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Guthman, Editor, Seattle Times (1947-1961); Director of Public Information, Department of Justice (1961-1964); press assistant to Robert F. Kennedy [RFK] (1964-1965) discusses the press coverage of civil rights during the Kennedy Administration, RFK's relationship with the press, and Guthman's involvement in the investigation of James R. Hoffa, among other issues.

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EDWIN GUTHMAN
JFK #2

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Oral History Interview

With

Edwin O. Guthman

February 24, 1968
Los Angeles, CA

By John Stewart

For the John F. Kennedy Presidential Library

STEWART: The date is February 24th, 1968. This is the second interview with Mr. Edwin O. Guthman, G-U-T-H-M-A-N. The interview is taking place at Mr. Guthman's office at the Los Angeles Times. The interviewer is John Stewart.

[PAUSE IN RECORDING]

STEWART: Just let me ask you, do you recall if there are any particular reporters, columnists, or papers that stand out in your mind as being particularly troublesome during the three years?

GUTHMAN: Well, let's say that there were a few columnists and a number of magazines that were not too interested in finding out both sides of the story. I think as far as the magazines were concerned, the two that were most difficult to deal with were *Time* and the *U.S. News*. They had their own viewpoint, and they made the news conform to that. And even when they had access to all the facts, it still came out a different why. And I recall a number of incidents, one in connection with *U.S. News and World Report*, which was typical of they way they operated. It was—at Oxford, Mississippi, they had a reporter down there by the name of Sterling Slappy. He was on the scene; he saw what happened. He reported, and it was an accurate report, and they printed it.

It reflected that the marshals had held their ground, that they had been attacked, and they had been reviled, and so forth. And generally it reported it as we thought it happened.

U.S. News and World Report was southern-oriented, and I imagine Mr. Slappy's reported caused a good deal of trouble for them. So the next week they wrote a--they published a letter that was unsigned from a student, which told an exactly opposite story, of how it was the marshals who precipitated all the trouble, and who did all the things, which was the view that the officials of Mississippi—well, we got a lot of letters then, asking us about it, and criticizing us for what we did.

And what I did then was to Xerox copies of Sterling Slappy's story which appeared one week, and this unsigned student letter. And I sent back letters, and there was quite a number of them, and I said, "I suggest you ask *U.S. News* which version of this thing was right." They were continually doing that. They didn't—they had good reporters. They got the facts, so you can only conclude that there was something at the top that wanted it differently.

And I think that's also true with *Time Magazine*. We had repeatedly—yeah, they had good men, very decently people who were trustworthy and bright, and no problem about giving them access to any information that they wanted. But somehow it didn't very often get reflected in the reporting, in the exchange. When we got the [unclear] prisoners back, apparently someone up there didn't think that was a very good idea, so they just reported it in a completely distorted fashion.

A better example of that, one that was—we finally were able to do something about, and it's kind of an interesting anecdote. They, when the Civil Rights Bill was first proposed in 1963, in that summer after the trouble in Birmingham, *Time Magazine* reflected that, reported, that the open—not—

STEWART: Public Accommodation?

GUTHMAN: Yeah, was something that we'd dreamed up, and something that we had sort of manufactured, and that there was no real need for it. And this went on for a couple of weeks, and they really zinged us on it, particularly the Justice Department, and the Attorney General [Robert F. Kennedy]. And we were trying to figure out what we could do about it, and we finally decided about the only thing we could do would be to go up and have lunch, try to have lunch with Henry Luce.

And so we arranged to have lunch with him, and the Attorney General and Burke Marshall and I went to New York, and we had lunch with Mr. Luce and the editors of his, all of his publications. And the Attorney General and Burke Marshall, during the lunch, explained just why there was a need for the Public Accommodation section of the Civil Rights Bill. And Mr. Luce kept saying, "Oh, I didn't know that!" And then they would explain a little more, and he would answer, "Well, I didn't know that." And it was: "I didn't know this," and "I didn't know that," and it went on and on. And finally, Tom Griffith [Thomas Griffith], who was I think at that point an assistant managing editor of *Time*, finally said, in the presence of everyone, he said, "Well, Mr. Luce, what these men are telling you is what is reflected in the reports from our correspondents in the field."

And I was quite grateful. I thought it took a great deal of courage on his part. But it showed what the hell was happening on that magazine! And why they would do that, I don't

know! And the result—that did get straightened out, and thereafter, they then reported it—you know. You know, you have times with, say, with *Newsweek*, or with *Fortune*, or with *Look* or *Life*, or *Saturday Evening Post*, where you had a difference of opinion.

STEWART: Yeah, yeah.

GUTHMAN: Where they got something that you wished they hadn't, or they got something but they didn't get all the facts, or something. But those were in the normal course of doing business, and there was no pattern to it, and no—there could have been that it was a difference, mistake on our part, or on theirs. But with *Time* and *U.S. News*, it just was a constant attempt to portray the administration, and particularly President Kennedy and Robert Kennedy, in something other than was the fact. Anything that I ever had any personal knowledge of, that I saw or whatever, was very seldom factual. And as far as the columnists are concerned, I think that most of them, excellent job, good reporters. Obviously Drew Pearson was always a source of reputation.

He had a favorite explanation for something. Whenever he would write a column which reflected on something in the Department of Justice, it was always about two-thirds wrong, perhaps higher, I would call him, and say, "Well, why didn't you at least give us an opportunity to tell you what we think's happened, or give our side of it, reflect that?" And his answer always was, and it was really funny, because he'd say, "Well, I got that from such a good source, I didn't think I needed to check it." And you know, it was ridiculous! He was a very unpleasant man to deal with. He was not interested in checking out anything, and I don't think—I think that's his stock in trade. I don't—I think he's brought things to light that ought to have been brought to light. I just don't like, on a day to day basis, a guy just going at people, and not giving them any opportunity to at least state their side of it. And he almost never did. And if he did call you, you were so goddamned scared that he'd—what you said, because you had to be so careful! You didn't know what he'd do with it!

There were other reporters, like Henry Taylor, and I don't know what his hang-up was. He obviously had something with the Kennedy's, whether it was because they didn't continue him as Ambassador to Switzerland, there was bitterness over his son's death in the Congo, or whatever it was. But Henry Taylor would just write off the top of his head, sometimes very, very erroneous, and troublesome, and would not even give the courtesy, if you tried to reach him—which I did every time something like that happened. It was in all the Scripps Howard papers, and in a number of other good papers. I'd try to reach him, and say, well, you know, I never got the courtesy of a callback, even.

And he was always an irritation. And it's different with a fellow like him than say David Lawrence. David Lawrence wrote a lot of columns that didn't reflect very handsomely on what we did, and he was very critical. I always enjoyed, though, talking to Mr. Lawrence, and he was always very courteous. He listened to what we had to say. He then went ahead and wrote, and I didn't always like what he wrote, but at least he listened. And if he made up his mind differently, and he was writing a column of opinion, you can't argue with that! You can be upset, maybe, that you didn't agree, but you can't—but that wasn't any problem. But it was so different between, say, a man like Lawrence, and a man like Taylor.

STEWART: Yeah, yeah.

GUTHMAN: Even men like Arthur Krock. Arthur Krock, for example, despite his attainment in the journalistic field, would call you up to check a date! Or to make—you know, I mean, strived to be accurate. And which was so different with other men who, Pearson or some of the others, that just, Taylor, and one or two others. I thought, perhaps, that some of the older columnists, newspapermen, had difficulty accepting that young men were in the government, and ran the government. And some of them, like William White, for example, had connections, or not connections, but were close to other figures. Like White was close to Lyndon Johnson. Let's say to White's credit, while he might reflect in the column some of Johnson's thinking, he was a fair man.

But on the other hand, you found other older men, like Walter Lippmann, and curiously enough, George Sokalsky, as the time went on, relating their understanding in writing with a good deal of understanding as to what President Kennedy [John F. Kennedy] was doing. And the George Sokalsky thing was always curious to me. I had read him for many years in the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, and I had thought, particularly during the fifties, his views were quite far from mine. And I don't recall exactly what the circumstances were under which I met him with the Attorney General. It was early in 1961, but over a period of time, a relationship developed between us, between, and when we'd go to New York, we'd often—he'd often ask, "Would you come by and see me?" And he was, had had a heart attack or two at that time.

And I found him to be a very warm man, a very learned man, and we enjoyed going over there and spending an hour or so with him, and visiting with him. And we had, I think, you know, it was a totally different thing. It was like the experience I had with the Immigration Service. I found him to be very different than what I thought he'd be. And we saw him, I think, about two days before he died, on another one of those visits. And I'm glad we had those visits with him.

But he seemed to understand, as well as some other older men, like Lippmann and others. But I always thought that part of perhaps Mr. Lawrence's trouble, and some of the older publishers and editors was that just they couldn't—they had trouble accepting that these young men would be able to do anything right.

STEWART: Was Robert Kennedy as sensitive about the press, and press criticisms, as his brother President Kennedy? Of course, a lot has been made of how sensitive the President was to the views of particular papers and columns.

GUTHMAN: Well, I suppose the word sensitive, if you mean that they were attuned to it, and they listened to it, and they watched it. They could take criticism pretty well, both of them. And I think the best thing that enabled them to do well with the press, and then when I say that, also radio and television, was that they had a pretty good understanding of the reporter's role, and they understood, for example, that if a reporter wrote about them, and they just wrote real nice things about them, he wasn't going to be much of a reporter very long.

They understood that, and they understood the very careful—or very well, the relationship that a public official can have with a reporter, and vice versa, and the rules of

that. So that they didn't require any kind of slavishness or agreement, or anything like that. Yet what they were looking for was somebody who was friendly, in the sense that he would make an effort to understand, that he could be trusted with a confidence, or could be told something and not see it in print the next day, if it was a sensitive matter, and that you had a feeling that they were making some effort to find out.

