

Gilbert A. Harrison Oral History Interview – JFK#1, 10/06/1967
Administrative Information

Creator: Gilbert A. Harrison
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Biographical Note

Harrison was the owner and editor of the influential magazine *The New Republic* from 1953 to 1974. In this interview Harrison discusses his interactions with JFK beginning when JFK was a congressman; the American Veterans Committee's interest in JFK; JFK's personal interactions with journalists; *The New Republic's* support for Adlai E. Stevenson over the years and then for JFK in 1960; Stevenson's position within JFK's Administration; an article about the Bay of Pigs that Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., asked Harrison to pull; and Harrison's opinion of JFK as President, among other issues.

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Oral History Interview

With

GILBERT A. HARRISON

October 6, 1967
Washington, D.C.

By Larry J. Hackman

For the John F. Kennedy Library

HACKMAN: Mr. Harrison, do you remember when you first met John Kennedy [John F. Kennedy], or when you first came into contact with his career?

HARRISON: I think the first time I met him was when he was in the House of Representatives. I don't know why I was curious about him, but I was. In part, because he'd been interested in problems of housing, I think, for veterans at that time. And I had never met him. So I called and asked to have lunch with him and went over to the House, and we went down to the dining room there. He caused a flutter with a couple of nuns who were sitting nearby. He had a kind of a shaggy haircut, not long. He was dressed in rather faded and unpressed dungarees, and I believe he had on tennis shoes—I'm not sure of that. I don't believe he had on a tie or a coat. He sat sort of sloping back in a chair, with his legs sprawled out. In general, he wasn't a man of fashion, but charmingly informal, and I would say also noncommittal.

HACKMAN: Do you remember specifically what you talked with him about?

HARRISON: My impression is that we talked about very little,

and that's why I say noncommittal. There was nothing striking about the lunch or about his views, but it was pleasant to feel that you were talking to somebody in the Congress who had some of the relaxed, cool quality of your own generation. He and I, I believe, were almost exactly the same age.

HACKMAN: I've heard that there were efforts made to get him to—or he was asked to join the American Veterans Committee [AVC]. Do you know anything about that?

HARRISON: I don't know anything firsthand because I wasn't around when that was done. I'm told that's true. I think it is true. He did take some part along with Jack Javits [Jacob K. Javits], who had been a member of the American Veterans Committee, in the housing rally that took place around that time for veterans' housing. But I think AVC was the kind of organization he didn't see much percentage in getting tied up with. These were a bunch of do-gooders, and he didn't really care much for that. I doubt if he thought they had any grasp of practical politics. His attitude toward groups like the American Veterans Committee was not hostile, but he never struck me as a man who cared to throw all caution to the winds. And this was the kind of a group that would respond affirmatively to whatever liberal program he would put forward anyway. There wasn't much political percentage, I think from his point of view, in being too closely identified with it. And I don't think he ever did join.

HACKMAN: I had wondered if the American Veterans Committee's problems at that time in weeding out communism in the group had anything to do with his reluctance.

HARRISON: It might have, though from the time that problem first appeared, which was right after the War [World War II], it was met and it was overcome. And so from that point of view, it might be said that by identifying with it, he would have identified himself with a vaguely liberal anticommunist group that had a lot of bright fellows in it. But on the other hand there were men at the time who had political ambition who probably said to themselves, "It's true that this organization has fought the communists and beaten them in a democratic way, but, nevertheless, some of this rubs off on

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people who are too close to it." And Westbrook Pegler [J. Westbrook (James Westbrook) Pegler] was attacking the American Veterans Committee and so were others attacking and it wasn't an absolutely safe thing to join. [Interruption]

Well now, let's jump way ahead in sequence here because I want to tell you about a very small incident that illustrates, I think, in part, why Kennedy was so popular with the press. He had been elected President, and I got a call from the American Veterans Committee that they would like me to go with them to the White House in a small delegation. I don't remember what they wanted to talk to him about. And I said no because I had, at that time, really no more connection with the American Veterans Committee. I am a journalist. I didn't

see why I should be in a sort of mob standing around gawking at the President. They said I had to do it. And I did. There were perhaps a dozen fellows who came. Well, the first thing that struck me was that he was well dressed.

