

**Roger Kent Oral History Interview – JFK#1, 11/19/1970**  
Administrative Information

**Creator:** Roger Kent

**Interviewer:** Ann M. Campbell

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**Biographical Note**

Roger Kent (1906-1980) was a California political figure in the Democratic Party who serviced as vice-chairman and chairman of the California State Democratic Central Committee from 1954 to 1965. This interview focuses on the 1960 Democratic primary race and the 1960 presidential election in California, among other topics.

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Roger Kent  
Roger Kent

June 2, 1972  
Date

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Date

## Roger Kent– JFK #1

### Table of Contents

<u>Page</u>	<u>Topic</u>
Photo	Photograph of John F. Kennedy [JFK] with Roger Kent
1	Meeting JFK at 1956 Democratic National Convention
2	JFK's confidence that he would be chosen as vice presidential candidate in 1956
5	Support of Hubert Humphrey in 1960 Democratic primary
7	JFK's statement that he would make Governor Aldai Stevenson Secretary of State if elected president
8	Conversation with JFK about Stevenson
9	Possibility of JFK entering the primary in California
11	Edmund G. Brown withdrawing from primary and supporting JFK
13	Visit with Governor Stevenson
14	Unethical behavior of Paul Ziffren on Democratic selection committee
16	Switching support to JFK
18	Selection of Lyndon B. Johnson as vice presidential candidate
19	JFK's campaign in California
21	Conversation with JFK about religious issue
24	Offer to be undersecretary of the Army
25	John Bailey's leadership of Democratic National Committee
26	Conflict with Democratic Party in California
27	1962 gubernatorial race in California
29	California senatorial race between Thomas H. Kuchel and Richard Richards
30	Senator Clair Engle's assistance in gubernatorial race

Addendum 1: Supplementary Documents

Addendum 2: July 17, 1972 Statement







Oral History Interview

with

ROGER KENT

November 19, 1970  
San Francisco, California

By Ann M. Campbell

For the John F. Kennedy Library

CAMPBELL: Maybe we could begin this morning by my asking you if perhaps you recall when you first met John Kennedy and what your impressions were of him at that time.

KENT: I can't recall--I may be able to--when I first met him. I remember the first time I was filled with admiration for him was when he made a speech in Congress when he first got in there about the low opinion he had of the American Legion (1946-48). I thought that was just great! Subsequently, I'm afraid that he had to back away from that. Can you turn it off?

CAMPBELL: Certainly.

KENT: I'm quite sure that the first time I met John F. Kennedy was at the Democratic [National] Convention in Chicago in 1956. The California delegation was pledged to [Adlai E.] Stevenson, he having won the primary over [C. Estes] Kefauver by a two-to-one majority, but there was a great divergence as to how we would go for vice president. We had a caucus, and it split fairly evenly between Kefauver, [Hubert H.] Humphrey, and Kennedy. I remember that



[James] Jimmy Roosevelt, I think, spoke for Kefauver, [Benjamin H.] Swig spoke for Kennedy, and I spoke to our caucus for Humphrey. I think there were probably a few more votes for Kefauver than for Humphrey and there were a few more Humphrey votes than there were for Kennedy. The Kefauver votes were largely from southern California, although there was substantial support for both Kennedy and Humphrey down there. The Humphrey and Kennedy people were very much together on the fact that whichever one of the two candidates showed up as the stronger, the other votes would go that way. We still were perhaps a little bit unhappy with Kefauver because of the California campaign which we'd had here in the primary in which most of us had been, were for Stevenson. We were quite violent on the subject.

Well, [Elinor R.] Ellie Heller, who was--no, she was not national committeewoman at that time. She had been national committeewoman before that, but . . .

CAMPBELL: [Elizabeth R.] Libby Smith may have been at that time.