And within that framework, the President and the Attorney General were—they read the paper very carefully. They watched television every morning; they watched it at night. They read the magazines; they read quickly. And were sure then that if something was wrong, was an error, they wanted to have it corrected. And they didn't waste time. I used to say if we got by five after eight in the morning, and I hadn't had a phone call from the Attorney General, and sometimes it would be from the President--saying, "What are you going to do about that?" that they'd seen on television, or they'd read in the *New York Times* or the *Washington Post* or something—well, it was starting out a pretty good day!

And so in that sense, they were—he was certainly sensitive to it, but not in a complaining way. He knew the rules, and he played, you know, at it. You know, it was like playing soccer. You played hard, and if you got kicked in the shins, why, you didn't like it too well, and you might try to straighten that out.

STEWART: Yeah. Did the President call you directly very often?

GUTHMAN: Well, if he couldn't find his brother, or a couple of the other people higher up in the order, yeah, he'd want to know what we were doing about something.

STEWART: Yeah.

GUTHMAN: It was always fun to talk to him. After the Mississippi, trouble at Oxford, Mississippi, and then we next, the following spring we were heading into the confrontation with George Wallace at the University of Alabama. And we knew what we were going into, and we had critiqued the Mississippi, our actions at Oxford over a long, for a day and a half. And we knew what we had done wrong there, and how we could do better for the next time we had to do that.

And one of the things that we had neglected, or were deficient on at Oxford was that nobody knew the territory. We didn't have any good maps, and we didn't have accurate maps. And John Doar was the only person who knew how to get from the Lyceum Building up to Baxter Hall, or how to get around. And so we decided that we ought to get the map on the University of Alabama, the area around Tuscaloosa, and we found there wasn't any! And we asked the, I believe it was the Department of Agriculture if they had any Forest Service maps and so forth. And they didn't!

And somehow, and I don't know exactly how this was done, or exactly the procedure, but anyway, approval was made for a jet plane to photograph the campus of the University of Alabama. And that was duly exposed by the press, [laughs] and it came out in the afternoon editions, late afternoon editions, that we had sent a jet plane some weeks earlier to photograph the University of Alabama. And the President had called for the Attorney

General and for the Deputy Attorney General and for Burke Marshall, and not being able to get them, he finally got to me.

And he said, the first words were, "Who pulled that rock?" [Laughs] And I said, "Well, it wasn't your brother, Mr. President." And he said, "Did Nick know?" and I said, "Yes he did, Mr. President." And he said, "Oh. Well, Nick's a good man. What are you doing about it?" And I told him, and that was the end of that conversation.

And I think what it, you know, what it meant to me was that had that happened, and somebody in authority had not okayed it, or had not—he would have been, I think, really unhappy about it. But when he knew that Nick Katzenbach had approved it, well, he knew it hadn't been done precipitously, it hadn't been done [unclear]. And it was done, and so what are you doing about it? And that's the way he was. If he was unhappy about something, something we had done, he let you know about it, but then he always wound up making you feel pretty good. So that I never worried about getting a call. It actually was always interesting.

STEWART: How did it come out? Did you ever find out the story of the flight?

GUTHMAN: Well, I know that I was involved in it, but I don't remember it exactly. I think it was almost routine, one of those kind of things. We were figuring out, you know, we knew certain things we wanted to do, and one of the things was we wanted to get the maps. So somebody said, "Well, what about the Forest Service?" And so they checked the Forest Service; they didn't have any. Then, well, what about sending a plane? Let's get a new aerial photo. I don't think anybody thought of the implications of it, and it was done.

STEWART: Oh, oh.

GUTHMAN: And of course, it was an embarrassment.

STEWART: Yeah, it smacked of a U-2 flight or something.

GUTHMAN: Yeah, that's right! We were intent on getting a map, so that if we had to run around like we did the night of Oxford, Mississippi, we'd know something. We'd know where we were going.

STEWART: Yeah… yeah… yeah…

GUTHMAN: Sure, I suppose I should have thought about this, and I didn't. That's not the only thing I didn't think in the time there, but in any event, that was—and you know, the only thing to do in a situation like that is to be honest about it. We didn't beat around the bush on it, and we simply said that that's why we had done it, and it wasn't the worst thing in the world. Of course, it did smack of spying on Alabama, and of course Wallace made the most of it.

STEWART: Did you have many meetings with publishers or editors such as the one

you mentioned with Henry Luce?

GUTHMAN: Well, from time to time, as the Attorney General traveled around, he would be invited to come to a paper, and we made an effort to try to, so that we could have conversations. But I think that's the only time where when we were faced with the problem of getting our views across accurately, that was asked for something like that. Yeah, as I say, he frequently, when, for example when he came out to Los Angeles, he came up to the *Times* here. When he met—I remember meeting at least with the editors of the *New York Herald Tribune,* the *Daily News*, the *Times*. In Cleveland he always saw Louis Seltzer, *Cleveland Press*, and so on, down—you know, when he went down to Alabama, he went up to the *Constitution* to see Ralph McGill.

STEWART: Yeah…yeah.

GUTHMAN: And tried—always seemed very conscious of maintaining relationships with the press.

STEWART: But not in reply to, or in trying to straighten out specific situations, such as the one with *Time*?

GUTHMAN: No, not like that. Sometimes we went to a publisher when we couldn't get anything worked out anything else. For example, in connection with Henry Taylor, we repeatedly went to the head of Scripps Howard, and his editor in the *World Telegram* in New York. It was of absolutely no avail! But no, I never had, I didn't, I never had any—if I couldn't get it done through the writer or reporter, I didn't have any hesitation to go right over him, if I felt it was deserved. I mean, in other words, if you weren't, if you knew what the truth was, and you weren't getting that out, and somebody was really sticking it into you, I didn't have any problem with that.

STEWART: Yeah, mm. What about the Negro press? Was there anything that stands out in your mind as far as your association, in general, with the Negro press?

GUTHMAN: Well, my main association with Negro press were with two reporters. One was Chuck Stone [Charles Sumner Stone, Jr.], who was working on the Washington paper, and then later went to Chicago. And Simeon Booker, who was a Washington representative for *Ebony* and *Jet*, those magazines. And there were other Negro reporters, and I don't—you know, we tried to help them.

STEWART: Yeah.

GUTHMAN: And I don't know if I would call it anything special.

STEWART: Yeah, yeah. I mean, there certainly was an attempt to be as generous as possible with them, or make a special effort with them?

GUTHMAN: Well, I don't think we tried to make a special effort with them. We tried to treat them like we treated other people. They were men that were good at their craft. I knew Simeon Booker for a long period of time, and I had total confidence in him as a man, as a journalist. I had a good relationship with Chuck Stone, and I remember with other Negro reporters.

STEWART: Let me ask you about deciding on the type of cooperation you'd give to people who were writing major articles or books. Oh, for example, Robert Thompson wrote the book *The Brother Within*. What general criteria would you use in evaluating a person's request to do a major article or book? I imagine you got quite a few requests, some you cooperated with extensively, and some you didn't.

GUTHMAN: Well, I don't think we had any general rules on that. It was sort of you played it by ear. You know, if you could give me a name, I could tell you pretty much how we cooperated with them. Robert Thompson, his background was this: he had been a reporter for, who had covered the rackets hearings. He was in that group of men who the Attorney General had a sort of special relationship with. He was, so he wanted to write this book, and we were willing to cooperate with him up to a point. And we had to have real—knowing Bob, we knew that he was a good newspaperman, and it wasn't very likely it was going to be a very good book. So, there wasn't much point in just unloading all your, anything that he wanted, or you know, just because if we think a book, you know, realistically, wasn't going to be much of a book.

STEWART: It wasn't going to be?

GUTHMAN: No.

STEWART: Why?

GUTHMAN: I didn't see how it could be. Well, just as I said, I didn't think he would have the ability to, the depth, and you know. I don't mean to say that in [unclear].

I don't think I could do it, for example. I think there are certain news writers that can do it, and some of us that don't have that particularly ability. And sometime along the line, somebody may come along and want to write a book about Robert Kennedy. Well, maybe that's the time you unload everything. But I just—but certainly tried to help him within—every way we could. You said, how did you decide? Well, I don't know. Some people you'd help more than others, on the basis of their ability, on the basis of how much you could trust them.

STEWART: Were there many people wanting to write books that you turned down?

GUTHMAN: I don't recall turning down anybody. You can't, I mean—

STEWART: No, I mean, making it known to them that they weren't going to get as much cooperation as they'd need to write any kind of a book.

GUTHMAN: [Sighs] Gosh, you know, I suppose there were, but I don't just recall that. There were people writing books about—I think if people were writing derogatory books, they didn't bother to come and see anybody.

STEWART: Right.

GUTHMAN: There were a number of those, and there have been a number of those written. There's a fellow that wrote *JFK, the Myth*, and a book on RFK, you know. What's his name?

STEWART: Shannon, that's another one.

GUTHMAN: No, no, not Shannon.

STEWART: [Unclear]

GUTHMAN: Well, he's another. But, what's the fellow that—

STEWART: Oh, Lasky [Victor Lasky]!

GUTHMAN: Lasky!

STEWART: Yeah.

GUTHMAN: Lasky, you know, it wouldn't help him anyway, but I mean, he wouldn't bother to come and ask you, either. And I don't, you know, I think you know a writer is going to do a hatchet job, and that's what they're doing, you're not going to help them, and not likely they're going to come and ask you. The rest of the people are well motivated and trying to do a decent job. You're going to try to help them, up to a certain point. Heck, you're dealing with a man's career, and some of the matters in the government. You're dealing with sensitive material, and you want it to be handled with judgment.