HACKMAN: [Laughter] Great contrast to the earlier...

HARRISON: Great contrast. He had on a beautiful, expensive, gray flannel suit. He'd had his hair cut by an expert. And, in general, there was a sharp contrast to the early, relaxed, sloppy days of his youth. I stood way in the back and said nothing. Kennedy saw me and said, "Say, you ran a note a couple of weeks ago" (an unsigned note in *The New Republic*, about four paragraphs long, having something to do about our policy towards Nasser [Gamal Abdel Nasser]). And he said, "You got that wrong." It's flattering to have anybody notice a thing like that, especially the President. But he didn't stop there. He said, "I'll tell you what I want you to do. I want you to sit down with Mac Bundy [McGeorge Bundy] and get straight on this because the information wasn't correct."

He followed up on that. Within three or four days, I had a three or so page, single-spaced, personal memo from Mac Bundy on the whole affair. As I look back on it, I think our note was accurate and that subsequent events showed that it was right. But that was incidental. The fact was that he noticed things of that kind.

About that same period I had a call one day from a journalist in town, not a very well known one, who had done a book review for us. Well, how many people read book reviews in

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detail? And I'm not saying that Kennedy did. But if he didn't, he had marvelous staff work because this book reviewer called me and said, "Hey, I just got a call from the President." I said, "Oh. What about?" He said, "Well, he called me and he said, 'You said something in your book review about Eisenhower [Dwight D. Eisenhower]. You said that Eisenhower said the following. Do you have the citation on that? What was the date? Can you back it up? etc., etc.'" Well, imagine a book reviewer getting a call like that. He was floating on a cloud. That's the kind of thing I mean.

It was very flattering for journalists to feel that Kennedy knew what they were writing, and not only what they were writing, but that he would come back and pick them up on a point. And he didn't come back in a mean way. All of us have got used to politicians being mad when something is written about them they don't like, or when they think they've been misinterpreted. He wouldn't let you get by with it, but you didn't feel after the encounter that he held it against you.

HACKMAN: Do you recall anything else about that American Veterans Committee at the White House? What was the purpose of this thing?

HARRISON: I think they went to present him with some program they thought he ought to be for. I was going to tell you that, in addition to the comment he made

about *The New Republic* on something having to do with Nasser, he went further and said, “Now look, why aren’t you writing something more about our economy?” And I said, “Well, we were planning to do something on the economic problems in an article in a month or two.” He said, “That’s too late. You’ve got to do it now.” You had a feeling he was taking an editorial hand in the most skillful way. I suppose you could call that brainwashing or you could call it manipulating the press, or anything you like. But it was provocative, constructive, and flattering.

HACKMAN: I had wanted to ask you about that because I had heard that he had told some other people in that same period that he felt he needed pushing on economics, and he didn’t mind criticism from the Left, I think, as he put it, pushing him on economics, but he didn’t want it on civil rights. Did he ever spell out to you what he...

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HARRISON: I’m not surprised at your first statement. I have no evidence at all on the second one. I don’t know.

HACKMAN: Let me skip back a minute to what we were talking about before. Did you ever hear him comment when you were with the American Veterans Committee concerning his attitude toward the other veterans groups, the VFW [Veterans of Foreign Wars] and the Legion [American Legion]?

HARRISON: Well, of course, his comments on the Legion were well publicized, and I suspect that he would have, with his cool, detached and highly intelligent attitude toward all problems, I would suspect that he would think that these were a bunch of grown-up boys running around in silly uniforms. But he wouldn’t be averse to having them for him.

HACKMAN: During his Senate years did you have any contacts with him in that period, let’s say up to ’58 or ’59 before his push for the presidency really got going?

HARRISON: No, not really until the presidential thing began. I’ll try to sort out this. First, I’ll have to tell you that *The New Republic* had been very closely identified with Adlai Stevenson [Adlai E. Stevenson]. It was passionately for him the first time he ran—for him before he was nominated. It supported him less fervently the second time he ran, in ’56. And if I had to guess I would say that if you had taken a poll of our readers, say in 1959, you’d have gotten something like a 99 percent pro-Stevenson response.