KENT: No. Let's see, was it Libby at that time, or was it still Clara Shirpser? Clara Shirpser was elected in '52. Yeah, that's it. Clara had been elected in '52 when Kefauver beat the [Edmund G.] Brown slate here. And she held office, I believe, through the convention of '56, and Libby had been elected to succeed her. Well, Libby and I were very much on the Humphrey side. Ellie Heller, who has always been very close to us, and [William M.] Bill Malone, who had been a former state chairman, were on the Kennedy side. So either Ellie or Bill said to me could I get Libby and meet with Senator Kennedy in Ellie Heller's room one night before the balloting for vice president. I said, "Yes, I'd be delighted."

We went there and had a very interesting conversation with Senator Kennedy. He said that he was sure that he was going to emerge as the stronger candidate and that he had a very good chance to be selected by the convention as vice president. He indicated to us that Humphrey's strength was diffused and that it wouldn't stand up, although he realized that Humphrey had many, many friends all through the various states. And this,



of course, was an absolutely accurate prediction because a great many of the southern states, particularly, were violently anti-Kefauver and they looked to see who was the candidate that had the best chance to beat Kefauver. They saw that John F. Kennedy had a very strong base in the New England states, and I assume that [Abraham A.] Abe Ribicoff and John Bailey and some of the others plus his own people in Massachusetts had put together a strong New England base of--he had, what was it, eighty-four votes or something of that kind going in, so that brought the anti-Kefauver forces very strongly to him. His prediction was absolutely deadly accurate, as many of his political predictions were. Our first vote for vice president was announced from the caucus vote but after that we couldn't get an accurate tally. And of course, that was a riotous back-and-forth vote. And I don't think they finally ever got the California vote because we had so much difficulty--because it was a very large delegation and half votes--of trying to take a tally and have somebody announce it. I think finally it was announced as a Kefauver vote and that helped, I think, to put Kefauver over. And of course, everybody realizes that was exposure and the fight helped make Kennedy very much of a national figure, and of course, as many people have said, he was very fortunate that he lost it.

CAMPBELL: Yeah, yes indeed. You ended up then as a Humphrey voter?

KENT: Yeah. And I don't remember. . . . I think that when. . . . They were trying to get us to go unit rule for Kefauver after--Humphrey was out and the Kennedy vote was pretty small. The Kefauver people were very vociferous, but I don't think that California ever did cast a legitimate ballot in that thing. I think something was announced.

CAMPBELL: Some people have said that. Did you ever discuss with Governor Stevenson his decision to throw up the vice presidential candidate to the convention?

KENT: I never did. I never did. I suppose it was a mistake to do it, on the other hand, it might have



given a valuable sense of participation. It was the only excitement really that was going on, I'm sure.

CAMPBELL: In Chicago that year. After the convention, I believe Senator Kennedy was out this way campaigning.

KENT: Yes, we realized that he was a very valuable property and we signed him up very quickly, as fast as we could, to speak at what was to be our big fund-raising dinner in the fall of '56. I was at that time state chairman, and I had a big role in the Stevenson campaign as well. I've forgotten what my title was, but we would meet every afternoon on the campaign in the headquarters. We finally got around to having a fifty-dollar dinner--we had normally had twenty-five-dollar dinners, and we did have one very small hundred-dollar dinner prior to this time. But Bill Malone, who was very much of an ardent supporter of Kennedy, and Ben Swig, are very good fundraisers. I made Bill chairman of the dinner, and he and the dinner committee, I think, sold something between eight hundred and a thousand tickets at fifty dollars. And I called up John Kennedy, who was in Los Angeles, and told him that this was the biggest thing we'd ever had up to that point in northern California and that we were just delighted that it was stacking up that way.

