

William Averell Harriman Oral History Interview – JFK#1, 04/13/1964
Administrative Information

Creator: William Averell Harriman
Interviewer: Michael V. Forrestal
Date of Interview: April 13, 1964
Place of Interview: Hobe Sound, Florida
Length: 34 pages

Biographical Note

Harriman was the U.S. Ambassador to the Soviet Union, 1943 to 1946, and to the United Kingdom for a short while in 1946; the Secretary of Commerce from 1946 to 1948; the governor of New York, 1955 to 1959; Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs from 1961 to 1963; Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs, 1963 to 1965; the chief American negotiator at the Limited Nuclear Test Ban Treaty discussions in Moscow, 1963, and the Vietnam peace negotiations in Paris, 1968 and 1969; and an adviser to Presidents Franklin D. Roosevelt, Harry S. Truman, John F. Kennedy [JFK], and Lyndon B. Johnson. In this interview Harriman discusses early interactions with JFK, from 1945 to 1956; the 1956 and 1960 Democratic National Conventions; helping get JFK the votes from New York state for the presidential nomination; traveling to Africa in 1960 and the problems with the Department of State's work there; meeting with JFK and discussing various presidential appointments between JFK's election and inauguration; and the religious demographics in New York state and how they impacted JFK's 1960 victory, among other issues.

Access
Open.

Usage Restrictions

According to the deed of gift signed January 19, 1973, copyright of these materials has been assigned to the United States Government. Users of these materials are advised to determine the copyright status of any document from which they wish to publish.

Copyright

The copyright law of the United States (Title 17, United States Code) governs the making of photocopies or other reproductions of copyrighted material. Under certain conditions specified in the law, libraries and archives are authorized to furnish a photocopy or other reproduction. One of these specified conditions is that the photocopy or reproduction is not to be "used for any purpose other than private study, scholarship, or research." If a user makes a request for, or later uses, a photocopy or reproduction for purposes in excesses of "fair use," that user may be liable for copyright infringement. This institution reserves the right to refuse to accept a copying order if, in its judgment, fulfillment of the order would involve violation of copyright law. The copyright law extends its protection to unpublished works from the moment of creation in a tangible form. Direct your questions concerning copyright to the reference staff.

Transcript of Oral History Interview

These electronic documents were created from transcripts available in the research room of the John F. Kennedy Library. The transcripts were scanned using optical character recognition and the resulting text files were proofread against the original transcripts. Some formatting changes were made. Page numbers are noted where they would have occurred at the bottoms of the pages of the original transcripts. If researchers have any concerns about accuracy, they are encouraged to visit the Library and consult the transcripts and the interview recordings.

Suggested Citation

William Averell Harriman, recorded interview by Michael V. Forrestal, April 13, 1970, (page number), John F. Kennedy Library Oral History Program.

Harriman, A.

file: Harriman

STATEMENT REGARDING LISTING OF UNEDITED
ORAL HISTORY TRANSCRIPT

Until I review and edit the transcript of my oral history interview for the John F. Kennedy Library and sign a deed of gift regarding research use, I give permission for the Library to list my transcript in its guide to holdings as available for research to those who obtain my prior written permission to read the transcript. No citation of or quotation from the transcript may be made without the researcher first obtaining my further written permission. Should I not review the transcript of my oral history interview during my lifetime, all rights in it shall pass to the John F. Kennedy Library upon my death.

Signed:

A. Rowell Harriman

Date:

Jan. 19th 1973

William Averell Harriman – JFK #1
Table of Contents

<u>Page</u>	<u>Topic</u>
1	First time meeting John F. Kennedy [JFK], 1945
2	Interactions with JFK between 1945 and 1954
4	1956 Democratic National Convention
6	Supporting JFK for President in 1960
9	Getting the votes for JFK in New York for the nomination, 1960
11	1960 Democratic National Convention, Los Angeles, CA
14	Harriman campaigning for JFK in other states
15	JFK's appearance at a New York State Democratic Committee rally
19	Harriman's 1960 trip to Africa
20	Harriman reports negatively on the State Department in Africa, 1960
22	Dean Rusk's appointment as Secretary of State
23	Meeting with JFK in Florida and discussing different presidential appointments
26	Lunch with JFK and Hugh T. N. Gaitskell in New York, December 1960
28	New York state—breaking down the religious demographics in terms of JFK's 1960 victory
30	The Catholic issue
31	Harriman begins his work at the State Department

Oral History Interview

With

WILLIAM AVERELL HARRIMAN

April 13, 1964
Hobe Sound, Florida

By Michael V. Forrestal

For the John F. Kennedy Library

FORRESTAL: Averell, when did you first meet the President [John F. Kennedy]?

HARRIMAN: The first time I recall meeting him was in San Francisco in 1945, the time of the first United Nations meeting. As I recall it, he was then representing, as a newspaper correspondent, one of the Boston papers. (That can be checked, of course.) He was with Paul Fay [Paul B. "Red" Fay, Jr.] who had also—well, I think was still in the Navy, and they came up to my room in the Fairmont Hotel. I remember that at the time I saw a number of newspaper men and told them that we had to recognize that our objectives and those of the Kremlin [Moscow] were irreconcilable. In spite of that we would have to try to find a way to live on this small planet without a war. This shocked a good many of them. I don't quite recall what President Kennedy's reaction was. I remember that Paul Fay told me he had quite a clear recollection of the meeting. He seemed to

[-1-]

have been impressed by what we were talking about. He mentioned to me that I had walked them both down the hall and put them in the elevator, and he thought that was extraordinary to do to a young naval officer, which he was at that time. I can't remember why I did it, except that I was probably interested to get Jack Kennedy's reactions. I had known his father

[Joseph P. Kennedy, Sr.] very early in the early New Deal [Franklin D. Roosevelt Administration] days, or before then when he was in New York, and later on he used to be in Washington of course, and then on Long Island [New York], staying with Herbert Swope [Herbert B. Swope]. So, I had an interest in him for that reason, if for no other.