STEWART: Yeah.

GUTHMAN: And so I think you sort of look at the writer's ability, and how much you respect his judgment, and then within that sort of loose framework you go as far as you think you ought to go.

STEWART: Yeah, yeah. What about television specials? Didn't ABC do a big thing on the Birmingham crisis?

GUTHMAN: Yes.

STEWART: And they had some people actually following—?

GUTHMAN: Yes.

STEWART: —everyone around? Were there many requests of this type, and were many of them turned down?

GUTHMAN: No, I think that ABC thing, this was done by a special group and then sold to ABC.

STEWART: Yeah.

GUTHMAN: It illustrates the willingness of the administration to explore, you know, and go a long ways to try to give the public some insight into what was going on. You know, I'd have to say in retrospect that that was probably a mistake, allowing the ABC crew to bring their cameras into the discussions, and cover it the way they did. But it was a good idea!

And what was the problem was that you suppose it's great to allow that all to be recorded. History's got this film that is someday going to be a great insight for historians to see President Kennedy, for example, and how he actually talked, without trying to, not totally aware that he was on camera. Now, the thing was, this was done with small cameras, a portable camera and a portable mike, which was quite sensitive, which was never intruded. And after a while you just forgot these people were there! And so, nothing was held back from them. So that is to say, history's got a wonderful record of the meetings in the Department of Justice, the Defense Department, and in the White House. And at the same, in Alabama, with Governor Wallace, because he allowed them a certain amount of freedom—not as much as the administration did.

But then to try to put that into a program, into an hour, and to give it so that it's really in perspective, and so that the things that were said are in context all the way—almost impossible.

STEWART: Yeah, yeah.

GUTHMAN: And probably a President shouldn't do it. But we tried it, and we thought that it would be a good thing to do from a historical standpoint. We thought it would be a pretty good thing as far as afterwards, the public having an understanding of, whatever the decisions were, how they were reached. I don't think that the program had that impact. It caused a good deal of—it was headache for both Pierre Salinger and me, and I think that we probably were wrong to advise that. But we tried that, and we tried other things.

In "David Brinkley's Journal," we tried a couple of things. Ted Yates was the producer of that program, a fellow that was killed recently in the Middle East. He was a creative, very creative man, and so of course was David Brinkley. And so we tried a number

of things with them, for example they wanted to do a program on organized crime. Well, we allowed them to photograph a meeting in the Attorney General's office in which some of the problems of the cases were discussed, as it was done. I don't think it came off too well, actually. I mean, it sounds like a great idea, always. And everybody wants—you know, you want to do it. And yet, there's something lost between the time, once it gets on film, and it's edited and cut—and not because anybody's trying to make a point of view or anything. But just, something gets lost. But anyway, we tried it.

STEWART: Yeah.

GUTHMAN: We were interested in trying, as I said earlier, trying to open things up. And if people had ideas in writing or in television or radio, we were willing to explore them, and see where we'd come out. As I said, we probably learned a good deal, and I think we wouldn't do some of the things that we did. But I don't think we got—I don't think it hurt, either. It caused some of us a good deal of—as I say, it was a headache, because we got into a lot of problems and difficulties. But in the last analysis, we didn't—it didn't hurt the President, or it didn't hurt the administration, and it maybe in some sense helped.

STEWART: Were the initial arrangements for this ABC thing done by your office, by you, or by the White House?

GUTHMAN: They were done through me.

STEWART: Yeah. And then, who made the final decision to do it?

GUTHMAN: Well, as far as the Justice Department was concerned, the Attorney General made the decision. As far as the White House was concerned, I assume the President it, or Pierre. I don't know. But ultimately Pierre, you know, arranged for this crew to be present at the White House.

STEWART: Let me ask you a few questions about Robert Kennedy's press conferences, and his general feelings about meeting with the press. How was it decided, or how often did he have regular press conferences?

GUTHMAN: Well, he didn't have regular press conferences. He, we had press conferences when there was some reason for it. They were irregular. I think that was—he was always available to anybody. There wasn't any—I don't know any reporter that couldn't get in to see him, even Drew Pearson. I mean, we didn't like, but we didn't make a big—make it very easy. But he was available. And he saw the reporters who covered the building regularly, at least once a week. But he didn't do a lot of press conferences.

STEWART: Yeah.

GUTHMAN: I don't recall how many press conferences he had, but he didn't have a great many in Washington. He had them when it was necessary for something that needed a good deal of explaining, or that was a situation or a crisis in which he was involved. Whenever he traveled, of course, he went from city to city, he had press conferences in the cities.

STEWART: Was there ever a problem—I would assume in his briefings for press conferences and for appearances, like on "Meet the Press," his briefing would have to consist of both Justice Department matters and administration matters in general, because he would be as apt, it was apt to ask him about things not related to the Justice Department as not.

GUTHMAN: Right.

STEWART: Was this a problem, or was there anything you could say about this briefing process—?

GUTHMAN: No, because he was well-informed, and we briefed him. And if it was, like, "Meet the Press," then maybe four or five of us would meet with him the day of it, and ask him a bunch of questions. They had thought about what kind of questions he'd get, and suggested some answers, and we'd discuss what kind of answers, and try to anticipate, you know, what areas he was going to be questioned about. And he tried to prepare for them best he could. But it was no problem, really. I mean, he just, you know, we had the information. He knew—he has a very, you know, retentive mind.

STEWART: Yeah, yeah.

GUTHMAN: So that he—it was never a problem.

STEWART: I was thinking more in terms of the, getting him ready for questions not related to the Justice Department, things that related to the administration in general, which he was frequently asked about.

GUTHMAN: Yeah, well again, I don't recall anything that was major. You know, I think he knew, well-briefed from the Defense Department and the State Department and the White House. Those would be the areas, mainly. He knew pretty much what he could say and he has good judgment. And he'd back off of anything he didn't feel he ought to discuss. I don't recall him ever doing that.

I think the toughest press conference he had was in West Berlin, at the time when he went there, the first time, in 1962. And there were very, very—it was a delicate situation, I remember, internationally. And he held a press conference with the German press, and it was just a, you know, it was just like holding your breath the whole time, because they asked some pretty difficult questions. And the thing that saved him there was they didn't ask that second question. For some reason, the German reporters don't follow up like American reporters do, and he got through it. But it was very, very difficult, but he handled himself

well. He always handled himself well. He very, very seldom said something that later on he wished that he had said a little bit differently, or not said it. So it worked out pretty well.

STEWART: Was he always relatively satisfied with his performance in press conference type of situations?

GUTHMAN: No, I don't think so. There was an uneven quality to his public appearances of all kinds, whether it was press conferences, or television appearances, or speeches. And I always had a problem, always curious as to why? What was the reason? Sometimes it would be a very good forum, and he had a good speech, and he'd do very mediocre. There were times that would be very, very difficult—

[END OF TAPE 1, SIDE 1]

GUTHMAN: --and I kind of decided that it had something to do with the chemistry of the challenge that he seemed to get out of the audience or out of the situation. And the greater the challenge, the better he did!

And the more—as I say, whether it was the situation, like in West Berlin, or whether it was the audience, which could be—and if he could relate to the audience somewhat, whether he liked the audience, or if he was determined that this was an audience he had to, why, he did very well! Example of that would be at the—the first speech he ever made was one of the best he made, was the Law Day speech at the University of Georgia. It was an excellent speech, but it was, you know, a real—and I think that's, particularly at that time. I think now he's more able to be, well, any situation, a little bit better.

But I think it's still true that he responds to the challenge. If he goes before an audience of well-dressed, middle class or wealthy people, and they're just there to hear some person speak, he can be very, very flat. He can, despite having a well-written speech. He'd go before a bunch of kids in a junior high school, and they started asking rather difficult questions, he can rise to great heights! So it's all—you never knew! And he always, afterwards, could never, you know—he knew when he did well, and he knew when he didn't. And we tried to do well every time, but it wasn't always successful.

STEWART: Yeah. Was there anything specific as far as things you were trying to get him to do that he wasn't doing?

GUTHMAN: You mean, physical things?

STEWART: Well, as—I guess you'd have to distinguish between formal speeches and press conference-type things.

GUTHMAN: Well, no, not—you mean, was he doing something and I thought he ought to do something else?

STEWART: Right.

GUTHMAN: No, I don't—no. I mean, he—not really. He had a good style; he had an effective way of doing things. He answered concisely. He knew what he was talking about. And very few things that--mechanical type things, like on television: be sure you look at the camera instead of the questioner over here, so that you're looking at your audience rather than over here—just, difficult for him to remember to do, because he'd get engaged in the conversation. That type of thing, but that's relatively minor.

STEWART: Yeah, yeah.

GUTHMAN: And he constantly improved. But really, again, I think it depended an awful lot on what the circumstances, and the audience.

STEWART: That's interesting, that there could be that much of a difference, depending on the audience, depending on their reaction.

GUTHMAN: It was almost, I suppose, performers have something like that. But he, you know, he really could reach—really a tremendous inspirational quality about him, but it might happen one out of five times! And then he might be very, just half-good, fairly good, and other times, just flat! And it had more to do with the quality of the audience, and the circumstances of the appearance, rather than something that might have happened at home, or at his office, or whatever the pressures [unclear]. It was not that, so much. It was: what was it out there in front of him?

And if he instinctively liked the audience, or if the circumstances were a real challenge, he could—they were memorable experiences, memorable. You know, I can go down the list of these things, and go through it, and where did he do well—I can just remember them, because they were things that just stood out in my mind. And again, I can tell you times when I thought he fell flat.