I asked him would he please have his speech or excerpts from it available for the press when he arrived. And he said, yes, he would. This was two or three days before the dinner. Well, I suppose that he was still a fairly young man at that time and he had very close friends in San Francisco. And he didn't do a very good job for us. He came up to San Francisco without a speech and without excerpts and he told me that so-and-so--and I don't remember whether this was [Theodore C.] Sorensen or not--would give the speech to the press. And it was some hours later and just about time the dinner started that the press finally did get a few paragraphs of a speech which they could use. And of course, the senator had a very close friend, [Paul B., Jr.] Red Fay, here and Red Fay's wife and some other friends that they had known. He met with them before dinner and then made a speech which was his usual excellent off-the-cuff start, and then the page or so that had been prepared for him, and I don't think the whole speech lasted



more than ten to fifteen minutes. Then when the dinner was over he left immediately with his close personal friends without seeing many of our politicians or contributors. As I said a number of us were not happy with his performance at that time, that being perhaps one of the very few times when I wasn't happy with the senator.

CAMPBELL: Did you ever discuss that with him afterward?

KENT: I certainly did not.

CAMPBELL: As time went on in the late fifties, how did you view John Kennedy as a potential presidential candidate? It became rather clear he was interested.

KENT: Yes. It was, of course, very clear that Stevenson would not be a candidate again, and I had traveled with Hubert Humphrey in California on a number of swings. He came into the state, too, and helped us in '54 and again in '56 and again in '58. And he would stump all the railroad crossings and the little towns, and he would go in and help the congressional candidate raise a few bucks who didn't have any chance to get elected. And he, of course, was a perfectly charming and delightful guy, and had unsurpassed energy, so that I became very much of a Humphrey supporter. And Kennedy, of course, knew this. He kept the tabs out on about everybody. I regarded--always felt that I would be happy with either Stevenson again or Humphrey or with Kennedy. I felt that I would not be happy, particularly happy, with [Stuart] Symington. I would be dismally unhappy with [Lyndon B.] Johnson. But any of the other three were okay with me.

I suppose it would've been in late '59 or early '60 that I was in Washington, and I'm not sure whether Libby was still there. No, of course not. Of course, not. No, she was appointed as the treasurer after his election. She happened to be in Washington, probably at a meeting of the National Committee, I think that was it. And so the senator got a hold of us and asked if we'd come down and see him. So we went down and saw him in his office. I suppose this would've been early '60. He produced polls from various states and some on a national basis which showed that he was a leading candidate



and that he would also have the best chance to win against a number of stated Republicans. I suppose that was probably early in '60. Libby and I then divided for a while--one of the few times that we were on opposite sides--and she became a pretty firm and open Kennedy supporter and I stayed, of course, with Humphrey. And I don't remember whether it was at that conference or a subsequent one that I had with Senator Kennedy when he told me, he said, "I know of your very deep personal friendship with Hubert Humphrey and, of course, respect it. But," he said, "Hubert Humphrey is not going to be around when this convention starts." Again his prediction was deadly accurate and Humphrey wasn't around after the rather inconclusive thing in Wisconsin and then the devastating and conclusive thing in West Virginia.

Again, I was very close to Stevenson and I had been at Libertyville with him on a long weekend. He had stayed with us in Kentfield. He'd gone over to Bolinas where we had a little place on the beach and dug clams with us. I had an enormous admiration and affection for him, but I had a feeling that he couldn't win, that the business of "two-time loser" would be too much to overcome, and I went around and I checked on this. I checked with [Robert B.] Meyner, who told me that he had run much worse in New Jersey in '56 than in '52, and with [Richardson] Dick Dilworth and learned that he'd run, again, much worse in Pennsylvania in '56 than in '52. California was contrary to this pattern. I felt and still believe that Stevenson would have carried California in '60, but presumably he wouldn't have carried a lot of other states. And some of these other politicians that I talked to, [Robert F.] Bob Wagner, some Humphrey Minnesota people and others. They just said, "Look, we went downhill from '52 to '56 with Stevenson, and it's not going to work again. And he can't be elected."

[A. S. Mike] Monroney, at that time, was, of course, making noises that he was helping Stevenson. (I learned later that he was almost certainly working for Johnson.) So I went to see Mike Monroney, who again had been a friend of mine. He'd been out here speaking from time to time. And I asked Mike, I said, "What have you got going for Stevenson?" "Well," he said, "we've got this and that and so forth."



CAMPBELL: Would this have probably been in early 1960?