FORRESTAL: Was he in Congress then, do you remember or was this before he went to Congress?

HARRIMAN: Oh, no. This was in May, 1945. He had just returned from the Navy, just returned from his experiences in the Pacific, and he had been invalidated out of the service, I assume. He was there representing one of the Boston newspapers. I can't remember anything else about that talk.

FORRESTAL: When did you next run across him?

HARRIMAN: Well, I can't remember just when I saw him. Of course, he was in the Congress, and he was a senator. I must have run across him on a number of different occasions, but none of them were particularly vivid in my mind. I recall that he used to see Senator McCarthy [Joseph R. McCarthy] occasionally, which surprised me somewhat. As he wasn't on Foreign Relations

[-2-]

[Senate Foreign Relations Committee], I didn't see him often at that time. During that period up to January, 1953, I used to see a great deal of the senators who were involved in foreign policy. They used to come to my house and have breakfast and for drinks in the afternoon, and we discussed foreign policy and particularly the various Marshall Plan [European Recovery Program] or other aid problems particularly at the end, when I was Mutual Security [Mutual Security Agency] director. But I don't recall that Congressman Kennedy ever came to any of those meetings.

FORRESTAL: When you ran for governor of New York some years later...

HARRIMAN: 1954.

FORRESTAL: ...1954, did you have any contact with him at all then in a political context?

HARRIMAN: No, I don't remember any contact with him. I remember when I was governor I invited him to come to Albany [New York] to make a speech at our Democratic State Committee dinner, which we held at the large armory. I remember one year President Truman [Harry S. Truman] came, and we asked Kennedy. I thought a number of the Party leaders would like to see him because he was a young Irishman and there were a good many Irishmen in the state, and I thought that they would be interested to meet him. Unfortunately he couldn't come, but Bobby [Robert F.

Kennedy] and Ethel [Ethel Skakel Kennedy] came instead, and he made a rather short speech for his brother.

I remember, of course, seeing him [John F. Kennedy] in the 1956 National

[-3-]

Convention in Chicago. I was then a candidate for the Democratic nomination, and I never talked politics with him, but I used to see John McCormack [John W. McCormack] quite frequently (he was supporting me); and, of course, at that time John McCormack and Senator Kennedy were not on very good terms, because Senator Kennedy had taken away from John McCormack the leadership, or they were sparring for leadership anyway.

FORRESTAL: That was the year he almost made the vice presidential...

HARRIMAN: I remember very well; I was back on the floor after Stevenson's [Adlai E. Stevenson] nomination. I didn't go on the floor during the time while they were balloting for the presidency or during the previous discussions, but I remember very well that I joined the New York delegation, and the question of the vice presidency came up. We had all thought that Stevenson had made a deal with Kefauver [Estes Kefauver], because Kefauver suddenly withdrew his name. There had been some discussion between some of my supporters and Kefauver's to see whether he would join me. That was the only chance, of course, of my getting the nomination. I might say here quickly that I had no idea that anybody could beat President Eisenhower [Dwight D. Eisenhower], but I thought it was important to have a somewhat stiffer front on the Democratic Party than the one that I thought Adlai Stevenson gave. But that has nothing to do with President Kennedy; it's my own motivations.

In any event, we suddenly discovered (I can't remember just how soon, but before the balloting) that Stevenson had

[-4-]

thrown the vice presidency open for the nomination of anyone. And then Senator Kennedy, John F. Kennedy's name, was put in nomination; and I sent someone to see John McCormack, since he had supported me, to see whether he would want New York State to back Senator Kennedy. I knew that a number of our delegates were going to back him anyway; but I could have held a certain percentage of the delegation. I thought, considering John McCormack had supported me, I should find out what he wanted to do. His reply was, "Of course I'm always loyal to a Democrat from my state when he's up for nomination or for election." I think that's very typical of John McCormack and would do well for some of the younger political fry around the nation to recognize that if you believe in a Party, you've got to have a certain Party discipline—believe in the objectives of the Party. In any event, it looked as if John Kennedy was going to get the nomination. He came within twenty votes. And then...

FORRESTAL: What was Kefauver doing at this time? Was he fighting for that

nomination?

HARRIMAN: Oh, yes. He was trying to get it. The record of the Convention will tell you just what happened. New York State, of course, casting its 115 votes, whatever it was, for him, was a big boost up fairly early in the balloting; and it wasn't until the very end—I've forgotten—one of the states—I'm not sure it wasn't Tennessee itself, that switched over, had agreed. In any event, the record of the Convention will show.

[-5-]

Naturally, I recalled President Roosevelt's experience, in which he had very much advanced his candidacy for the presidency by running as Vice President even though he lost the election (I think he ran with Cox [James M. Cox]), but he got to know everybody around the country; and I thought this would Kennedy a tryout. Also, having supported Al Smith [Alfred E. Smith], I was very keen to see a Catholic on the ballot.

FORRESTAL: That of course was in 1956.

HARRIMAN: That was 1956. I would have gone for the presidency again except that I was beaten, if you remember, in 1958 by a lot of circumstances which I doubt very much, whether if it happened a hundred times, would have worked out just the way it did. But that's not for this account. But we had a row at the Convention due to certain people double-crossing me and others deceiving me, and which I didn't handle very well. The morning after the Convention I told my press secretary we'd lost a million votes the day before, and we would have to try to get them back. Unfortunately the campaign was not well run, and, in any event, I was beaten. So that the ideas of being a candidate in 1960 naturally dropped out.

Then the question was whom to support. I was quite affected by Harry Truman. He maintained that he thought it was too early for a Catholic to win the election. He knew Missouri well. He knew how difficult it was going to be in

[-6-]

the Bible Belt; and this delayed my supporting Senator Kennedy. There were a number of polls in New York, and I finally made up my mind he would carry New York very well. In fact, I predicted to someone that he'd carry it by half a million votes; but he carried it by about 400,000 votes. But this was a special situation as it turned out, because Senator Kennedy did not carry the other industrial states of Illinois (wasn't it?), Ohio, and Pennsylvania. I think all three of them he lost.