STEWART: Yeah, yeah. The whole subject, moving on, the whole subject of freedom of information and news management came to the fore during the Kennedy Administration, and certainly Pierre Salinger devotes a lot of, a big part of his book to this whole subject. To what extent was this whole matter a concern of yours during the three years? And maybe I should also ask, did your opinions of the whole matter, as a newspaperman, change drastically because of your experience in Washington?

GUTHMAN: Can you ask that, I mean, be specific of what you--?

STEWART: Well, to what extent, if at all, were you concerned with reporters who were constantly digging at you for greater access, or greater freedom to write and do what they wanted to? Or, was this a problem?

GUTHMAN: Well, it wasn't—I don't regard it as any great problem. Basically, our feeling was that we ought to, that we should give reporters access to the

Department of Justice. And it was a public agency, and therefore—and we were conducting public business, and it ought to be done for the public. And that was our general philosophy. And as I said, I spent most of my career as a reporter trying to get into public matters, and I wasn't going to come to the Department of Justice and start closing things up. And I had no—and the Attorney General fully agreed! And it was his philosophy. Obviously, there were troublesome reporters, and troublesome incidents where it would have been very nice if there hadn't been a free press in this country. It would have been a lot easier for us. You could have conducted your business and made your mistakes, and gone about your way, and not have to explain to anybody, or worry that somebody might find out, really, what you were doing. Hell, we weren't in that kind of a situation, and I don't think we regarded that as any great loss.

You know, we were devoted to the basic freedoms of this country, and we weren't going to do anything to lessen that. I know that a certain amount of the news management, we didn't have the problem that Sylvester [Arthur Sylvester] had in the Defense Department, or that Pierre had at the White House. They were under much—they had more difficult problems than we did, and under much greater pressure than we were.

The Department of Justice is a relatively small department, and staffed mostly by professionals. They were high caliber, by and large, or career people. I think that—coming in from civilian life into the government, and one thing that I was always impressed with was the caliber of the people in the Department of Justice, the career people! And by and large, they were very able and dedicated men and women. And so, they—we didn't have this big [unclear] thing that Sylvester had in the military, or in the State Department, people accustomed to running to the press if they didn't, you know, and Pierre's problems in the White House. So I didn't—it wasn't as serious a problem. We didn't get the attention from the press that they got.

And we had, the wire services had two reporters, you know, there was an A.P. reporter and a U. P. reporter, Tony Lewis [Joseph Anthony Lewis] of the *New York Times*, and Jim Clayton [James E. Clayton] of the *Washington Post*, and Miriam Ottenberg of the *Washington Star*, were the only people that covered the department regularly. Of those, Miriam Ottenberg was the only one who was a really investigative-type reporter. And she did—and her main interests were in organized crime, and she got into a lot of things. Now, the only other reporter who was interested much in what was going on in the Department of Justice along that line was Clark Mollenhoff. He had excellent contacts in the department, knew a hell of a lot, and of course, he sometimes wrote stories which we wished he hadn't been able to dig out. And sometimes Tony Lewis would get a story in Antitrust or some of the other divisions that jumped the gun.

I don't think we got hurt by any of these things. They might have been inconvenient. They might have exposed something that we wished—but I mean, there were never, we didn't have, you know. You asked whether did I change my views about reporters. Not really, I guess. I wouldn't—I would think that government agencies ought to be—operate out in the public as much as they can. And it's important that they do, not only for the public knowledge, but to discipline their own operations.

I think that I wouldn't be as trustworthy, trustful, of some newspapermen as I was when I originally went there, I think. I thought that--perhaps naively—that most newspapermen could keep a confidence, that they would be concerned about their

relationship with a public official, and their reputation for accuracy and liability. And it wasn't—I think I have that in better perspective.

In other words, I think that after a year in Department of Justice, I had a different idea. And I think—but basically not different. In other words, then it was a question of always find out who were the ones that you could trust, and who were the ones who were interested in the truth and being accurate, and who were the ones who were just interested in making a name for themselves, or running into the story, or who were just gossips. And there were a lot of gossips among the press in Washington, and they'd run around telling each other everything. And pretty soon, you'd find out that you might be a source for something that you didn't think you were going to be [unclear]. You know, I think you learn to protect yourself a little better, and in that sense—but I don't think fundamentally we changed much.

STEWART: Yeah. You mentioned the other day that in the—I don't know if you mentioned, but it's a well-known fact that in the Powers [Francis Gary Powers]-Abel [Rudolf Abel] exchange, the *Herald Tribune* found out about it beforehand, and were asked to withhold it, which they did. Do you recall any other incidents like this, of having to go to newspapers, or to publishers, and ask them to withhold something?

GUTHMAN: Well, yes. Let me just say, as far as the Powers-Abel exchange is concerned, I don't think they were asked to withhold it. If they were asked to withhold it, it was on a little different basis than I understood it. David Wise was the reporter, and I think that David knew that there was going to be an exchange. He came over to see me, and we fenced around with each other. He never asked me whether there was going to be an exchange. I think he didn't ask me because he didn't want to put me in the position of having to either tell him the truth or not tell him the truth.

But I think that he knew, and I think that in my answers to him, I indicated, so that I confirmed what I thought he knew anyway. But we never actually said the words, one to the other, so that we—it was never on the basis that he knew, and we asked him not to do it. I think he didn't do it. I think he knew the sensitivity of the thing. He knew what was at stake if there was a premature disclosure, that the Russians would have thought we were trying to—and there wouldn't have been an exchange. And I think that that was a kind of very commendatory role that he played. With a reporter like that, you would probably have told him anything. I don't know what I would have done if he had asked me: is there going to be an exchange? What a hell of a thing!

STEWART: Yeah, yeah.

GUTHMAN: But anyway, he didn't. And we had many times when reporters would find out about something, or we'd tell them. Perhaps the best example of that was when efforts were being made to get the Bay of Pigs prisoners back. That began in late November, 1962, and I think it was early in December that the Attorney General called a number of us in the Department of Justice and said, "We're going to get those fellows out by Christmas." And we thought, well, you know, "You're out of your mind." But after some days, we began to see that we could. And all, you know, it was

quite an effort. Well, I would think about the 7th of December—it was early in December—on Monday morning, Miriam Ottenberg showed up in my office, and she said, "Why was everybody working yesterday?"

And she was not the kind of reporter that you lied to. I wouldn't have done it anyway, but I mean, there was no point in it. So I told her. I also told her that the success of this venture rested somewhat on the fact that it was not the United States Government that was involved, at least that there was no appearance of the United States Government being involved, that either Castro [Fidel Castro] didn't want the United States Government to be involved, or didn't want the appearance. In any event, we knew that if this was openly a government effort, or that the extent to which the government was involved in this, and particularly Department of Justice, that it jeopardized getting these men back.

She, I told her what we were doing, and she went to her editor, and we did not ask them not to run that story. We had, I suppose, some confidence in her, and in the *Star*. And they said that they would not run it—they would not. Now, subsequently, of course, others learned about it. There was Jim Clayton of the *Washington Post*, and Tony Lewis of the *New York Times*, and a number of others.

And we did the same with them. And the basis on which we did, we told them everything that was going on, and we told them that they could stay completely abreast of what was going on, and as soon as we got those men out of there, they could write their stories of the effort that was done—which they all did. And I think finally we told the A.P. and the U.P. so they'd know, in sort of, a sense, to protect ourselves.

The only place there was a breach in that, and it wasn't really a breach but it was a—was Jack Steele of the Scripps Howard papers. And Jack wrote a story that the government was involved in this. I forget the exact—but it came too late, at that point. By the time he wrote that, I think it was about the 20th of December, and at that time it was gone, and it didn't attract a lot of attention. The others kept their word. And we got—those fellows got out, and everybody got their stories, so it worked out pretty well.

STEWART: To go back a minute, did you say, as far as the Abel-Powers thing, that there was no direct contact by you with the *Herald Tribune*, it was just through Wise?

GUTHMAN: That's correct. The only person I talked to on the *Herald Tribune* was David Wise. Now, if there was any other contact with the *Herald Tribune*, through the White House or through the State Department, I'm not aware of that.

STEWART: Yeah, yeah. I don't know, I vaguely remember reading someplace—

GUTHMAN: Well, that was with the exchange of the two pilots, at the very outset of the administration.

STEWART: Maybe that's it, yeah.

GUTHMAN: And that was--the *Herald Tribune* did find out about that, and they did,

were asked to hold it.

STEWART: Yeah, maybe that's it.

GUTHMAN: That's the—

STEWART: I'm confusing the two, yeah. Okay, why don't we get into the first major civil rights crisis, which was the Freedom Riders affair in May of 1961. What, as far as the press was concerned, what were your major concerns in this first crisis? One of the things I think that is important, and possibly you have something to say about it: this whole matter of the involvement of the press in these crises. It, of course, was often charged by southern political leaders that the press, by being there and asking questions, and going around with their cameras and television cameras, were actually inciting people, and getting the thing worked up to much more than it really was. Was this a problem? Was this something that you were concerned with, that you were—in the Freedom Riders, or later?

GUTHMAN: No, I wasn't. You mean whether somebody was doing something for the press, or that the press was making the situation more difficult? No, I wasn't concerned with that. I don't think that it was—there's much validity for that. I suppose that there are some incidents where television cameras have caused people to do things, or act. You get that both ways, I suppose. But I don't, I never was much concerned that [pause]—I never operated on that kind of basis.

STEWART: Mm-hm. Did you go to Alabama during the—

GUTHMAN: No, I didn't.

STEWART: --the Freedom Rider thing at all?

GUTHMAN: The Freedom Riders, I didn't.

STEWART: I guess the—well, one of the big items in that whole crisis was this matter that there was a dispute with U.S. News and World Report as to whether—I guess they hinted in their story that the Attorney General had provoked these people to take the bus and go down there. Do you recall this?