KENT: This would've been probably later in '60. This would have been around--I was beginning to check it out carefully--say, in April or May.

CAMPBELL: In spring or early summer.

KENT: And then he said, "We've got the whole South after Johnson loses." And I said, "Well, let's be a little specific. What have you got in the South? And what makes you think you've got it?" "Well," he said, "we've got Georgia." I said, "All right, Mike, I'll give you Georgia. Now tell me what else you've got." And he just hemmed and hawed and didn't tell me that he had anything else at all. About this time I began to feel that Stevenson should not be the candidate, but I wasn't prepared to back away from him because of my friendship and admiration.

Then in early June, I think this was what we did: We had a dinner of some kind, or a lunch--I think it was a lunch--and Symington was there and John Kennedy was there and a representative of Lyndon Johnson was there. And during that stay John Kennedy saw a lot of San Francisco people. And he then had meetings with a lot of us individually in the Fairmont. Meantime, I attended a press conference where he said. . . . Some newspaper guy asked him and he said, "Now, if you are elected president, would you appoint Stevenson secretary of state?" And he said, "I think any Democrat"--I heard this-- he said, "I think any Democratic president would."

And then [William H., Jr.] Bill Orrick went in to see him. (Bill, subsequently, went to work, of course, in the attorney general's office and then over in the State Department and back in the attorney general's office.) And Bill was for Kennedy even though he had been chairman for Stevenson, I think, in '56. And when he came out Bill told me, he said that he specifically asked him this question, "Would you appoint Stevenson secretary of state?" And he said yes he would. So I then figured, well, this is the time I toss in my cards. I may have a few cards and I'd like to play them while they may still have some value. So I called Stevenson in New York and said this is what Kennedy had said. And he said, "Well,



this has got to be a two-way street. And I have got to. . . . It's got to be offered to me in a proper and dignified way." And I said, "I can clearly understand that." And so I called up the senator's office and I said I wanted to see him.

Then I called the senator's office and I said that I wanted to see him and I would be coming to Washington. So he said, "Any time." He said, "Two o'clock tomorrow afternoon," or something like that. So the meeting was just the senator and myself. I said, "I'm your guy. I'm going to support you." And then I said, "I want to tell you something," and then I told him about this business and the fact that I had talked to Stevenson and suggested to him the proper way for handling it. (As far as I'm concerned, obviously they didn't do it the proper way then.) I felt that Stevenson was one of the ablest guys there was for the job and was on a first-name basis and, practically, friend of every head of state in the world. And he said, "Yes. Of course, you know, Stevenson's making it kind of tough on me. [Chester] Bowles is helping every day." I said, "Well, I understand that." And he said, "Well, anyway, if I do do this, I'm not going to make an announcement for a long time because I want [Richard M.] Nixon to be running against me and not running against Stevenson." And I said, "That's very, very good strategy." And I agreed with it thoroughly. So then I said to him, "I think I will be more effective for you if this is not announced right now because I will attempt to work on my many, many Stevenson friends."

CAMPBELL: And you meant your support of him was not to be



announced.

KENT: That's right, my support of him was not to be announced because I thought it would limit my effectiveness in dealing with other members of the delegation. Oh, there's one very funny one.

CAMPBELL: May I just quickly ask did you feel when you left that day that Senator Kennedy had committed himself to appoint Governor Stevenson secretary of state?

KENT: I didn't. I didn't ask him for a commitment, and he didn't give me one. So I didn't really feel that.

Now, there's one funny one. A call I got from [Joseph W.] Joe Alsop, and this was back about February or March of '60. It was getting very close to the time when any presidential candidate had to announce, appoint his committee, and prepare to get on the California ballot for the June primary. And Joe Alsop called me--I guess at this time I would have been a vice-chairman of the state committee, but it was pretty well decided that I would, in August when they had the election, become chairman. California has this law, you know, in which it rotates north and south every two years.