FORRESTAL: Well he got Illinois...

HARRIMAN: ...Illinois by a very small margin. And this was one of the reasons why I didn't support him, because I thought he was the best candidate we could

have. I like him, and I liked his point of view. And I didn't see anybody else that I could support. I couldn't support Stevenson, I couldn't support Senator Symington [Stuart Symington, II] (I didn't think he had the stability); and although Truman had supported me in 1956, and he was then supporting Symington, I couldn't get myself to accept him. I did not believe that Senator Johnson [Lyndon B. Johnson] would carry New York State. The Texas image was not a very favorable one in New York State, particularly at that time, as civil rights was becoming more and more an issue. And, generally, a liberal point of view, I thought, was necessary to carry the state, and that was pretty well shared.

[-7-]

It's interesting that then I had made up my mind before West Virginia that I would probably support Kennedy, but after West Virginia it was quite obvious that he was the only candidate. Oh, by the way, I took a good look at Hubert Humphrey [Hubert H. Humphrey], whom I respected very much; but obviously he didn't get off the ground, and he misses something in the way of voter appeal. Possibly he may have gained it by now, but he didn't at that time—a national voter appeal. I was prepared then to come out, but the New York delegations are all asked that we hold together and come out at one time after the State Convention which was to take place, I think, about the middle of June. So I didn't do anything. Possibly it might have been a useful thing for me to have done, but I didn't. The interesting thing was that, typical of Bob Wagner [Robert F. Wagner], who thinks of nobody but himself, he broke that agreement and came out for Kennedy before our State Convention.

FORRESTAL: Did you discuss any of this with any of President Kennedy's people?

HARRIMAN: No I didn't; they didn't approach me. I don't why. Joe Kennedy talked to the New York Irish group. He was in touch with some that really didn't have much influence outside of their own counties. Friends from the Bronx, Brooklyn, Albany, and Buffalo, Peter Crotty [Peter J. Crotty] and.... Oh, yes, I did talk a little bit to Gene Keogh [Eugene J. Keogh] who was

[-8-]

quite anxious to get his support; he was working for him. But he was the only one. And the Kennedy family didn't approach me. I don't know why, but anyway they didn't. Mike Prendergast [Michael H. Prendergast] was, of course, very strong for him. DeSapio [Carmine G. DeSapio] wanted to wait and see, as he always did. In any event, there was an agreement at this Convention that each of the candidates should have one man speak for five minutes and no more; and I asked Buckley [Charles A. Buckley] whether he didn't want me to nominate Kennedy, which I did do.

FORRESTAL: This was in June '60?

HARRIMAN: Yes. We came out then, and we then told the Kennedy family (I don't know through whom—perhaps it was through Mike Prendergast) that we

thought we'd have 105 votes. It turned out we had 104 ½ votes.

FORRESTAL: Who were the holdouts?

HARRIMAN: Oh, there were a certain few, a sprinkling of votes. I can't remember who they were, but Johnson had 1 ½ votes and Stevenson had 1 ½. I think we then had 113 in total. So as you can see it was all but about 8 votes.

Symington had half a vote or so. But Prendergast made a statewide issue of it and deserves a great deal of credit, which he subsequently did not get. I never could understand why they turned on him, because he was the one that held 104 ½ votes solidly for Kennedy right through the Convention.

[-9-]

FORRESTAL: Had he gone around the state checking with the various leaders before that?

HARRIMAN: I talked to a certain number of them—they came to me. But this was clearly the overwhelming majority of the state. There wasn't anybody else the state wanted. But there was always a solid pseudo liberal bunch that were for Stevenson, but they were more vocal than they were numerous, and they had very few votes among the delegates. We elected, I think, as I recall it, the delegates to the State Convention and then we picked.... In any event there were a few delegates-at-large, but the rest came from the various counties and were selected by the county chairman; so Mike Prendergast did a very good job in picking those who were for Kennedy. I remember Mrs. Marshall Field [Ruth P. Phipps Field] was very much insulted because the Suffolk County chairman had agreed to put her on the delegation from Suffolk County; but as she was not "regular" for Kennedy, he insisted that she be not given this, and she was quite incensed. I don't know if she has gotten over it yet. But it was typical of the case which Prendergast took to see that....

Now Johnson made a great drive, came up to New York, asked that we give him twenty votes; and his backers were quite insulting because he didn't make any progress. He did not fail

[-10-]

to point out that he was majority leader and that New York State had many interests in congressional action, but this drive was resisted. No one else made much of an effort.

FORRESTAL: What did DeSapio finally do? Did he...

HARRIMAN: Oh, no, DeSapio went along.

FORRESTAL: He moved right along, did he?

HARRIMAN: Oh, yes, DeSapio. But Mike Prendergast was the one who controlled this. DeSapio had agreed that I should be chairman of the delegation, and Wagner refused to accept that. So he made me honorary chairman and Wagner was chairman. Then I... I've forgotten what I did between the Convention and...

FORRESTAL: There wasn't much time, I don't suppose. New York State...

HARRIMAN: No, there wasn't much time; but at San Francisco Gene Keogh suggested that I second Kennedy's nomination and I agreed to do that.

FORRESTAL: It was in Los Angeles?

HARRIMAN: Yes, Los Angeles. And at that time we were active one way or another in lining things up. I only saw Kennedy casually. I saw his father once or twice.

FORRESTAL: This was between...

HARRIMAN: During the Convention.

FORRESTAL: During the Convention when he went out there.

HARRIMAN: I hadn't seen him in between as far as I can remember. I didn't make any particular effort to get in touch with him. The general history of the Convention is pretty well known.