It was quite clear that, at least among this readership, which was then, I don’t know, pushing perhaps eighty, ninety thousand there was a great hope that Adlai Stevenson would run again in ’60. And many of these readers were part of various, perhaps amateurish moves to “draft” Stevenson in ’60.

I thought it was a hopeless affair. I was not convinced that Stevenson could get the nomination. I wasn't even convinced by then that he ought to get the nomination. Anyway, it seemed to me that if he wanted the nomination, he ought to go after it and fight for it. But that was not, I'm very sure, the view of the great majority of the readers of *The New Republic*.

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It was complicated also by my own personal relations with Stevenson, with his sister, with people close to him, such as Bill Wirtz [W. Willard Wirtz]. And this was made more difficult by the fact that my wife comes from Chicago, had known Stevenson in the very early days when he was the chairman of the Council on Foreign Relations in Chicago. But I just thought this didn't make any sense.

I had gone out to West Virginia and watched Humphrey [Hubert H. Humphrey] in this primary fight against Kennedy, and I had decided that we were going to come out for the nomination of Kennedy. I wrote a lead, and it was called, "Those Who Prefer Adlai." It was addressed to the Stevenson crowd. After it was written, but before the magazine appeared, I called Kennedy's office, and I said, "I want you to know that this is what we're going to do." I had had no conversation in advance of that about what I should do. Kennedy was very nice, but reserved. He said, "Thank you very much."

I later talked to I believe it was Ted Sorensen [Theodore C. Sorensen] and Feldman [Myer Feldman]. They said something that set me back on my heels. By this time Kennedy was running strong for the nomination. I must have said something that suggested, and obviously my editorial suggested, that one of Kennedy's major problems in getting the nomination was to win over the Adlai Stevenson people, and to have Stevenson bow out, which he was reluctant to do just as he was reluctant to bow in. I believe it was Sorensen, or it could have been Feldman, who said, "He isn't our problem. It's that son of a bitch, Johnson [Lyndon B. Johnson]." I said, "Lyndon Johnson, a possible presidential candidate? You're out of your mind." And they said, "Oh, no. That's the boy who's going to make the flight." It was the first time it had ever crossed my mind that anybody could take seriously Lyndon Johnson for President. But they took it seriously. And that's why I wasn't as surprised as I might have been when he later turned up on the ticket as Vice President.

HACKMAN: What was your attitude toward Humphrey in that period, because a lot of Stevenson supporters were supporting Humphrey in that West Virginia primary.

HARRISON: I was a great fan of Hubert Humphrey's, I was for him after West Virginia in terms of my own personal preferences and I was for him up to West Virginia.

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I respected him. I thought he had a good grasp of public problems, demonstrated sincerity and was interested in a lot of things I was concerned with. I hoped he would get the

nomination. After West Virginia I simply crossed that off the books. I didn't stop liking Humphrey. I didn't stop thinking that he would have been a great President. But it no longer occurred to me that there was any chance of his winning the nomination. Kennedy was the bet.

HACKMAN: Was Symington [Stuart Symington, II] at all attractive to you?

HARRISON: Never. And it always used to surprise me when I'd meet friends at cocktail parties who were working for Symington. They are somewhat shamefaced about it now, but they weren't then.

HACKMAN: What were your own reasons for your feelings toward him?

HARRISON: Well, it didn't seem to me that he had any great depth of understanding of public issues. I thought that his foreign policy views were, as they have turned out, the kind that didn't promise much in the way of getting peace in the world. He seemed to have nothing to commend him, except good looks.

HACKMAN: Was this decision that resulted in the article in *The New Republic* urging the Stevenson people to, in effect, support Kennedy completely your own decision, or was that discussed with...

HARRISON: No, that was my own decision.

HACKMAN: What type of reaction did you get from your people here?

HARRISON: I didn't get much reaction in the staff. We got a terrific reaction, as I expected, from our readers. We had wholesale cancellations of subscriptions. There were people who wouldn't talk to me in this town. I've been told that this happened once before in the history of *The New Republic* on this scale.

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Bruce Bliven [Bruce Bliven, Jr.] told me that he had been told that after the First World War when *The New Republic* was running articles by John Maynard Keynes about the German settlement—the Versailles Treaty, and particularly the reparations section—and was saying, in effect, “This is unrealistic; the Germans will never be able to pay it.” They got a great many cancellations on the grounds that *The New Republic* was pro-German. Well, we got a lot of cancellations on the grounds that we'd sold our virtue for expediency.