I was on the Brown selection committee for his delegation and whatnot, and I got this call from Joe Alsop, and he said, "Kent, old boy," he said, "you people must realize that maybe--should realize that Senator Kennedy may enter the California primary." And I said, "Yes, we realize this." And he said, "I think he would win. What do you think?" And I said, "Well, I don't know." I said, "He'd have a real struggle. As you know, the group that's on the Brown delegation, including the governor himself and [Clair] Engle and the rest of these people, are all people that helped swing California from a Republican to a Democratic state, and they are on this delegation and committed, and committed to go for Brown. I think they would be somewhat formidable."

And he said, "Well, what would you do if Senator Kennedy entered the primary?" And I said, "The first thing I'd do is I hope I would call a meeting of those that I knew I could



count on and we would kick off the proposed delegation everybody who we suspected was even remotely in favor of John Kennedy and we would fill up the delegation with people who were clearly for Symington, Johnson, Humphrey, and Stevenson. And then we would prepare for the damnedest fight we could give." He said, "Old boy, why would you want to do a thing like that?" And I said, "Well, look. I can't blame Senator Kennedy if he wants to come in here. But if he wants to come in here and enter a slate, he will earn my undying enmity and that of a good many others in California." And I said, "It might hurt very badly in the fall." He said, "Well, you're very inconsistent, old fellow. You know, you're saying that you don't blame him for coming in, and yet, he's going to incur your undying enmity." And I said, "Yes, and that's not inconsistent at all." I said, "He's playing for the highest stakes there are, which is president of the United States, and why the hell should he care whether he incurred my enmity and these other people or not?" "Well, old boy, you know, he may come in." I said, "Yes, of course, I realize that he may come in." I later found out, from a strange coincidence, that he was calling from Senator Kennedy's office. And that's why I told you this.

CAMPBELL: Oh, really.

KENT: But I've forgotten exactly how it came, but it was some fellow in Washington (I think [James H., Jr.] Jim Rowe) who told me. . . . When I mentioned this, he said, "What day was that?" And I told him. This was only a few weeks after it happened. And he said, "What time of day was it?" And I told him. He said, "I was having lunch with Joe Alsop, and Joe jumped up and said, 'I've got to go down to Senator Kennedy's office and see him,' and he left. And that was only about twenty minutes before you had this telephone conversation with him." So I would love to have known what the senator thought when Joe conveyed this to him because I knew perfectly well, of course, that Joe was speaking for him, but I didn't know where he was.

CAMPBELL: Speaking from his office.



KENT: I didn't know he was speaking from his office.

CAMPBELL: Joe Alsop was the source of another story that, I think, broke in the early summer of '60 that suggested that [Edward H.] Ed Heller had been some sort of intermediary between the Kennedy people and Governor Brown and had been the source of, perhaps, a Brown promise to withdraw his candidacy if Senator Kennedy performed well in the primaries he was interested in. Are you aware of such negotiations at all?

KENT: Yes, I think what I heard--I heard this from Don Bradley, who was our executive secretary of the committee and was the campaign chairman in many statewide campaigns. He knew about it and apparently it was true. As far as I know, the deal went something like this: If Kennedy won the primaries in Wisconsin and West Virginia and Oregon and maybe some others, then Brown said he would withdraw and have Kennedy run in California. I don't think that was in the cards and it would not be possible. It was that Brown would support him.

CAMPBELL: No, I think that he would support him openly and early maybe, or a little earlier.

KENT: Yeah, I don't know whether it was early or not. I know that Brown did come out, of course, before the convention started really and say he was for Kennedy.

CAMPBELL: Let me ask you why you as a party leader and other party leaders in the state felt it so important to take a delegation to Los Angeles pledged to a favorite son?