[-11-]

I remember I was in the balcony with Bill Walton [William Walton] during the stampede for Stevenson which was a ridiculous performance they put on. And we very nearly got into a row because I insisted on pulling down someone that had a Stevenson banner, and I remember quickly getting some Kennedy banners up so as to show that the gallery wasn't all for.... But it was a ridiculously packed affair. I don't know how they got the tickets because the tickets to the Convention hall were very hard to get. Many New Yorkers couldn't get in because we only had a limited few. What they did to do this, I don't know. But it was about as absurd a performance, I think, as I've ever seen. But it was so preposterous that it never occurred to me that this would take. I was not at all concerned.

Then the day after the nomination, of course, was the question of the vice presidency. I heard that Senator Kennedy was going to pick Johnson early in the morning. And I thought that was probably a very, very wise thing to do. I went down to the floor rather late. I discovered that Freeman [Orville Lothrop Freeman] and "Soapy" Williams [G. Mennen "Soapy" Williams] were both making a terrible to-do, and some on the District of Columbia—do you remember who that was?—were making idiots of themselves...

FORRESTAL: Yuh, yuh.

HARRIMAN: I remember they tried to get you on television and on the mike.

[-12-]

I remember coming in and being hit with, "What did I think of it?" I remember saying on the radio that I thought this showed the wisdom of selecting Senator Kennedy as our presidential candidate, because Senator Johnson was by far the most experienced man he could get and was very highly thought of, and we were in strong support of him. This was quite a contrast with the fuss which Williams and Freeman were making and then Joe Rauh [Joseph L. Rauh, Jr.] of Washington, D.C.; but John McCormack, of course, was regular and was for Johnson, and I think he kept that row down. So there was a lot of puerile uproar until it came to a vote. And then you remember what happened. I remember the evening before, going to a party after the voting. The President was there. One of the members of his family—I've forgotten which one—give this party, and we went there—Mary [Mary Averell Fisk] and I went there. There were a few friends. He seemed completely to be composed, entirely unruffled by the situation.

FORRESTAL: This was the night before he announced that he had asked Lyndon Johnson?

HARRIMAN: Yes. The night before. But we didn't discuss that. But I went up to see Joe Kennedy at his house the morning after the nomination of the President. I'd heard there had been some talk of Johnson, and he said that the President had decided on Johnson. I told Joe Kennedy I thought that was a very wise move.

[-13-]

FORRESTAL: Did Joseph Kennedy discuss why or any of the reasoning behind it?

HARRIMAN: No.

FORRESTAL: It just seemed obvious.

HARRIMAN: Well, I don't know if it seemed obvious. Symington was the other potential candidate, and "Scoop" Jackson [Henry M. "Scoop" Jackson], who was highly thought of by a great many people. I liked him also. But Johnson was a man of far greater experience.

Then I went campaigning. I didn't pay very much attention to headquarters. Perhaps that was a foolish thing to do, because otherwise I probably would have.... Well, I don't think the President ever knew how much I campaigned. Bobby knew, but not the others. I knew New York State was all right, so I didn't pay too much attention to New York, but I went out to states where I'd had support in '56 and '52. I must have gone to about a dozen states.

FORRESTAL: These were the Middle West, the Rocky Mountain states?

HARRIMAN: The western states, the Rocky Mountain states, and some of the other states too, because I was fairly well known and had a rather wide.... On one trip I went to Wyoming, Idaho, and Utah, Nevada; went to California, spoke four or five different places. I'm not sure where else I went. I don't think I went to Washington. But there also were a number of other places. I was fairly busy all the way through the campaign. I took the places that the National Committee wanted to have somebody cover.

[-14-]

FORRESTAL: Who did you deal with mostly on the National Committee?

HARRIMAN: I didn't deal with anybody. It was done through my secretary. Of course I knew the members of the National Committee, but I didn't particularly—I don't remember. I was in New York, of course, when the President came through several times. Once he went through Schenectady west through the Mohawk Valley, and then another time he came to Rochester and Buffalo. No, he didn't. I guess that was a different time.

Well, anyway, when he came to New York, he went down to Long Island. That was the night when he got quite angry with Mike because he told DeSapio and *not* Prendergast that he wanted to have Lehman [Herbert H. Lehman] speak; and they were all very late because the weather made them a couple hours late coming into New York City where they had this rally. And Mike—this was his State Committee rally: it wasn't a Liberal Party group of insurgents but it was his State Committee function, and he felt he couldn't ask Lehman to speak if he didn't include Wagner and myself and Jim Farley [James A. Farley] and other standbys equally important to the Party as Lehman. I don't know why it was the President stacked that up against him.

In the meantime, I talked to Bobby or the President—I've forgotten which—about New York State, and they wanted to have someone come up to New York, and they suggested Bill Walton because he was a good friend of mine and because they thought he could handle it. Bill spent his time with the

[-15-]

independents and got into a personal difference with Prendergast. They also had an upstate fellow called Corbin [Paul Corbin], I think, who rowed with our county chairman; and Prendergast, of course, supported our county chairman, naturally, in making the arrangements. And Bill Walton who had had no experience at all in New York, and his natural friends were among the Independents for Kennedy, spent his time at their headquarters, and this got him cross-legged to Prendergast. I didn't realize this was going on, or I'd have straightened out with him. I was out on the road most of the time; but it was a very sloppy performance. But anyway it's rather tragic in a way, because Prendergast was so loyal to Kennedy, had done so much for him, that when the time came they refused to have anything to do with him.

FORRESTAL: He'd been cut out.