I know one reporter in Washington who was mad for Adlai, who when I walked into a room said to me a most chilling tone, “You, too?” She, by the way, later turned out to be one of the most adoring fans of John F. Kennedy. So within a year it was all forgotten, and all these people who thought that we had done the wrong thing became Kennedy boosters. And Adlai Stevenson went to the United Nations, and all was forgotten. It wasn't quite

forgotten by, I think, perhaps one or two people who were very close to Stevenson. But it was all over.

HACKMAN: I remember at the time, in that article I think, you suggested that Stevenson and Chester Bowles [Chester B. Bowles] would probably be given high appointments in the Administration, in the Kennedy Administration.

HARRISON: Well, that's the kind of thing you say in an editorial which represents not so much your best judgment, but your best hope.

HACKMAN: Best hope, right. How did you feel that turned out? Were you satisfied with what Bowles and Stevenson wound up with and the way they were treated in the Administration? Maybe you could comment on that.

HARRISON: No, I wasn't. I was very sorry he didn't pick Stevenson for Secretary of State. I think Rusk [Dean Rusk] was, and is, a disaster. Whether Kennedy ever privately felt that, I don't know; whether Rusk would have stayed as Secretary of State, had Kennedy lived, I haven't any idea. But I think it was too bad to shunt off Adlai into the United Nations. I can't believe that he was happy there. There were policies he couldn't have been

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enthusiastic about. The Bay of Pigs incident certainly must have been a great embarrassment to him. And then he died.

Bowles is another matter. I can see why Bowles would be difficult to have in any Administration. I like what Bowles says. I like it even after I've heard it ten times. And from what I know of what he did while he was in the State Department, particularly in Africa, I would say that he was a very useful fellow to the Kennedy Administration. But there again, I think Bowles was the kind of man, with his sort of observations on how the world can be made better, that must have chilled the Kennedys somewhat. He wasn't their type, nor, of course, was Adlai Stevenson.

HACKMAN: Going back to Stevenson, at the time of the Cuban Missile Crisis in '62, there was an article that came out on Stevenson by Charles Bartlett and I think it was Stewart Alsop. I remember you writing on that in *The New Republic* and saying that while the President probably wasn't to blame for the story, there were other people around him who, in effect, wanted to get rid of Stevenson. Do you recall that?

HARRISON: Yes, I recall that.

HACKMAN: Who were you talking about then?

HARRISON: I don't know who it was. But there certainly were people in this town who never liked Adlai Stevenson, who probably thought he wasn't realistic and practical enough. He wasn't enough of an organization man for them. And that's true. He wasn't, although he certainly was a good soldier about the jobs that he took on after Kennedy was elected.

I had called—When this happened, I had telephoned New York. I couldn't get Stevenson. But I talked to Clayton Fritchey who was then his press man, and Clayton was bitter because he thought the governor had been sold down the river, and that people in Washington had said indiscreet things about him, and that they had misrepresented what he had said, and, in general, that he hadn't been treated very nicely. I think that's probably true. Incidentally, in the middle of telling me this on the telephone, Fritchey stopped right in

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the middle of a sentence and said, "I can't talk anymore. I'll call you back." And, of course, he never did. I later was told that there were instructions from on high that people were to shut up. So I never could get anything more out of any of them—on that subject.

HACKMAN: Talking about people shutting up, I'd heard that at the time of the Bay of Pigs disaster that the President called in a group of editors and discussed this whole question of national security and the press with them. Were you there at this time? Do you remember anything about this?

HARRISON: No, I wasn't. I did have one experience at the time which had been referred to by Arthur Schlesinger [Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr.] in his book, and which Clifton Daniel [Clifton Daniel, Jr.] referred to in a speech he gave, I guess it was last year, on this problem of national security and the press. We had, about a week before the Bay of Pigs, an article which was submitted by a reputable reporter in Washington, whom I knew. He was very worried. His article mentioned the CIA's role in a possible invasion. He didn't say specifically that the invasion was going to take place and, he certainly didn't give any date. But it was an alarmist article. It said that this was in the works, that it would be a disaster.