GUTHMAN: No, not exactly. I don't recall that. I don't recall that this was possible. You know, we didn't even know, hardly know—he didn't know they were going. I recall that Burke Marshall had gotten a press release, or something, that these people were going. And he and I discussed it, and he might have discussed it with Byron White; I don't know whether he did or not. We were only dimly aware of what they were doing.

And they had gotten through Virginia and North Carolina and South Carolina and Georgia, and they were not high on our, you know. And then they just burst on us. Wally,

Wallace Turner, who was Director of Public Information for Department of Health, Education and Welfare, accompanied Byron White and the marshals to Alabama. He had been a reporter on the *Portland Oregonian*, and was another one of the men who had covered the rackets hearings, been involved in that. He was a close friend of mine, and also had a close association with the Attorney General. And I stayed in Washington, and we asked Wally if he would go down and do the—handle the press.

And he did. He's now a reporter for the New York Times in San Francisco. But I do kind of dimly remember it some, but I don't remember, recall, about the Attorney General having sent these people down. I don't recall it as anything that [unclear], in any event. I don't think he knew anything about it. He was, at that time, you know, was involved in the Bay of Pigs investigation, and he wasn't at the Department of Justice—only, you know, maybe a couple of hours a day, and he might come in afterwards for an hour or two in the evening. As I say, we were aware that they were going on this trip, but that's about all.

STEWART: Yeah. Is there anything else about that whole situation that stands out in your mind? Of course, the problem with this and with other crises is that so much has been written about them—

GUTHMAN: Yes.

STEWART: --and you know, there's certainly no need of going over the whole thing minute by minute.

GUTHMAN: Well, one thing that might be interesting. I have told something about the Kennedy Administration, I think, that gave it a little bit different character than either the Eisenhower [Dwight D. Eisenhower] Administration or the Johnson Administration, and that was this: that virtually every person in the Kennedy Administration had been in combat over a fairly long period of time in the Second World War. They had been deck officers or platoon leaders, or enlisted men, non-coms. And many of them, like the President, had had fairly long periods of combat, and almost all of them had put in three to five years of military service. And they knew how, instinctively, to do things rather quickly. And I don't think that a group of men could have mounted this force of five hundred marshals that went down there with Byron White unless they had had this kind of background! And I think that just in the logistics of the whole thing, of how do you do it? The improvising that went on, the thought about communications, and the thought about transportation.

The thought about feeding, of all the things that a guy thought of when he was a platoon leader or a non-com, or was an enlisted man. He had to think about all these things. And as a result of that, they rather got together a force of five hundred men. The problem was that the President and Attorney General did not want to send the Unites States Army down there. The experience of Little Rock was fresh in their minds, and they wanted to do it without the appearance of uniforms. All right, where do you get those men? There were about a hundred and fifty U.S. Marshals who were young enough to take that kind of duty. Where are you going to get some more? Well, what about the Immigration Service? What can they do? Well, the Border Patrol. The Immigration fellows came back, "Oh, we've got

X number of Border Patrolmen, we can get them." Well, how are you going to get them there? Prison guards.

The whole thing—and it just started to come together, and if you look at the men who were involved in it, every one of them had this. And they started thinking about how you get men fed, how you get them moved, how you get them armed, how you get them organized. And it just, you know, it went like that.

And it was remarkably successful, for an operation that was just pulled together!

STEWART: Yeah.

GUTHMAN: In a very short period of time. It's like the, I always thought, at Mississippi. There was a lot of that, too. When we got to the Lyceum building, the first thing we did was to go to a pay phone and put in a dime and call the Department of Justice. Then we got another phone, and we placed a call to the White House. And all through that night, somebody manned those two phones. The result was that the President was getting information from what was going on there directly, while the Defense Department was getting it round about. So the President was always well ahead. And about four days later, Nick Katzenbach and I were going back to Washington, and they had sent a jet down for us, a little jet. And we picked it up at Memphis, and there was a Signal Corps General there. And he asked could he ride back with us? And we said sure. We got on the plane, and he—a Major-General—and he said, "You guys really screwed us up." He said, "It was the worst thing that's ever happened to me in my whole career." And he said, "You were getting this information to the President and the Justice Department," and he said, "You were way ahead of the Signal Corps." And he said, "Tell me, how did you do it?" And Katzenbach just reached in his pocket and took out a dime, and said, "Well, General." The General laughed. [Laughs]

But I mean, there was that thing in the, all through the government, and particularly in the Department of Justice. People there could react very quickly, and they were falling back, whether consciously or unconsciously, on their military experience.

STEWART: In terms of the press coverage of these crises, specifically the Freedom Ride thing and Oxford, what were your major concerns? Is it possible to generalize?

GUTHMAN: Well, I think we had two major concerns, one that there was accurate reporting of what happened, and who did what to whom. And the other thing which was most difficult was to clarify the role of the government in the thing. For example, the Freedom Riders. What role does the government have? And of course, the role was the right of people to travel in the United States. And the local authorities couldn't or wouldn't move to protect them. In Mississippi, the issue was whether a federal court order was going to be obeyed. And it's a rather fundamental issue, public, to try to get it clear that it wasn't—the federal government had nothing to do with Meredith [James Howard Meredith] going into the University of Mississippi.

The federal government didn't sent Meredith to the University of Mississippi, had had no contact with Meredith about going to the University of Mississippi. He went to the

University of Mississippi; there was a suit involved in that. And ultimately, a federal court ordered that he go! And then when they tried to go, in furtherance to the court, the State of Mississippi moved to interfere with the court order. Well, that was difficult.

And always, through all these civil rights things, the role of the federal government, what was it, why it was doing what it did, or why it didn't do something? And very, very difficult, being involved in the whole federal/state relationship, and the law is—it may be fundamental, but it's awful difficult sometimes for people to understand, depending on which side of the issue they're on. It's difficult for southerners to understand why the federal government was concerned whether a man like Jim Meredith, James Meredith, got into the University of Mississippi, or that the Freedom Riders could travel on a highway. And on the other hand, it was difficult for many people in the north to understand why the federal government didn't do more, in many instances. And so that was a continuing problem, and that was the major problem.

STEWART: Mm-hm. This leads into something else I want to ask you about. In terms of the overall—I hate to use the word image—but in the overall picture that you wanted people to have of the Department of Justice during that period, was there some kind of an overall picture? For example, there was a good deal of criticism and reservation, I think, when Robert Kennedy was appointed Attorney General, by liberal people, that possible he wasn't as much of a liberal as they would have wanted in that position. Was this a problem that you were aware of in the beginning, and consciously tried to do something about?

GUTHMAN: No. I never thought about it in that way at all, and neither did the Attorney General. We felt that if we did our job, and we maintained relationships with the news media, and that we could get accurate reporting of what we were doing, that the public would understand what we were doing, and that was the way you got public acceptance. And frequently the Attorney General took upon himself responsibility for things, in the civil rights area particularly, which—but in other areas which he might have avoided somewhat.

He saw his role as drawing away from his brother some of the criticism, some of the responsibility that might go to the presidency. He never saw it, considered himself, as going to ever run for public office, and therefore really didn't care. There were a number of times when he was getting his head knocked off on something that we didn't solve, where I'd say, "You don't have to accept all this. You can do something about that." And he'd say, "No," he said that, "I'd rather it be on me than on my brother." And he'd say, "I'm never going to run for anything."

STEWART: Yeah.

GUTHMAN: "And he is, so I don't care." And the other thing was that he took responsibility sometimes. For example, the most glaring thing, and probably the thing that carried with him, both the public image of him as Attorney General, was the waking up a newspaperman in the steel crisis.

STEWART: Yeah, right.

GUTHMAN: Which was something he never knew, and had nothing to do with. But he, it was done by an FBI supervisor, who felt that it was important to see these newspapermen, and sent his men out in the early morning hours. And the next morning, when there was a storm about that, we talked about what he could do. And he decided it rather easily. He said, "Well, I get credit when the FBI does something good," and he said, "I'll take the responsibility when they blow one." And so he just simply said, "I am responsible for this." Well, that was one of the things that the FBI didn't bother to clarify, and not that it made any difference at that time. Again, he wasn't thinking of himself as a candidate for public office, as he did—he did get credit when the FBI made a case, or did something—

STEWART: Yeah, yeah.

GUTHMAN: So he took the—the fact was, he didn't know anything about that. He had nothing to do with sending the agents out to the homes in the early morning hours. So that was the way we operated, and we thought that if we were doing right, it got out. And ultimately it would, the public would accept it.

STEWART: Yeah, and there was nothing more, as far as image was concerned?

GUTHMAN: Well I don't—you know, I'll tell you. You mean, to make somebody look like they're not?

STEWART: Well, no, no. Again, so much, you read so much about—well, this whole, you read so much about the type of image that either the department or he was trying to create, as far as his conservatism or liberalism was concerned. And what I was asking basically was if there was any conscious attempt to deal with the public reaction to him or to the department, however that might have been.

GUTHMAN: Well, as far as the question of whether he'd be a good Attorney General, or whether he was too young to be Attorney General, or any of that, I just figured that events would take care of that. Our actions, our performance, would either be good or bad; we'd have to rise or fall on that. Obviously we tried to put the best light on everything we did.

STEWART: Oh, yeah.

GUTHMAN: And sure, we were conscious that there were people who felt that he might be soft on Communists, or others who felt he might not do—but I don't recall ever any discussions along that line, as to whether you did or did not do something on that kind of a basis. I mean, it was never— You might make a speech someplace. It made sense to make the Law Day speech in 1961 at University of Georgia, and make the—

STEWART: To firmly establish what the goals of the administration were going to be?

GUTHMAN: Yeah, right, and to make it in Georgia, and not out in Nebraska someplace.