HARRIMAN: Yes. And by that time, of course, I maintained my relations with Prendergast because he supported me in Buffalo on down the line. I wanted the nomination of Tom Murray [Thomas E. Murray, Jr.] for the Senate and DeSapio double-crossed me as well as Buckley and Sharkey [Joseph T. Sharkey] and they put across Hogan [Frank S. Hogan]. So I was not at all friendly with him, but with Prendergast I was. When I say I was not friendly, I was at arm's length with him. I didn't have a public break with him, and I refused to join the independents, of which Mrs. Roosevelt [Eleanor Roosevelt] and Senator Lehman were attacking all of the

[-16-]

bosses. Now maybe they had an influence. I don't know; but evidently the President was quite angry that Prendergast should have disobeyed his request to have Lehman speak at the NYC rally. I don't think Prendergast went into business with DeSapio immediately after the election, so I couldn't support Prendergast because I was quite opposed to DeSapio. And I told Prendergast he was making a very great mistake, and he ought to break. So anyway, he fell into the bad graces of the...

FORRESTAL: Did the Kennedys have any influence at all in the choice of the Senate candidate, Hogan?

HARRIMAN: You mean in 1960? No, you mean in 1958, rather. Not that I know of. I don't think he would have come into the picture.

FORRESTAL: He wouldn't have cared much about that.

HARRIMAN: I told Hogan if he accepted the nomination, that he would not only—he couldn't get elected, but that he would beat me—which was what happened. Wagner, whom I thought was going to accept it—Alex Rose told me he definitely agreed to do it and he intimated as much to me—he ran out at the last minute. It was rather hard to know just why. So that left me—I had accepted the nomination the day before, unfortunately—so it left me in a position where I—well, it is too long a story to go into here.

FORRESTAL: Going back to that period when the President asked Prendergast to have Lehman speak at the rally.

[-17-]

HARRIMAN: That was just that night—I didn't know anything about it. I was traveling in a car behind the President, and we had lost contact. He went through

one or two street corners in pouring rain. I didn't know this thing was going on; I saw Lehman arrive with a speech in his hand, but I never knew this was a request. He had made it to DeSapio and not to Prendergast. Prendergast is a stubborn Irishman, you know; he couldn't see how he could ask Lehman, who was out to get him, to speak at his State Committee rally unless he had the other people too. It was a rather unusual request; although of course the President knew he had the organization with him, and he wanted to make sure he had the liberals. But Lehman had been making speeches around, and there wasn't any reason to butter him up unduly. Anyway, it didn't make any difference.

FORRESTAL: Was Walton involved in this?

HARRIMAN: Well, I don't know that he was involved in it at all. He was involved in the row with Prendergast, and he and Prendergast didn't get along at all. Prendergast never thought very much of the independents. He thought he would concentrate on the people who were really working, and so, as you know, it was a typical squabble. Bill Walton didn't have too much experience anyway.

FORRESTAL: Then after the President appeared at that particular rally, I guess that was the last time...

HARRIMAN: That was the last time he appeared in New York, and the election was quite

[-18-]

easy. I remember going to Washington and expecting the President to ask to see me; and after I had got on the plane, my office got a telephone call saying that the President wanted to see me in Washington; he was down there. He said to come down and see him in Florida. So I saw him.... We came down here. The house was open, and we came down to Hobe, and I went over to see him in Florida, in his father's house in Palm Beach.

FORRESTAL: About when was this, Averell?

HARRIMAN: Oh, this was sometime in the middle, between the end of the election and January.

Oh, by the way, I left out the fact that right after the Convention there were about three weeks in which there wasn't much to be done; and I had never been to Africa, and so I thought it would be a good idea to go to Africa, and I thought it might be useful for President Kennedy to have someone go. So I sent word to him and asked him if he would mind my going and saying that I had informed him, that the trip had his approval. I got back word, would I be willing to go as his representative? Which was exactly what I wanted to do, although I had a contract to write for the press—NANA—I think North American News Alliance on it which I would have written. But going for him, I didn't write because it was an official trip. So I went to eight, I think, of the new countries that were just about to

join or had just been admitted to the United Nations, from Dakar, Senegal, to the Belgian Congo on West Africa.

[-19-]

FORRESTAL: You did this at the end of August, didn't you?

HARRIMAN: The end of August and early September. Had an extraordinarily interesting time. I think it did us a certain amount of good because the new African leaders were enormously interested in Kennedy. I think it did a certain amount of good in terms that it got rather wide publicity, and, in addition to which, it did a certain amount of good in Africa because it showed these eight countries the great interest that Senator Kennedy had in them, and I think one of the reasons why we started off—the Administration started off—not all, because Senator Kennedy had done quite a little talking about Africa and showing an interest in it.... I gave him some campaign material. I remember one of the issues...

FORRESTAL: Did you see him when you got back?

HARRIMAN: Well, let me finish this. What I gave him was the awful job the State Department was doing in eight out of the countries that were just about to come into the United Nations. I've forgotten—a dozen or fifteen, but in eight of them we had no representative in those countries. They had had their freedom anywhere from a month to six weeks. Some of them were just about to get their independence, and I remember that our consul [Donald L. Norland] in Abidjan, Ivory Coast, had been assigned as Chargé [Chargé d'Affaires] to the Ivory Coast and three other countries, four in all. And the same thing was true of our consul [Alan W. Lukens] at Brazzaville [Congo]. He was our representative in four countries. Well it was absolutely

[-20-]

ridiculous. This consul chargé couldn't get around Equatorial Africa, made up of four countries, although it was only, I don't know, five million people. The area was about half the size of the United States, so that it was impossible to get around. I gave this information to the Senator. I saw him when I came back. But I gave him this information, and he used it during the campaign to show how what utter disregard the previous Administration had for Africa, their unwillingness to recognize that these states were going to be quite important to the United Nations, and he used it on several different occasions.

I reported to him when I got back. He was then in his Georgetown house. I didn't have a very long talk with him, because of course in those days he was being torn by—this must have been the third week in September—so he was well into the campaign. I made a lot of speeches about Africa, and I used this a good deal in the campaign, although it was only one of the many subjects which I took on, because I used to talk about not only foreign policy but also the domestic policies wherever I went—the full gamut depending upon the kind of audience I talked to. You asked me...