It's the kind of article that I rarely have received. It was very hot. I knew it was, and *The New Republic* had for weeks preceding this been saying that any such attempt would be a calamity. But we'd been doing this editorially. The writer who gave me this article—I believe he gave it to me on a Monday—asked that his name not be used because he said it would embarrass his newspaper. We were going to run it under a pseudonym.

I had the article set in type. The galleys came back the next day, Tuesday, I think. Then I got a little worried. I made a mistake, because I should have gone along with the reporter, but in this kind of a situation I couldn't be sure that his facts were correct, although I suspected they were. So I called up Arthur Schlesinger at the White House. I said I had this article. And I believe what I said to him was, "If you know of any reason why it should not run, I want you to tell me." That was my mistake.

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What I should have said was, “If you see anything incorrect in this article, I’d like to know.” leaving no inference that the White House could have anything to say about whether I published it. I learned a lot from that error. Arthur began to stutter over the telephone. I’ve never heard him do it before and haven’t since. He said, “Send it right over.” I did. I had a telephone call from him, I think within a couple of hours. He said, again in a shaky voice, “I must ask you on the highest authority not to publish this piece.” I said, “All right, Arthur.” And I killed it. Arthur told me later that he had taken it immediately to the President, who had read it. He also told me that there wasn’t anything incorrect in it. It was right on the nose.

HACKMAN: He told you this at that time?

HARRISON: No, much later. Now, this was all complicated by something else. We might not have run the article even if I hadn’t called the White House, because about the same time Arthur was talking to me, or just before that, the author called and said, “I want to withdraw the piece.” He’d gotten scared. That annoyed me because he had submitted it, it had been set in type. I didn’t tell the author I had talked to Schlesinger. I’m not even sure whether by that time I had, it was all happening so fast. All this was happening over a period of about twenty-four hours.

I didn’t tell the author that we wouldn’t run the article. I just said, “Well, we’ll see.” Then the White House episode came, and I did decide not to run it. I’m very sorry I did that. The Bay of Pigs invasion took place the following Monday, I believe it was, or Sunday. Sunday or Monday. If we had run it, this article would have been on the newsstand about the day of the invasion. Journalistically it would have been something of a coup. Well, that was the end of that story.

HACKMAN: Did anything else like that ever come up during the Administration?

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HARRISON: No.

HACKMAN: Did you ever get comments back from the White House, from people in the White House on various articles—ones they felt were too critical?

HARRISON: No. If you saw them, if you had lunch with them, they might comment on something. But I didn’t get any written notes saying, “You’re all wrong about this,” or trying to set you straight on something else. But, as I say, the fact that the President would do it himself was far more satisfactory than a member of the staff who might just be carrying out orders.

HACKMAN: I think Sorensen made the statement that the President went to great lengths to woo the people he considered his critics. And I think one of the

examples he uses is Henry Luce [Henry R. Luce], or someone uses that example. Do you think that was so, or was there anything other than this one instance where you felt he attempted to...

HARRISON: I'm sure that he did, yes. He cared what they said about him. Also, there was enough of the journalist in him to take an interest in what journalists thought and said. I remember somebody in Vietnam telling me many years ago—it was perhaps the first thing I ever heard about Kennedy that made me interested in him. I made a trip to Vietnam about fourteen years ago. Around then. Long before the present mess. In Saigon, I talked to a young fellow in the American Embassy who seemed to me very bright. I believe he was a political officer. I was interested in finding out anything I could about what was going on. He told me the story of Kennedy's coming there as a representative, a congressman. I asked the Embassy man how Kennedy went about finding out something? He said, "Well, he was very smart. He got off the plane"—of course the protocol required that the Ambassador see him and that he see the Ambassador, which Kennedy did, but it was purely formal. And as soon as he

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could get out of there, he said, "Who are the journalists in town?" He wanted to talk to the AP [Associated Press] man. I thought, to myself, now, that's the way I'd do it.

HACKMAN: Did you have any contacts with Salinger [Pierre E. G. Salinger] at the White House during this period?

