The gardener protested; it would ^{be} take decades before the tree could cast any effective shade. "Then by all means," General Lyautey replied, "we must plant the tree this very afternoon." Had not the Inaugural carried this same enduring message - the call to begin, along with the admonition that we might not see the results during our life on this planet?

Meanwhile on the vast stage of events the measure of the administration was beginning to take form. The Peace Corps was set on foot, that important initiative which reminded younger people across the country that

there are still tasks to be done for their country - tasks to be performed in hard conditions, without worldly rewards, yet bringing the deepest satisfactions of service and self-sacrifice. The fight for ultimate equality on this continent was launched, its battle cry embodied in the President's assertion that a moral revolution was under way, its marching orders written into a new civil rights law. Important progress was being charted in such fields as housing, education and urban reconstruction. In the pivotal speech at Yale's Commencement, the President laid the groundwork for a fiscal policy which could assure an adequate rate of economic growth.

In international affairs the crisis of Berlin was surmounted, new initiatives toward the interdependence of nations affirmed, and above all, the fateful confrontation with the Soviets took place over the placement of missiles in Cuba. If the Bay of Pigs had found the administration off guard, acting half on its own and half in line with arrangements already laid down, this new and deadly situation found it prepared, strong in its will, absolutely unwavering in its course of action. For the first time in history two great power systems, each armed with atomic weapons and equipped with the means of their immediate delivery, looked at each other and faced the ultimate issue. The way the crisis was handled - defiance in the teeth of danger, prudence and magnanimity when a solution began to appear - will stand as a classic act of high statesmanship, a precedent which may serve us in good stead through years to come. That was Kennedy's finest hour.

On the very evening that the President was delivering to the nation and the world an account of the grim facts of the Cuban situation, it happened that there was being held in Washington the greatest convocation of American poets ever to meet in one place. In that conjunction - what Robert Frost had called the union of poetry and power - we see another aspect of the Kennedy years. From the beginning there had been a new note struck; at the Inauguration the nation's most venerable and beloved poet stood upon the rostrum to give the blessing of the muses to the young leader. Artists, scholars, writers and intellectuals came from ~~far and near~~ as a visible symbol of the fact that henceforth such representatives of the nation's cultural achievements would not remain upon the outskirts, looked upon as odd and even faintly disreputable members of the great community, but that they would stand at the center, in the sunlight of the nation's life. The meaning of that day was not lost on the American people. Afterwards, when the White House began to open its doors in brilliant hospitality to leading figures from the world of scholarship and art, when the old building itself began to shine forth in an exquisite restoration, the citizens realized that a new luster had been added to the American image.

Having done this, it was natural for the President to look more generally at the arts in America, and to ask whether the government was meeting its full responsibilities in this domain. I had the good fortune to be called on by President Kennedy for help and advice in this work. He made it clear to me, characteristically, that he wanted to move "without fanfare" in a field new to the national government, and with awareness that it would always be the artists and creators themselves, along with support of private patrons, who would play the main role in the development of the

nation's cultural life. I fully agreed with this approach. Yet as the popular reaction proved favorable, and popular interest mounted, he seemed ready to give increasing support to activities in this area. Toward the end of his life President Kennedy came to feel, I think, that progress in the arts was intimately related to all that he wanted America to be. It is significant that one of his last major addresses, and one of his ~~finest~~ ^{finest}, was delivered at Amherst in praise of poets and poetry.

I have often been asked how it was that John F. Kennedy, who certainly never claimed to be a connoisseur of the arts, could have come to show so much sympathy with their cause. In part, no doubt, it was because of the beautiful and gifted woman who stood at his side. In part it was because he was responding, as any sensitive and enlightened leader must, to currents that were stirring within the social order. But in his own makeup, as man and statesman, the arts were a genuinely important element. Through the writing of history, through his own care in the use of words, through unappeasable curiosity and love of excellence, he had come to understand those who, in various fields, followed their particular vision. And then he saw that the creative individual came close to his ideal of the good statesman and the good citizen. "Too often in the past," he said, "we have thought of the artist as an idler and a dilettante, and of the lover of arts as somehow effete. We have done both an injustice. The life of the artist is, in relation to his work, stern and lonely. . . His working life is marked by intense application and intense discipline. As for the lover of arts, he seeks only that his life will be the more fully lived."

"Intense discipline," and "a life fully lived": these qualities came to be the hallmarks of what is remembered as the Kennedy style. It was a style that had little to do with surface manifestations, but had a great deal to do with lasting values as they are expressed in even the most commonplace duties of life. It was an infectious style, marking the whole White House staff. I recall how many a luncheon conversation in the White House mess would be suddenly broken off as young men rushed out to exercise or to take courses in rapid reading. One day the President's adviser on science, Jerry Wiesner, asked me whether it would not be a good idea if I were to put a scientist on the President's Advisory Committee on the arts, which we were then forming. I said I thought that would be excellent, but how would it be if he placed an artist on the National Science Committee? Mr. Wiesner thought for a moment and then replied: "That wouldn't be necessary, for you see we scientists are all artists." So, in a way, they were artists every one, those who gave themselves in intense application, intense discipline, to the service of the New Frontier, taught by their chief to pursue excellence in whatever field and at whatever level they worked.

My own contacts with President Kennedy were not of a frequency comparable to those of many other staff members. Yet the door was always open when there were matters to be decided; and then, almost invariably, the conversation would range widely. In these days of the television one no longer has the feeling of discovering what a great man is really like; he has already been made familiar, both in his manner and in the substance of

his thought. President Kennedy was the man the whole nation, and indeed the whole world, knew well: crisp in his intelligence, probing in his mind, quick to smile and yet with the ever-present feeling, as he had said of the artist, of something "stern and lonely" beneath. Nevertheless there was always, as one entered that office - so modest to be the seat of great power - there was always a sense of some surprise. The President was taller than one had quite realized. There was about him, to a degree that his public appearances had never fully conveyed, a sense of the man's grace; something in his bearing and dress for which the word "elegance" would seem alone to be adequate.

When my report for the President had been completed, I went to talk over with him some of its implications and, in effect, to say goodbye. It was indeed to be the last time I saw him. I had asked whether I might bring my thirteen-year-old son, who watched and listened in awestruck silence as the interview ran on and the President talked freely about the Republican Party, the civil rights movement, the then all-absorbing Profumo affair, and other matters. Toward the end of the hour the President turned to my son, and there was a pleasant scene as together they discussed whether he should be given a Parker pen with Mr. Kennedy's name engraved upon it, or a PT boat in the form of a tie clip. In an entry in his journal made that evening, my son recorded the conversation in detail. (A copy ^{is} now ~~rests~~ among the papers destined for the Kennedy Library.) Of his own transaction with the President, he remarked: "All this he said not talking down to me, but with an air of businesslike equality. . . Then we said goodbye and I departed, walking on air."

And so we must all say goodbye once more and depart, as the sad

anniversary draws near and we recall the memories of one of the darkest days that ever occurred in American history. We shall not walk on air, but may we not all of us walk a little more proudly, with a stronger faith and courage, because this man lived and was raised up by the vote of his fellow-citizens to the eminence from which he led us for a little while? It is too late for the *pl* rhetoric of grief. It is still too early for the sober verdict of history. But for all of us, young and old, who have lived through these last memorable years, there is a light that plays upon the public scene. We move in that light - the light of a presence that lives on, and that will not fade while youth and valor have their home among men.