STEWART: Yeah.

GUTHMAN: In that sense, you thought about the wisdom of where you did things, and how you did them. I never recall discussing whether we were doing something either liberal or conservative, when we went to make speeches or do things, as I say. The major speech that he made on anti-trust policy, for example, he made in New York City, before the Executive Club at the Waldorf Astoria, was a disaster, as far as the audience was concerned! It was a good speech, but those men didn't want to hear that! The effort was to, all right, you go before the men who are most affected, and lay it out! And boy, that was a tough night!

You went to the American Bar Association, we went before various groups of all nationalities, Poles, Negroes, Jews, Indians. Every—you know. But in the context of: this was something that you ought to do, and this was a good thing to do, and it was good for the administration. But not necessarily, but not about, in the way you put it. As I said, the Attorney General was really not too concerned about it.

STEWART: Mm-hm. Bear in mind, I'm only asking the questions!

GUTHMAN: Oh, I understand that. I understand that! I'm not, you know.

STEWART: All right, yeah. Because again, I think in the popular mind, there is a connotation that there was some image-building in one way or another there. And I think it's, you know, [unclear] some discussion about it.

GUTHMAN: I think if there—the conscious image-building was this: that it disturbed me, always, that there was this kind of stereotype about Robert Kennedy, that he was a ruthless, hard-charging person who was not too considerate of people's rights, and determined to win at all costs.

STEWART: Yeah.

GUTHMAN: Well, that wasn't the man I knew. And it wasn't the man I had known from 1956 on. Now, he matured tremendously, and by the time he became Attorney General had matured way beyond his years. But the man I knew was a bit different than that, I always sought to encourage people to try to get at the real, the person that I thought he was. And it was difficult, because first of all, he's a difficult man to interview. And secondly, because of the stereotype, writers were always under the pressure that if they looked—if they didn't deal with the stereotype, somebody would think they'd gone soft on the Kennedy's. So that with rare exceptions, they always had to deal with the stereotype.

Probably the best piece written about him, I think, while he was Attorney General, was done by Paul O'Neil for *Life Magazine*. O'Neil had all the preconceived notions about Kennedy, but he also is an unusually fine writer and reporter, and he spent a good deal of time getting underneath the stereotypes, and then wrote a, I think, not a totally friendly article by any means, but it was one which was, that had him, Kennedy, at least much greater insights into what kind of a man he was, and character. Sometimes it was difficult, and distressing, because publications or writers felt that they had to deal with the stereotype, not—

[END OF TAPE 1, SIDE 2]

This is Tape Two of the second oral history interview with Edwin Guthman. The date is February 24, 1968. The interviewer, Mr. John Stewart.

STEWART: Okay.

GUTHMAN: All ready?

STEWART: Yeah.

GUTHMAN: I can start going?

STEWART: Yeah, it's going.

GUTHMAN: One time *Newsweek*, the Washington Bureau of *Newsweek* decided that it wanted to do an article on Kennedy as the way they saw him. And so it was done by Ben Bradlee [Benjamin C. Bradlee], was the Bureau Chief, and Jay Ireland, and a couple of other men. And what they wanted to do was take Kennedy now. What was he like now? What was he doing now? And take him from today forward. And they did, and they wrote their article, and they submitted it, and it was a cover story. And I gather that the editors of Newsweek felt that if they ran that story and didn't deal with the stereotype, everybody would think they had flipped over to the Kennedy's. And so somebody up there wrote, dealt with the stereotype.

And you can see where the article just breaks in half! It starts out dealing with the stereotype. You mash through the stereotype, and then all of a sudden [snaps fingers] like this you go to the new stuff. And that was a real—always been a problem! And I felt strongly about that, and I suppose in the sense if there was any image-building, that's what we were trying to get over. That was very difficult.

STEWART: Yeah, and certainly it lasted through the whole three years?

GUTHMAN: Well, it's still going on. It's still a problem.

STEWART: Yeah, yeah, yeah. As far as Oxford is concerned, again as I say, so much has been written about this, and I wouldn't want you to go over it, an hour

by hour thing. But are there any general comments you could make as far as the handling of the press that night was concerned? To what extent, for example, did you in your own mind assume a certain responsibility, for their physical safety?

GUTHMAN: Well, to the limit of what we could do at that point. We had, I had met with some of the reporters on the steps of the Lyceum Building while the demonstration was going on. The kids were—it wasn't, you know, it was just sort of building up. And I said, "Well, I'll go down to the motel where they were staying," the reporters, "And I'll meet them there about eight o'clock."

You know, I didn't think that we were going to get into what we got into. And you know, so I briefed them, and asked them, "Any questions?" and so forth. Well of course, it erupted. And some of the reporters were inside with us, and some were caught outside. I could do nothing as far as the reporters who were outside, and of course, we did take care of the men who were inside.

STEWART: Yeah.

GUTHMAN: One man, one reporter, was wounded, shot in the back, A.P. man from Memphis. But sure, those that made their way into the Lyceum Building during the night or anything, we took care of them, and certainly felt some responsibility for their safety. But they were also experienced newsmen; they knew what they were getting into.

We, the next morning of course, we had I think probably three or four hundred newspapermen.

STEWART: I was going to ask you about how many there.

GUTHMAN: Certainly over three hundred. We had a press conference. It had been decided that I would answer the questions, and that Katzenbach would not. I don't recall why that decision was made, except I guess it was just not putting the top officials of the government on. So I held, over the next three or four days, press briefings or conferences twice a day, which is what the reporters wanted. I sometimes, one of the first times, I brought Jim McShane [James J. P. McShane] to the press conference, on that morning after, and we just answered questions.

They were held in a room in the Lyceum Building, and we stood on a table—there were that many people there—so that they could, everybody could see us and hear our questions. We had very good cooperation from the press there, and they understood the difficulties of their position. In other words, you had this small campus, and three hundred or so newspapermen and photographers, and television, and it was almost unmanageable. But they, we worked out pool arrangements for everything, and it worked out very, very well. And we would pick someone for the reporters, let them—they picked their own. The television people picked their own, and radio, and the newsreels, and the stills. And it worked well. I think one anecdote which is kind of interesting: when Meredith went to class the first day, the reporters wanted, you know, to go to class.

STEWART: Right.

GUTHMAN: And the University of Mississippi said nobody could. And I didn't see why the reporters shouldn't be there. And so, but the university was adamant about it, and we went to the head of the university about it, and so did John Doar. Both of us went, and we got nowhere.

STEWART: You were asking that people be allowed to stay?

GUTHMAN: A reporter, that one reporter, be allowed to attend the class, as a representative of the press.

STEWART: Yeah, yeah.

GUTHMAN: So, we got turned down. And so we talked with the reporters, and we finally decided that there were two reporters who might get in anyway. One was Harry Ferguson of the United Press, and the other was [pause]—

[PAUSE IN RECORDING]

GUTHMAN: And Pat Morin [Relman G. Morin] of the Associated Press. Both of them are elderly men. They looked like professors; they didn't look like newspaper reporters, although they're two of the best in the business. So we worked, decided that with Harry, we'd try to get Harry and Pat into the class. And everybody was delighted with that, because we figured we could do that [laughs]. Nobody would ever take them for reporters! So they did. They just went in, and they sat down. And they got along pretty well, but finally—

STEWART: No one was screening people going in?

GUTHMAN: No.

STEWART: Hm.

GUTHMAN: No. Well, they just didn't look like reporters. Both of them are outstanding reporters, but they just—Pat Morin in tall. He looks something like President Eisenhower except he's taller, with balding hair. And probably at that time was probably fifty-eight, fifty-nine years old. Harry Ferguson is a jolly looking, round faced fellow, and about the same age. And there wasn't—they didn't have any trouble getting in. But once they got in, they were in there for a while, and then somebody decided to ask them who they were. Of course, they told them; they said who they were.

STEWART: Yeah.

GUTHMAN: But they did get to see Meredith come into class, and they did get to see all the things.

STEWART: Yeah. I thought you were going to say that you took some young reporter who would go in as a student, or look like a student. There was no thought of that?

GUTHMAN: No.

STEWART: No?

GUTHMAN: No, strangely enough, there wasn't! And I don't know that we had anybody down there who'd fill the bill! There probably were some, but you know, most of the reporters were at least in their middle twenties.

STEWART: Yeah.

GUTHMAN: Or thirties, and we didn't have anybody like that, and didn't think about that. Reporting that incident, of course, was very important, because it was a confused situation. It was—you had the State of Mississippi and the authorities there putting out a version, and we putting out another version.

And we felt what we said was in accordance with the facts. And so a good deal rested there on what the reporters said and did. And basically, as to what precipitated the violence—did the marshals precipitate the violence, or did the kids? Or, who did it?

STEWART: Yeah.

GUTHMAN: And so, certainly it was important for us, and important for us to tell everything that we knew, get full details, and answer everything that we could get. And I don't know that we were totally successful on that, but I think that by and large, the public understood what the United States was doing there.

And the reporting, I thought, was generally quite high caliber. I think probably the best piece of reporting done out of that was done later, by *Look Magazine*, and they came in after the incident. They sent three reporters: George Harris, Christopher Wren, and George Leonard, I believe. And it's an outstanding example of what newsmen can do coming in afterwards.

STEWART: Yeah, yeah.

GUTHMAN: And they began about—I suppose they got down there, or they may have been there at the time, I don't recall. But they went at this thing actively about two days after it started, or the day after, and then over a period of weeks, worked at this thing, as to reconstructing what did happen. And their report is the

best that was done. And we gave them every kind of help we could, and opened any, you know, answered, and got them any information it was possible to get them.

STEWART: I should have asked the question: was there absolutely anything that you were withholding from the press at that time, during the crisis or the few days after?