FORRESTAL: Then, of course, after having seen him and after the election, you came down to Florida at his request?

HARRIMAN: No. Well, I missed him that day in Washington. So he talked about what sort of a job to take and out of the conversation came the idea of being roving ambassador. He said to talk to

[-21-]

Dean Rusk about. There had been of course some discussion as to who would be Secretary of State, but by that time it was known that it was going to be Dean Rusk. I talked to Dean. Dean, incidentally asked me whether—I knew him quite well from the Truman days; I saw him in New York—he asked me whether I thought that he should take this job, was it a draft? And I said it absolutely was. He spoke about his difficult financial position. He didn't have a nickel in the world, and he had certain obligations. And, of course, he couldn't have. I suppose the foundation [Rockefeller Foundation] gave him some termination allowance. But in any event, I told him he would have an asset from his own standpoint, which would be of enormous value, not only in satisfaction, but also the demand that he would be in after he had served as Secretary of State.

I talked to him about this, and he said he had always thought and talked about the establishment of a super undersecretary, a minister of state, who might be the one to go around and attend the international meetings. He said he wanted to be the—not do as Dulles [John Foster Dulles] had done, but spend his time in Washington and look after the State Department and not do the traveling, not do his business on the airplane. I told him I thought that Ambassador-At-Large was the ideal title because an ambassador represented the person of the President. If he was given that title, it had greater dignity than any job.... And anyway it would

[-22-]

have to get the approval of the Senate, and that it would cause a lot of argument.

So anyway he agreed, and he visualized, he said, the idea that I should go to the meetings, and that he would only go to those that were of special importance. So the interesting thing about that was that the first thing that came along was SEATO [Southeast Asian Treaty Organization]. He told me that he was going to go to SEATO. And he said, "Well, this is the only one I'll go to." I said, "If you go to one, you'll go to all of them. This is something that you either have got to establish now...." Of course the fact is that he likes to go to these meetings, and he's been to every one of them. I mean not only SEATO, but CENTO [Central Treaty Organization] and NATO [North American Treaty Organization]. Not all of them, because some of the American meetings he hasn't been to, although he's been to some of them. But he's been to most of them. He's been a traveling Secretary of State, which in a sense is a wise thing to do, if you've got somebody like George Ball [George W. Ball].

There was one incident that occurred while we were in Florida. Bill Fulbright [J. William Fulbright] was down here, and he had heard that the President was going to ask Bill Foster [William C. Foster] to be Undersecretary for Economic Affairs. Chester Bowles [Chester B. Bowles] had been picked for Undersecretary—the jobs then were supposedly Undersecretary to run the Department and

[-23-]

handle political affairs and the other one was Undersecretary for Economic Affairs. Bill Fulbright was incensed and felt very strongly that George Ball, who had been, of course, a great friend of Adlai and had a great deal of experience in economic affairs—and he was not at all keen to see a Republican take that job.... So he talked to the President. I had a great respect for George Ball and thoroughly supported George Ball's appointment, but I thought George Ball would be far more understanding of the political problems that the Department had to face. Well, that gets us up to...

FORRESTAL: Is that about all you can remember of the conversation here with President Kennedy?

HARRIMAN: Yes. There was a group that was down there (in Palm Beach). I remember John Rooney [John J. Rooney] was there and several of the senators. I can't remember who they were. They were talking about one thing or another, and that was one reason why I only saw the President for a very short time. In fact, we went out, and he walked me to my car. We went in the other room and sat down and talked about it. I never take very long to talk to the President about things. This was very simple. I had made up my mind that this was probably the best thing to do. I talked to Bill Walton about it, and he had mentioned it to the President as a possibility so Bill was very kind about it. He put the idea in his mind, and it seemed to be the right thing to do. I've forgotten why these other people were down there.

[-24-]

I think he had John Rooney down to butter him up. And I think the junior senator from Florida [George A. Smathers] was there.

FORRESTAL: And Fulbright was there too, as you said.

HARRIMAN: No. Fulbright was here. I'm not sure that Fulbright was there. Fulbright was staying at Hobe Sound and talked to the President on the telephone, and I think I talked to him too, urged him to appoint George Ball because I couldn't see.... It seemed to me the President needed a good Democrat in that job. In any event, he walked to the car and we chatted about things. In general, he asked me about what I thought of Rusk, and I said I thought he was a fine appointment. I can't remember really what we talked about. I remember talking to John Rooney about the State Department. He said he wasn't so bad. He wasn't going to be too unkind to the State Department. You know,

he was chairman of the subcommittee of the Appropriations Committee for the State Department, and he had slashed certain funds which were quite important for travel, what he called the “whiskey allowance,” which was the entertainment allowance. He had enjoyed doing these little things, but he was quite generous on a larger field.

I wish I could remember the subject they were talking about, but we sat around and talked quite awhile. I can’t remember whether Senator Kerr [Robert S. Kerr] was there or not.

FORRESTAL: You went back to New York then, and it would have been late November.

[-25-]

HARRIMAN: This must have been in December. Early December I think. Then I remember going to the inauguration.

FORRESTAL: Yes. Before that you had lunch with Senator Kennedy, or President-elect Kennedy then, in New York, didn’t you?

HARRIMAN: Yes. Oh, yes, of course.

FORRESTAL: How did that come about? Wasn’t it Gaitskell [Hugh T. N. Gaitskell]?

HARRIMAN: Yes, it was Hugh Gaitskell. Well, Hugh Gaitskell came over at that time. He was a great friend of mine, and he wanted to see Senator Kennedy. Senator Kennedy, incidentally, used to come in and out, and I saw him occasionally—not alone, thought, but with people that were there. So I asked him whether he would see Gaitskell, and he thought it was unwise. [Outside interruption] Hugh Gaitskell, leader of the Labor Party—even at that time it looked as if Labor was going to come in—probably the next Prime Minister of England. Of course, subsequently, he died. I thought it was quite important for the President to see him; and I spoke to the President and the President agreed. But he thought that it would be perhaps a little bit unusual if he should have a special meeting with Gaitskell prior to his meeting the Prime Minister of England [M. Harold Macmillan]. And therefore I suggested that he come to lunch at 81st Street [New York, NY] and that Gaitskell be not the only guest, but that I get a couple of other people. Was it lunch or was it tea?