KENT: Well, you see, we had just had a big clean-up victory in '58, what we had been working on from '52 on--I became the vice chairman in '54--and had been working very, very hard on all these special elections and then general elections for the assembly and the state senate as well as Congress. And we had the opportunity after



[William F.] Knowland pulled out of the Senate and went for the governor to. . . . I mean we never would have gotten a candidate as good as Engle, if he'd had to run against Knowland for the Senate. I'm sure he wouldn't have done it. We could point to Knowland and say, "He wants to be governor only to be president." And then we had Stanley Mosk, who was a judge, very good candidate, running for attorney general. So we had very nearly a clean sweep, and we took both houses of the legislature and the chief executive offices.

Well, we felt that we should stick together. We were very pleased and happy with Brown and we wanted him to be the chairman of our delegation, and we wanted him to speak for us. And I suppose that we were very much split among the others as I told you--that is the political leaders of California were split as to who we wanted to support for president.

So we didn't really much feel like choosing up sides, saying, "You get over on this one, and you get over on this one; we'll have a primary battle," because this would have divided the team that had been responsible for the Democratic victories in California. Well, you know, because of that danger I never. . . . I wanted to go on a delegation for any candidate other than Brown. I wouldn't have wanted to go on one for Stevenson because I had these big reservations as to whether he could win an election or not. I wouldn't have wanted to go on one for Kennedy because I was definitely committed to Humphrey, say, or Stevenson. We knew that Humphrey didn't have money enough to run one of these kind of things, and it would've been a very divisive thing if we had not tried to put it together the way we did.

CAMPBELL: You were a member of the executive committee, I think, that chose the delegation at a meeting at Carmel.

KENT: Yeah, that's right.

CAMPBELL: And was it a conscious thing on your part to include all factions of the party?

KENT: What we tried to do, and it's a crazy quilt that you're trying to put together. You have to get two people from every congressional district, or



maybe four if you've got half votes. You want to take care of various groups: You want to take care of the party workers; you want to take care of your labor friends; you want to take care of a reasonable number of your fat cat friends; you want to be sure there's an adequate minority representation; and you, of course, have got to balance it out with a substantial number of women. And you have some at-larges, and you'd throw most of them into San Francisco or Los Angeles because this is where you had your big requirement for people eligible and deserving of a place on the delegation. But I think it was much more in terms of what contributions the people had made to the Democratic party and what contribution they would make to the strength of a delegation than whether they were for Stevenson, Humphrey, Kennedy, or Johnson, or anybody else. And, of course, you have to take care of all of the congressmen, assemblymen and senators that decide they want to go on and a great many of the legislators did want one. You have a hell of a time keeping them off if they decide they want to go on.

CAMPBELL: I think that I read someplace that you made a special trip to Illinois to talk with Governor Stevenson about his plans, his potential for running in 1960. Is that true?

KENT: I don't think it is. I don't think that I went for that purpose. I went there. What I did was stop on my way to the East because I was so fond of him. He said he wanted to talk to me and would I come into Libertyville. I said I would just love to. So I went there, and he was. . . . I think we probably talked about whether he would run again, and I know he had the gravest reservations about whether he should or should not. I know that. . . .

CAMPBELL: Do you happen to recall at that visit if there was any discussion at all between you and Governor Stevenson about John Kennedy's potential candidacy? Or did you ever have the opportunity to discuss that with Governor Stevenson?

KENT: Well, I don't think. . . . I think I did discuss



it occasionally. Now, maybe it was at this conversation, or maybe it was another one where to my intense surprise, and very interestingly because of subsequent developments, that he suggested [Edmund S.] Muskie as a possibility for the presidency in 1960, which clearly indicated that there was at least friction between him and John Kennedy because Kennedy was so much further ahead. I mean Muskie was just like suggesting it be [Frank E.] Ted Moss in 1972 or somebody of that kind.

CAMPBELL: What was your role, if any, in the replacement of Mr. [Paul] Ziffren, which I think occurred at the first meeting of your delegation, by Stanley Mosk?