GUTHMAN: I don't think so. I don't recall anything. I suppose if I went over—well, I just don't recall.

STEWART: Nothing sticks out in your mind?

GUTHMAN: No, there was nothing. I don't recall anything that we had, you know, that we were ashamed of, or that we would rather not have come to public light.

STEWART: Yeah.

GUTHMAN: No, I don't recall.

STEWART: Was Meredith made available to the press generally?

GUTHMAN: Well—

STEWART: Or, at what point was it?

GUTHMAN: I don't believe Meredith ever held a press conference down there like that, in that sense. No, we didn't make him available, and I don't—I think first of all, he didn't want to be made available. He wanted to go to school. He didn't want to be—he was, I think, somewhat—well, he took it in stride, at least outwardly, all the—the incident which attended to his arrival there. He was interested in having as normal a stay at the university as was possible under the circumstances. He was never shielded from reporters, but, and at times saw them individually.

But I think it would have been wrong if he had had a press conference. That wasn't what he went there for. He went there to break the color line, and to become, to permit Negroes to get to the University of Mississippi, and wasn't interested in, you know.

STEWART: Yeah.

GUTHMAN: He personally wasn't, and it wouldn't have been, from a public relations standpoint, any great thing to have him get up and—so we didn't encourage it, but mostly importantly, he didn't want it.

STEWART: Yeah. Were all of his activities, as far as the press was concerned, handled through you, or was there someone else?

GUTHMAN: No. No, he was—no, Meredith was a very independent person. And he was under some sort of a, perhaps, a mystical quality about him. And as far as the overall situation, you know, we dealt with the press about his arrangements, and that type of thing, and what was happening to him, what kind of protection he was getting, what he was going to do, and all of that.

But then as far as his own views, or what his thoughts were, we didn't do anything about that. And you know, he didn't always—there was--a couple of days later, and the Army had, withdrew all of the Negro soldiers who had come in, and had them out in an encampment there by the airport. And he spoke out against that.

STEWART: Yeah, yeah.

GUTHMAN: And by the time he spoke out about it, we had already acted to correct that. In other words, when we became aware that the Army had done that, and I recall that it was—going out to the airport with Nick Katzenbach, and here are all these Negro soldiers over there! What the hell's going on? And Nick moved immediately to end that situation. Well, it was several days after that Meredith learned that it had happened, and he sounded off. Nobody could control him, and nobody tried, other than, I suppose, John Doar tried to advise him that his best course would be to go about his business.

STEWART: Did the Army have a pressman down there?

GUTHMAN: Yes, they had a number of men, and they were very, very good men. And we worked, began working with some of these men prior to that time, and had known them, or their superiors, in the Department of Defense. And they were cooperative, and they operated under our direction.

STEWART: Did you have much contact with the press officials of the university or of the State of Mississippi?

GUTHMAN: Well, not the state, but yes, I had a good deal of contact with the officials—not so much their press person, but a chief administrator for them, the Assistant President, and some of the Deans. Yes, I did.

STEWART: Yeah, but they had no one person who was handling their press?

GUTHMAN: They did have one; they did, and he was somewhat helpful to us. But they were all in somewhat of a compromised situation, whether they were going to—anybody who helped us was sort of considered a collaborator. And so they were wary, but as far as the use of the hall, and facilities and stuff like that, they were helpful.

STEWART: Yeah. Were many members of the press that night helpful to you in a non-press way? There were a certain number of reporters inside the building

with you that night.

GUTHMAN: Right.

STEWART: Were they working with you on other things you were doing?

GUTHMAN: No. They were there on the scene, and they saw, and they were part of the—we made it possible for those fellows to phone out their stories, and that type of thing. We did that. But we didn't—there was Tom Joyce of the *Detroit News*, and there were a couple men from the A.P., and Jerry Green of the *New York Daily News*, a couple of men from *Life Magazine*, and there were several others. But they didn't help us, you know.

STEWART: Yeah.

GUTHMAN: Well, there wasn't much they could do anyway. We were just staying in there, trying to hold back the mob.

STEWART: Were you ever personally fearful that they were going to overcome the building physically?

GUTHMAN: Well, no, I didn't really think so. But I certainly had some anxiety about the whole thing. I thought about that a good deal. I even think Nick Katzenbach was thinking about something else. It was maybe two o'clock in the morning, and he was sitting on the steps, the front steps of the Lyceum Building. And I walked up and I sat down, and he said, "What are you thinking about?" I said, "Well, I'm thinking about where the hell the United States Army is, and when they're going to get us out of this damn place!" [Laughs] I said, "What are you thinking about?" "Well," he said, "I'll tell you what I'm thinking about." He said, "I'm thinking that at eight o'clock tomorrow morning, we're going to take James Meredith, and we're going to march him right up these front steps. And we're going to march him right in that front door, and we're going to take him right up to that Registrar. And we're going to register him. After that we're going to take him to class!" [Laughs]

STEWART: Hm! You fellows were all armed, I assume?

GUTHMAN: No.

STEWART: No?

GUTHMAN: No, we were not. The marshals were, but we weren't.

STEWART: Yeah.

GUTHMAN: You know, it would have been ridiculous.

STEWART: Why?

GUTHMAN: Why?

STEWART: I mean, there was a possibility that—

GUTHMAN: Well, I suppose if it had gotten into that much of a—the shooting was sporadic sniping. We weren't in a skirmish. There were a lot of shots fired, but they were fired at various intervals, and they didn't—it never felt like we were in battle to that point, that we had to take up arms. We could have, of course, but we were not armed.

STEWART: Just one last question on that: was any special effort made by you with the foreign press to make sure that they understood exactly what had been going on?

GUTHMAN: Sure! Of course.

STEWART: I mean, anything unusual, apart from what you were doing with everyone?

GUTHMAN: No, we certainly, you know, we made people available. We—and particularly in Washington, Burke Marshall was available to the foreign press to explain the role of the government in this situation, and why this had happened, and why we had to do it, and enforce the orders of the court, and that type of thing. But all you can do there is to spend a good deal of time, and answer their questions.

STEWART: Yeah.

GUTHMAN: But we did that.

STEWART: Yeah, okay. What about the March on Washington? In general, what special problems did this present for you, as far as the press was concerned?

GUTHMAN: Well, I didn't have much to do with that, only peripherally. And the thing that we were most concerned about is that the march would be carried out in good order, and that there would be protection for the marchers, and that there would be facilities for the marchers, and that type of thing.

STEWART: Yeah.

GUTHMAN: And the press, part of it was—we didn't make any facilities for the press, or we didn't do anything like that.

STEWART: Yeah.

GUTHMAN: So, it was, I was not much involved in that part.

STEWART: The crisis in Birmingham in May of ’63—were you down there at all?

GUTHMAN: Yes, I was.

STEWART: Again, is there anything outstanding that comes to mind that hasn’t been written about, or talked about?

GUTHMAN: Well, I don’t know, there’s a couple of things which might be interesting. We had a difficult time with the FBI down there, whether the Special Agent down there was just unfriendly toward us, or whether he was under some kind of instructions, or what. But we didn’t get much cooperation from the FBI. We got surface cooperation, but our problem was to try to know what was going on, particularly in the Negro areas.

And the FBI was either unable or unwilling to find out. And so we didn’t bother much with what the FBI did or what it was going to do, and we relied on two sources of information. One was the Negro attorneys that were in the Department of Justice that were over working among the Negroes who were letting John Doar know. And then the other thing was my contacts with Negro newspapermen. And they were very helpful to us. And we had our intelligence through the Negro attorneys and Negro newspapermen, and it was way, way ahead of the FBI’s.

And it was, you know, it wasn’t a situation where the Negroes were unfriendly to the Department of Justice at all, just a case of trying to find out. We were also trying to find out what was going on in the white community, but the access there was a little bit different.

But I think one other thing that might—of course, that incident down there settled once and for all whether there was a need to be a civil rights legislation, and the Attorney General had talked to Burke Marshall when it was, you know, it was over, and we were heading back. And he said that he wanted to see us in the morning, and we’d start having some ideas about what could be done. And so going back on the plane that night, discussions began as to what we could do.

And then the next day, the Attorney General had to make a speech down in North Carolina, at Asheville. And so Burke Marshall and Lou Oberdorfer [Louis F. Oberdorfer] and Nick Katzenbach—I don’t know whether Nick was on that; I think he was. But anyway, Oberdorfer or Marshall, someone else, myself, and the Attorney General. And there, the genesis of that bill, and the major parts of what was needed—in other words, there had to be a public accommodation. There had to be the other provisions.

STEWART: Yeah.

GUTHMAN: And, were discussed.

STEWART: Mm-hm. Did you frequently get information from people in the press that you knew who had some association or some contacts within the civil

rights movement, or within particular organizations?

GUTHMAN: Some, yeah. I had some—would get information, yes.

STEWART: Anything of any great value?

GUTHMAN: Well you know, we were always trying to figure out what was going to happen.

STEWART: Right.

GUTHMAN: What the white people were going to do in a situation, and what the Negroes were going to do, so we were grateful for any information. I talked a great deal to people that I knew in the press, and they often told me a lot of things. I don't recall anything—you know, it was all what they thought, or what somebody might have said to them that might be important as to what—it might be in a little town, or it might have been in Birmingham.

STEWART: Mm-hm. I mean, any—I was thinking more, any inside information about the activities or the plans of, for example, Martin Luther King's organization, or—

GUTHMAN: Well, no, because we could talk to Martin Luther King directly. We didn't have any problem with that—talked to him on the phone anytime. The relationship that he had with the Department of Justice at that time was, I think, a pretty good one. He could reach the Attorney General any time he wanted to by phone. He could get to Burke Marshall, and they talked a great deal. He did not do—a lot of times he did things that they thought it would be better if he didn't do, but there was no question about what he was going to do. There was no mystery about that, because it was very open communications.