HARRISON: I had only one, rather bruising, contact. We had published an article by Jean Daniel, a French correspondent, who is now the editor of a new newspaper-magazine in Paris. He was working for another paper, I've forgotten the name of it. He was also writing for *The New Republic* occasionally. He came to town on his way to Cuba (This was after the Bay of Pigs, obviously) and said that he would write for us a piece on Cuba. He expected to have an interview with Castro [Fidel Castro]. It turned out that he had more than an interview. He spent days with Castro and wrote a fascinating account, which we published.

Before going to Cuba, however, through some intermediaries here, journalists, he went to see Kennedy. They were alone, he and the President, and had a long talk, or so I was told. Daniel said to me later the President suggested that he drop by the White House after his return home from Cuba, which would be a perfectly normal thing to do. Daniel's an intelligent fellow, and I should think the President might be interested in what Castro had in his mind, in a most informal, private way. Daniel said he would.

We ran the piece about Cuba, if my memory is accurate, just after Kennedy was killed. Then Daniel wrote a long article which was on his talk with Kennedy. He also brought in some more things that he had seen, but essentially it was a piece about Kennedy's thought on Cuba. Very interesting, I trust Daniel, and I think his report of his conversation with Kennedy was probably accurate. Salinger was furious when we published it, and he let me know it. He implied, there had been a breach of confidence here; the President wasn't around

to reply to anything Daniel had inferred in his piece that the President had somehow commissioned him to come back and report. Daniel didn't say that; he did say in print that the President suggested he drop by.

Salinger was very annoyed by that, however, as he was

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after he was defeated for elective office in California. *The New Republic* ran a report on that election written by Andrew Kopkind [Andrew David Kopkind] who then worked for *Time Magazine* in California. It was a sardonic piece. It didn't make Pierre Salinger look good. Salinger called our publisher, whom he knew, and said, "With friends like you, who needs enemies?"

Perhaps I should also mention that I had first introduced Daniel to Kennedy on Daniel's trip to the U.S. a couple of years earlier. Daniel was born in Algeria and was well informed on the war then going on between the Algerians and the French. Daniel had told me before he arrived in Washington that the one politician he wanted to meet here was Kennedy, because of Kennedy's powerful speech on Algeria, given a few months before, which Daniel said had hit France like a bomb. So I asked Kennedy, along with a handful of journalists, to come to lunch with Daniel at the International Club. I sat the two of them next to each other. When Daniel's English broke down, which it did at the slightest overloading, Kennedy would translate from the French. They seemed to have a lot to talk about, but later that day when I asked Daniel what they had talked about, he said, of course, Algeria. But Daniel had been shocked by a remark of Kennedy's which, Daniel couldn't understand, nor did I. It was that the Americans would and could do very little about Algeria unless and until the Chinese Communists got involved. Perhaps that remark, though I may not have it absolutely right, was the reason for Daniel's unflattering initial judgment of Kennedy. He said, based on their conversation that day, that "*Il n'est pas serieux.*"

HACKMAN: We've skipped around some. I'd like to go back to 1960 and have you comment on your feelings about Senator Kennedy at that time. A lot of liberals, it's been said, were worried about his lack of a stand on McCarthy [Joseph R. McCarthy] and some of his votes on civil rights. What was your feeling about him, personally, as far as his liberalism in that period?

HARRISON: Well, I'm not someone who cares much about words like that. I'm not much interested in whether he was called a liberal or something else. I wanted to know whether he'd be an effective

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President and get certain things done that needed doing. I was impressed by his emphasis on domestic rehabilitation. It's my only major criticism of Lyndon Johnson, that he's given up the big battle to go off on a destructive wild goose chase in Asia. And the country's suffering from it. Kennedy talked about getting America moving again. I thought that he was intelligent. I admired the kind of people he had around him who were advising him. I thought

that they had ideas that were useful. I thought he had the energy, the salesmanship, the political experience. Those are the things that impressed me. I know that in politics purity, as the so-called liberal would define it, is a nonexistent quality; that men make do with what they've got. I didn't have to admire his silence at the time of McCarthyism. I didn't admire it. We said so in *The New Republic*. And that part of the record. But you had to take the whole man and his potentialities and the alternatives. That's what we tried to do.