KENT: That is very, very interesting. I had forgotten about that. I'm glad you mentioned that because it had slipped my mind. We had the Brown delegation going. Senator Kennedy came up from Los Angeles and he talked to [Joseph C.] Joe Houghteling and Libby Gatov. Paul Ziffren was on our selection committee. He had been busily engaged in selecting delegates who would be the Brown delegates. Meantime, they had changed the rules of the National Committee to provide that the national committeeman and woman would be delegates to the convention whether they were on the winning slate or not, and so Ziffren would be a delegate no matter who won. Senator Kennedy told Libby Gatov and Joe Houghteling, he said, "Ziffren is urging me to enter the California primary." And he said, "This is just absolute cold turkey," in no uncertain terms at all. Hy Raskin later confirmed this to me.

So this, we felt, was the most duplicitous thing we had ever had anything to do with because it had to make Ziffren (who had been very close to us) the only important Democrat delegate from the state of California if the Kennedys put together a delegation and won. They would have to get second- or third-raters as far as the party was concerned. They would unquestionably be people with no leadership experience. There was a very good chance that such a delegation could win because everybody knew that Brown was not a serious candidate and so you were voting for a proxy rather than for a live body. And our experience in California had been in the '52 election that the live body was going to win. And the result of this would



have been that Ziffren would have gone back with the Kennedy delegation and he would have been the shining star because he was a plenty bright guy and he had had plenty of experience and he had all kinds of contacts, and there was no question about it that he would have emerged as the almost sole strong Democratic leader in California. So this didn't quite appeal to us, and I remember that I went to that. . . . This must've taken place in December '59 or early January of '60 because we went to the Albuquerque Western States' Democratic Conference.

CAMPBELL: That was in February of 1960.

KENT: That was in February. Well, then this conversation could have taken place in January; it probably did.

And I had started to have a split with [Jesse M.] Unruh because he had started in to work on Brown a bit and oppose him and start working for his own personal ambitions. But I sat next to him on an airplane going from Albuquerque back to San Francisco. And he had heard this, and he had it confirmed from some source. At least he told me that he had. And I just said, "All right, as far as I'm concerned, that's it. We will beat Mr. Ziffren for national committeeman. We can't have a guy around in a position of such power if he's going to act that way."

I came back and talked to Bill Malone, and Bill Malone said, "That's a very smart man." He said, "What you've got to do is you've got to keep him all the way in or you've got to throw him all the way out. You can't have a halfway relationship with a fellow like that." I said, "Well, it looks to me as if the only thing we can do is throw him all the way out." Then Stanley Mosk agreed to run.

And there were about four of us here in northern California who had been engaged in the political game six or more years, and we knew all the bodies, and we just made a full set of telephone calls. We had a tally on how it stood, and Ziffren and Paul Butler and some of Ziffren's friends just couldn't believe it when I said to them, "Look, get out. Don't make a fight of it. You're cooked." He said, "Just absolutely ridiculous. We've got this thing won and don't you forget it. And we're not going to let you forget it when we win." I understand that Paul Butler was absolutely dumbfounded when



he found that Paul Ziffren had been beaten and very decisively-- and I've forgotten what it was; it was around. . . .

CAMPBELL: It wasn't close.

KENT: It was two and a half to three to one.

CAMPBELL: How about subsequent effects of that bit of divisiveness? Do you think that that had an effect into the California delegation at the convention or the conduct of the convention in any way? It's been suggested, for example, that perhaps Mr. Ziffren was the source of some tickets to the galleries at the convention.

KENT: At the '60 convention?

CAMPBELL: Yes.

KENT: I don't know. I heard this, but as far as I'm concerned, it's straight rumor. I don't have any knowledge of it at all.

CAMPBELL: What are your memories of the 1960 convention? I think your delegation caucused a few times and took polls.

KENT: Yes. Well, we had meetings of the Kennedy people every day throughout. And of course, I met with the guys from the Kennedy delegations from other states, and I worked on our delegation. Three of the labor guys I know came up to me one time--and this is before I had announced publicly which way I was going to go--and they said, "What are you going to do?" They were fellows from San Francisco. And I said, "Well, I'm going to go for Kennedy." They said, "Okay, we've been very concerned and bothered with this and that and other considerations. If you're going for Kennedy, that's good enough for us. We're going for Kennedy."