STEWART: Let's see, there's a few other things, and time is moving on. A general question about judgeships: was there always or frequently a problem of withholding information about people who were being considered for judgeships?

GUTHMAN: Not particularly. You mean, if somebody wanted to know whether a judge was going to, somebody was under consideration?

STEWART: Yeah, yeah.

GUTHMAN: Well, no, because first of all, when a reporter asked you if So-and-so was under consideration, he had been told, probably, because the FBI agent started going around asking the prospective judge or the candidate questions so that they knew he was—and so, no point in kidding around on that. We used to

say yes, he was one of several people under consideration. Another thing—it was so easy to find out whether a man is under consideration. First of all, often times Senators will say who they've recommended, or what, you know, so there's never—no, it was very routine.

STEWART: Yeah. Were there any other problems as far as appointments, that investigations were let out by the FBI before the administration wanted it known?

GUTHMAN: No, I don't think the FBI ever did that. I don't recall any. There may have been some where people, where one group or another were opposed to a man becoming, and they might make it somewhat difficult, or try to. But I don't, it really wasn't very often decided on that type of thing, but more or less what was going on between the Senator and the administration, and if the man were qualified: what kind of a man he was.

STEWART: Yeah, yeah.

GUTHMAN: And how powerful the Senator was. You know, there was the arena in which the judgeship was—very seldom, that was something like the Morrissey [Francis X. Morrissey] case. There was the Irving Ben Cooper appointment in New York, where there was a good deal of public controversy over whether he was fit to be a judge, but he became a judge.

And sometimes those were kind of sensitive, as far as the press, because people were pro- or anti-. But you know, it wasn't a particularly major thing.

STEWART: What further association, if any, did you have with the whole Teamster investigation?

GUTHMAN: You mean as it went on through the Department of Justice?

STEWART: Yeah, yeah.

GUTHMAN: Well, I was very interested in it, all the way through. I was involved in all the major discussions that were held about what should be done. And I, you know, was, a somewhat public relations standpoint; I considered what, you know—I don't recall anybody that was a specific. But you know, in whether—I arranged for reporters to talk to men who were involved in those investigations. If charges were filed, or anything like that, and getting stories, the amount of work that had been done, the degree of corruption that had been exposed in the Teamster's Union. I tried to encourage people to write about it, made information available. We kept track of how many of Hoffa's [James R. Hoffa] close friends and associates had been charged, convicted, or acquitted.

STEWART: Yeah.

GUTHMAN: We kept a running record on that, and we made it available to anybody

who wanted to see it. And we were involved in a difficult fight, always, as to the motives of the Department of Justice, whether this was a vendetta, or whether there was a basis for, whether there had been a criminal action that needed redress. And Hoffa used every means at his command, through whether it was a publication like The Nation magazine, or Drew Pearson's column, or any place that he could do it. And so, you know, there was a good deal of that kind of activity, countering, heading it off, getting the facts, as we saw them, out. And basically it was one of the more sensitive and one of the more difficult things we had in the Department of Justice, and also one of the most worthwhile.

STEWART: Were you generally satisfied with the amount of success you had in getting your story about Hoffa across to people? Or, the amount of interest that reporters had in the story of Hoffa?

GUTHMAN: Well, I've always been surprised that there was so much sympathy for Hoffa.

STEWART: Yeah.

GUTHMAN: The only reporters that really felt strongly about Hoffa were those that had been through, all through the rackets areas, and they had their noses pushed into that corruption and the violations of every, you know, moral, everything that they felt were ethical and moral. And they understood the challenge that Hoffa posed to the country, and they wrote about it.

Now, there were a few others that did. Ultimately a fellow like Tony Lewis came to understand the depth of that situation, and one or two others, but by and large, it was easy, I think, easier, for people to say, "Oh, that's a feud between Kennedy and Hoffa." And I think perhaps many people today think that Hoffa was persecuted, and I think that's one reason perhaps the *New York Times* took a kind of a light attitude about it. I don't know why. Abe Raskin was the labor reporter; he never was concerned about it—seemed much concerned about Hoffa. Whenever he wrote about Hoffa he always made him sound like a pretty good guy. And the *New York Times*, of course, paid off to the rackets, and had been exposed during the rackets hearing.

But I think that made a difference, because I think that if the *New York Times* had taken a position of, say, the *Seattle Times*, or the *Saint Louis Post-Dispatcher*, that they might have made a little difference in public opinion. And *Life Magazine* understood what it was all about. I think that we may have held our own, against a very determined and well-financed effort to paint a different picture.

Though when you ask, am I satisfied? I guess I'd have to say I'm not satisfied, because I would think that people would have been repelled by what Hoffa did, and the abuse, how he abused his power, and misused the funds that were entrusted to him. And I would think that would be pretty basic. And finally, the effort to pervert the whole system of justice, probably the most massive effort ever undertaken to corrupt the jury system—corrupt a jury was undertaken by Hoffa, and he got caught at it.

And I would think things like that would just, when that happens to somebody, that people would just say, "Well, you know, that man is beyond the pale." But you find a good deal of sympathy for Hoffa, and the fact is, of course, Hoffa destroyed the country as easily as anybody ever, if he had the power. And it took some effort of the kind that Kennedy could mount, the kind of people that he had working on it, and the—[telephone rings]

[PAUSE IN RECORDING]

GUTHMAN: --the kind of people that he had were tough enough, and skillful enough, to combat Hoffa's effort. And I think perhaps you could sum it up with the caliber of the, the strength of the group, the fact that in the jury tampering trial, the chief witness against Hoffa was a man whom Hoffa trusted implicitly, Ed Partin. There were probably about thirty-five people in the Department of Justice who knew that Ed Partin had become an informant for the department, and knew that over a long period of time. And yet, when he took the witness stand and testified against Hoffa, it came as a great shock and surprise. I think that tells something about the group, that they could keep that information, and that there was no break-in, no indication, no nothing. I think that had it not been done, that Hoffa had not been investigated and prosecuted, that he would have been so powerful today that the country would have been a different country.

STEWART: Really?

GUTHMAN: Yeah. I think that the amount of money that he had at his disposal, and the strength and will to use that money and power to corrupt anything that he wanted, he would have tried to organize a national basis greater than he did, and he'd use that power to control as much of the country as he could.

STEWART: Yeah.

GUTHMAN: I don't mean control in a formal, government sense, but it was quite clear that as he acquired power he used it corruptly. He used it to expand his power, and to corrupt more. And I have no reason to think that it was ever going to stop, unless he was stopped. So I don't think that anybody that worked on that really saw the depth of his connection with organized crime, and the complete evil of his own operation, and his own character, had any illusions as to what they were doing and what they were up against. And you know, he operated from a long period of time, and was able to gain a great deal of power despite the fact that it was pretty clear that he had been a, broken most of the standards under which people normally operate in this country.

And so, I think that was an important thing, and perhaps the most important thing that the Department of Justice did.

STEWART: Do you recall any discussions within the administration of the political effects of all of this against Hoffa? Now, you've mentioned the fact that,

the irony, that he was still felt by a large number of people to be a persecuted man, and there was a certain amount of sympathy. Was there any ever discussion about the potential political impact of this?

GUTHMAN: Yes. Not in quite that sense, not the political impact of it. I think in trying to have the public understand what was at stake was an important thing. We would, if it had meant that everybody in the country thought that all the people in the Department of Justice were ogres, that we would have gone ahead, because we felt that this was the right thing to do, and that the seriousness of his acts, and his potential damage to the country was so great that if he wasn't stopped, in some way, it would go on to bigger and worser things.

So that was the first thing, that it was important to investigate his activities, and to try to bring a case against him. But we tried very hard to do it on that—to make it clear that we were doing it on a legal basis, and that there had been crimes committee. There was no question about that. And that we would have been derelict if we hadn't tried to get evidence on which to bring a case. And that's the thing we worked on. And also tried to show the depths of the corruption, and the ties with organized crime, the abuse of power. And I think that, you know, and then if everybody makes up their minds that Hoffa's really a good guy, there's not much you can do about it.

STEWART: Yeah, yeah.

GUTHMAN: We did everything we could to get public understanding of what was at stake.

STEWART: And there was no real discussion that conceivably this would have some harmful political effects?

GUTHMAN: I don't know.

STEWART: I'm not meaning to imply that anything would have been changed if that had been the conclusion, but—

GUTHMAN: No, no, I don't think it ever was a factor! If it was, I never was involved in any discussion of it, and I don't—well, I think this: that anyone who had a background in the labor rackets hearings, and saw the, as I said before, the depths of this operation, of Hoffa's activities, had any qualms about it at all. And that included President Kennedy. He participated in the rackets hearings. And that included the FBI—everybody that—it was important to get your nose pushed right into this, and see it all, as much as you could.

STEWART: Yeah, yeah.

GUTHMAN: And it was a dismaying situation, that it could happen in this country, that one man could get that much power, that he could be so immune to any

counteraction. It was frightening.

[PAUSE IN RECORDING]

STEWART: Yeah, sure! I'm not sure the way I have to [unclear].

GUTHMAN: I think my favorite recollection of President Kennedy occurred in a ceremony for the Young American Medals for Freedom in 1962. The girls in my office did all the work—

[END OF TAPE 2, SIDE 1]

GUTHMAN: --or that we were going after him just because he was Jimmy Hoffa, but what he had done, and what he stood for.

STEWART: Yeah. That's just about all I have, and it's getting late.

GUTHMAN: That's about all the time you have?

[END OF INTERVIEW]

Edwin Guthman Oral History Transcript – JFK #2
Name List

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