[-26-]

FORRESTAL: Lunch.

HARRIMAN: Yes.

FORRESTAL: I think the President was going to be in New York anyway.

HARRIMAN: Oh, yes. He was going to be in New York anyway, and we picked the day

he was going to be there. And he came to lunch, and I asked Michael Forrestal [Michael V. Forrestal] and Jack Bingham [Jonathan B. Bingham] to join us. I thought it was a very friendly and very useful chat; and we had a good talk during lunch and after lunch. You were there. Do you recall anything special that was discussed?

FORRESTAL: No, not particularly. I think the President asked Gaitskell a great deal about English politics, about his chances in the next election.

HARRIMAN: And then they discussed something about world affairs in general; but I don't remember anything especially significant. But it was a very pleasant, cordial lunch. I thought it worked out exactly as the President wanted it to.

About the election, I would like to say a word or two more about it. As I said, I was very much fooled by the Catholic issue. Having become a Democrat and supporting Al Smith in 1928 and still feeling the scars of the bigotry which were part of that election, I had hoped—and as a result of a check in New York State, which really came out remarkably close to my estimate (and I think, Mike, you'll agree), I said this publicly everywhere in the West: he's going to carry New York by half a million. And

[-27-]

it was, considering everything, very close (400,000 majority).

Now the question is why this was true in New York. I think in New York (except for Massachusetts) the percentage of victory was perhaps higher than any other state in the union. There may be another state. I've forgotten—Connecticut—but it was well up among the highest percentage of victory. And as you know, New York is not a fulltime Democratic state. It's in and out. And I am inclined to believe that there were several factors that were peculiarly in Senator Kennedy's favor. One was that the Democratic Party, of course, had been historically the Party of the Irish, but as some of the Irish had become what I call "rich, respectable, and Republican" (others call them "lace-curtain Irish"), they deserted the Party. Some of them took a walk with Al Smith and never came back. Jim Farley deserted President Roosevelt at the third term in 1940. He climbed back in but was never thoroughly to be depended upon. In any event, there was a group of Irish who had left the Party, either fully or partly, and were among the floating vote which went whichever way they felt was wise on the conservative side.

Well, there's no doubt that the Irish Catholics were impressed by this opportunity to vote for an Irish Catholic; and I don't think it had the same effect on the Italians and the Poles as on the Irish; but Kennedy did appeal to, generally, the minority voters. And his Catholicism was

[-28-]

a distinct help and in no sense worked against him. The place where a Catholic might have suffered most of course was the upstate Protestants, but they were Republican anyway, and also with the Jews. The Jews in New York are quite opposed to the Catholics because of

specific issues. The Jews are among our best citizens in New York and are for about everything that is for progress. They are very generous. They give not only to the Jewish charities and to Israel, but to the general charities. They want to see the school system improved. They feel the Catholics are conservative, because, of course, the Catholics support their parochial schools and they're not too keen to pay heavy taxes on schools which they don't use. So that there is a tendency to be against—on the part of the Catholics—some of the things which the Jews feel are very, very important. There are other issues which I don't have to enumerate.

If the Republicans had nominated someone other than Nixon [Richard M. Nixon], there might have been quite a large.... Catholicism might have had some effect. But Nixon was so utterly unpopular with the Jews in New York that they went out against him with the greatest enthusiasm, and, of course, in addition to which the Jews in New York are against racial discrimination and therefore that played into his hands. But the fact that Nixon was so very unpopular in New York among the liberals, among certain people who might

[-29-]

have had religious prejudice or been afraid that some of the positions of the Church which they didn't agree with would come into the political scene.... Now, that didn't work in the other industrial states for some reason or other. And of course Truman was right. In the Bible Belt there was a very, very strong vote against him, and it was an unnatural vote.

I'm afraid that the closeness of the vote had nothing to do with the quality of Senator Kennedy as a candidate. He certainly wiped the floor up with Nixon in the public debates, and possibly those are the reasons why he finally won. But I'm sorry to say that this anti-Catholic prejudice is still so prevalent that it did have a great effect. That's the only explanation that I have for the close vote. I think if it hadn't been for that, he would have won in a walk.

And I'm sorry to say that I find that.... I thought that after these four years the Catholic issue would be finished. But I regret to say that some of the information I have from political observers that I respect—men like Roy Roberts [Roy A. Roberts] of the *Kansas City Star* (Missouri, of course)—indicates (he's only one) that Johnson is going to run very much better than he would have thought Kennedy would have run. He thought for two reasons: one, the Catholic issue which he said he greatly regretted was still.... And the other was that although President Johnson is holding very firmly

[-30-]

to the same civil rights position, there is great bitterness among certain sections of Missouri, which is mostly a Southern state, against President Kennedy and against Bobby for their aggressive anti-segregation attitudes. That seems to have died, and Roy Roberts said, "I think the Western states are going to go back to their normal voting. In other words, Missouri will be strongly Democratic, and the farmers in Kansas will vote Republican. But I find that in several of these states, all information indicates that President Johnson has inherited the great popularity that President Kennedy had because of the strong positions he had taken, his wise

foreign policies, his courageous stands on a great many questions; but he has not inherited the antagonisms that have been built up by his fearless stand particularly on civil rights.”

FORRESTAL: Well, you went down to the inauguration, and then you started your duties as roving ambassador. Do you want to wait and talk about this later?

HARRIMAN: Well, I think we might as well. This is probably about as good a place to break. The only thing that is amusing.... Well, I think I have already recorded the fact that the first meeting was the SEATO meeting.