HACKMAN: Do you recall, was there any possibility at all that you might have come out for Kennedy previous to the West Virginia primary, or was that...

HARRISON: No, because then Hubert Humphrey was still a real possibility.

HACKMAN: Had you ever felt that the Humphrey movement might result in a deadlock, and that Johnson would get in? You've mentioned...

HARRISON: No. I never believed that. I never believed that. I never thought that Lyndon Johnson, in that kind of a situation, could become a national leader of the Democratic Party.

HACKMAN: During that same period also, there was a letter—you were one of the signers—that came out in *The New Republic*. Do you remember, there were people who had supported Stevenson earlier and who now were for Kennedy?

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HARRISON: I believe that came out not in *The New Republic* but in the *New York Times*.

HACKMAN: I mean in the *New York Times*.

HARRISON: Yes, that's right.

HACKMAN: Do you remember the development of that?

HARRISON: No. I was simply called. I believe it's the only public letter I've ever signed. I was called—I don't remember who called me and told me they were running this ad and would I put my name to it—and I said, "Yes."

HACKMAN: Had you ever talked to any of the people around Kennedy about who he might choose for a Vice President?

HARRISON: No.

HACKMAN: You said you weren't too surprised by the Johnson...

HARRISON: Not after the conversation I just reported to you. It came as something of a letdown, but not a great shock.

HACKMAN: After you urged these Stevenson people to support Kennedy, let's say after he got the nomination and during the campaign, were you involved in the campaign at all in working with Kennedy people and in making any personal efforts to get some of these people to come out for Kennedy?

HARRISON: No, none whatsoever.

HACKMAN: You talked about the Stevenson and Bowles appointments. Were there any appointments that you were particularly disturbed at that you can remember. Alexander Bickel [Alexander M. Bickel], who's a contributor of yours

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came out against the appointment of Bobby Kennedy [Robert F. Kennedy] as Attorney General. Did you get a reaction on that?

HARRISON: Yes, we got a reaction on that. Alex later changed his mind, but here he was sitting up in Yale as a law professor, believing that the Attorney General had to be a man whose record on individual liberties and protection against invasions of privacy must be impeccable. He didn't trust Bobby on that. We ran his views. I didn't personally share his misgivings entirely, but it seemed to me a point of view that ought to be presented in as sharp a way as possible. So we did. I don't think Bobby Kennedy liked it. Why would he?

HACKMAN: I was looking at the White House appointment book, and you attended the dinner I believe for André Malraux and his wife at the White House. Do you have any recollections of that particularly that stand out in your mind?

HARRISON: I remember how excited I was. It was a marvelous evening. What I remember most was Thornton Wilder and his bouncy, Tigger style, rushing up before dinner to embrace beautiful young actresses and in general being full of zest and joy. But I don't remember any more about it except that Kennedy's speech was gracious and the obvious things; that Mrs. Kennedy [Jacqueline Bouvier Kennedy Onassis] looked beautiful. They did have style, as they say. I believe that evening they had Isaac Stern play after dinner. It was elegant.

HACKMAN: Do you remember any other visits to the White House?

HARRISON: I don't think so.

HACKMAN: As time passed, did you become more disenchanted with the President? Did you feel he didn't live up to the early promise?

HARRISON: No, it seemed to me that he got better. Because

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when you say the early promise, it *was* very little more than promise. Leaving aside the Cuban fiasco, it seemed to me he was doing well. And one of the tragedies of the assassination, apart from the obvious personal tragedy, was that one had been told so often by the people around Kennedy, when you raised questions of why wasn't this done or that done, that he couldn't do it yet. But if he got a different Congress and was reelected, then new things would be possible, such as the war on poverty. And that never happened.

HACKMAN: When you say people around him, who do you mean? Who were you talking to?

HARRISON: Oh. It could have been Arthur Schlesinger. It could have been Sorensen. People who were close to Kennedy, people who you knew cared about getting things done in this country, they would drop a suggestion every once in a while that you can't do everything at once. Then look at the President's narrow majority in the Congress and look at the narrow majority by which he was elected. But just wait. Just wait. Well, he didn't have time.

HACKMAN: That's all I had, except for that one incident you were mentioning when I came in, if you want to put that on.

HARRISON: I think not.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

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