FORRESTAL: Yes. That must have come up rather quickly.

HARRIMAN: But prior to that time—of course, immediately when I got there I was spending my time to catch up to date on all the things that had been going on all over the world. It was quite

[-31-]

fascinating again to see things from the inside. I had learned in my association with Winston Churchill [Winston S. Churchill] and Anthony Eden that no one in opposition can really understand what the issues are. In England they have a habit of briefing the opposition even more in detail than we do in this country. And yet after they had been out of office a couple of years, I found they really didn't understand what was going on and it affected their judgments; so that I had been quite humble in expressing my considered judgments about international affairs, which I thought there might be some information with which I wasn't fully familiar—unless it was a political speech—and then I was quite ready to tear in. Or else something which I thought was.... President Eisenhower's first really dishonorable act, which he did on recommendation of Dulles the first week he was President, was unleashing Chiang [Chiang Kai-shek]. It was purely Dulles's move to attempt to appease the majority leader in the Senate, namely Senator Knowland [William F. Knowland].

Well, anyway, I was very busy doing that, and the Secretary [Dean Rusk] suggested that the President [Kennedy] wanted me to make a few calls, and I started on a most intensely interesting series of visits to a number of countries.... And I saw the heads of governments. I think I'd better take a little more time because they were fascinating. And generally speaking, I found the world looking to a new leader. His speeches had been widely read and acclaimed. His

[-32-]

State of the Union speech took in everybody in the world and laid at rest the awful statement of Dulles that neutrals were immoral, neutrality was immoral. And in other ways there was a feeling that a new American personality had arrived of the same quality as President Roosevelt.

FORRESTAL: Why don't we end it here?

HARRIMAN: Yes, because there is quite a little and there is a good deal I can say about my talks with de Gaulle [Charles A. de Gaulle], with Macmillan, with Adenauer [Konrad Adenauer]; and I had three days in Italy, where practically there was nothing in the press except my talks with—if you read the newspapers it would look as if there was nothing happening there except my talks with them. Then I went on to Morocco to the King's [Mohammed V, King of Morocco] funeral. And while I was in Italy I got a message thinking it might be well to go on and see the Shah [Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, Shah of Iran] of Persia [Iran]. I was going to see the Shah of Persia, whom I knew quite well from the wartime days, and then they wanted me to go on and make a speech in New Delhi in place of Chet Bowles at this ECAFE [Economic Commission for the Far East] meeting, and so I called on President Ayub [Mohammed Ayub Khan] and Nehru [Jawaharlal Nehru], so I had quite an interesting cross section.

FORRESTAL: Well, let's get those on the next tape.

HARRIMAN: But also, I think we can probably do better if we can get Hildy to give us some of the papers...

[-33-]

FORRESTAL: Some of the notes on this. We'll do that. Thanks an awful lot.

[END OF TAPE]

[END OF INTERVIEW]

[-34-]

William Averell Harriman Oral History Transcript – JFK #1
Name List

A

Adenauer, Konrad, 33
Ayub Khan, Mohammad, 33

B

Ball, George W., 23-25
Bingham, Jonathan B., 27
Bowles, Chester B., 23, 33
Buckley, Charles A., 9, 16

C

Chiang, Kai-Shek, 32
Churchill, Winston S., 32
Corbin, Paul, 16
Cox, James M., 6
Crotty, Peter J., 8

D

de Gaulle, Charles A., 33
DeSapio, Carmine G., 9, 11, 15-18
Dulles, John Foster, 22, 32, 33

E

Eden, Anthony, 32
Eisenhower, Dwight D., 4, 32

F

Farley, James A., 15, 28
Fay, Paul B. "Red", Jr., 1, 2
Field, Ruth P. Phipps, 10
Fisk, Mary Averell, 13
Forrestal, Michael V., 27
Foster, William C., 23
Freeman, Orville Lothrop, 12, 13
Fulbright, J. William, 23-25

G

Gaitskell, Hugh T. N., 26, 27

H

Hogan, Frank S., 16, 17

Humphrey, Hubert H., 8

J

Jackson, Henry M. "Scoop", 14
Johnson, Lyndon B., 7, 9, 10, 12-14, 30, 31

K

Kefauver, Estes, 4, 5
Kennedy, Ethel Skakel, 3
Kennedy, John F., 1-28, 30-33
Kennedy, Joseph P., Sr., 2, 8, 11, 13, 14
Kennedy, Robert F., 3, 14, 15, 31
Keogh, Eugene J., 8, 11
Kerr, Robert S., 25
Knowland, William F., 32

L

Lehman, Herbert H., 15-18
Lukens, Alan W., 20, 21

M

Macmillan, M. Harold, 26, 33
McCarthy, Joseph R., 2
McCormack, John W., 4, 5, 13
Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, Shah of Iran, 33
Mohammed V, King of Morocco, 33
Murray, Thomas E., Jr., 16

N

Nehru, Jawaharlal, 33
Nixon, Richard M., 29, 30
Norland, Donald L., 20

P

Prendergast, Michael H., 9-11, 15-18

R

Rauh, Joseph L., Jr., 13
Roberts, Roy A., 30
Rooney, John J., 24, 25
Roosevelt, Eleanor, 16

Roosevelt, Franklin D., 2, 6, 28, 33
Rose, Alex, 17
Rusk, Dean, 22, 23, 25, 32

S

Smathers, George A., 25
Sharkey, Joseph T., 16
Smith, Alfred E., 6, 27, 28
Stevenson, Adlai E., 4, 7, 9, 12, 24
Swope, Herbert B., 2
Symington, Stuart, II, 7, 9, 14

T

Truman, Harry S., 3, 6, 7, 22, 30

W

Wagner, Robert F., 8, 11, 15, 17
Walton, William, 12, 15, 16, 18, 24
Williams, G. Mennen "Soapy", 12, 13