CAMPBELL: When did you announce publicly? Do you remember?

KENT: Oh, several days before the vote. But then--this



made me so particularly mad at Unruh on the tactics he was using. I mean he was using the strong-arm tactics that he always says are the only way that you can do business. Well, this is just ridiculous. You can do so much better business with a glove than you can with a club, you know. And I don't remember exactly now just how the parliamentary situation shaped up. It was provided that we were to vote on . . . [Interruption] Well, I think the way it was was that we had some parliamentary motions that required us to vote that day on how we were going to go on the convention floor. I felt (and so did my friends) that there was no question but that we could get more votes for Kennedy if we could have the vote go over at least another day and give us another opportunity for a night of work on our friends. And I had this thing half unraveled and was all set to complete it when Unruh got up and said, "I move we adjourn." Well, this made everybody so mad that it was unanimously defeated. And then he said, "I move. . . ."--oh, I've forgotten--something like the previous question, or something like this which had to be explained in the light of the fact that what this meant was that it was some arbitrary manner of cutting off debate and that we were going to vote on whether we went over that day or not. Somebody got up a substitute motion that we vote that day which is actually the way it was set up. It had to be unraveled. But we didn't do it. So we had to vote that day. And I've forgotten just how the vote came out. Kennedy got about thirty-odd votes and Stevenson about the same with some legislators for Johnson and a small vote to Symington.

CAMPBELL: About the same.

KENT: And we were sure we could have done better for Kennedy. Well, of course, throughout that convention I was just absolutely flooded with wires and cables and letters and telephone messages and whatnot to go for Stevenson. And there were so many of these wires and I opened so many, that the day after the convention had nominated John F. Kennedy--I didn't open all the sheaves of telegrams in my room--one of them was one from Bobby Kennedy inviting me to come down to a campaign strategy session at the Biltmore, which I didn't go to, and which I was very sorry I missed.



CAMPBELL: What was your view of the selection of Lyndon Johnson as vice presidential candidate?

KENT: That it was just perfectly dismal. I thought it was just awful. On the other hand, I subsequently felt that probably it had been very important in his election. However, that first precept a man must have in choosing the vice president is "do you want him to be president." And I'm one who's not a damned bit pleased with Lyndon Johnson's performance as president. But of course, it was after he got elected on his own that he got us fully into the Vietnam thing. I wrote him in July of '65 not to get into a ground war there. It was just hopeless. I'd been on Guadalcanal in the fall of '42, and I knew that there's no possibility you could win the thing. But anyway, I thought it was awful.

I went to a meeting up in Brown's room. I'd seen [G. Mennen] Soapy Williams and some of his people. They were feeling the same way, of course. I got up there in Brown's office. I think there were about ten or fifteen of us there. They said, "Well, he's chosen Johnson." And I said, "Well, for God's sakes, let's communicate to him that none of us like it. Let's communicate to him the fact that we don't like it and hope that it be reconsidered." And so Brown got Kennedy on the telephone, and Kennedy said, "I've told Johnson, and he has accepted." [Inaudible] That was the end of that.

CAMPBELL: What was your role in the subsequent campaign?

KENT: I was state chairman. There was talk of [Alan] Cranston, Mosk and me. Ted Kennedy was in the governor's office with us and after some talk I was chosen. [Interruption] One of the campaign highlights was the whistle-stop. Libby and I flew up to Portland to join the train. Before I flew up, I had been called by the senator in San Diego County and by a couple of other people in San Diego saying, "What is this we hear that the president is going to cancel out on the San Diego trip?" And I said, "Well, I hadn't heard anything about it." And I had known that he'd been scheduled in to San Diego, but we run California very much like two states and the southern California people were pretty much running their own show. They asked me to check



this out, so we went in and saw the senator in the private car--he was sitting there having a cup of coffee--and he listened to us and he told us, of course, that his voice was giving him trouble and that he had a hell of a campaign ahead of him and he had one behind him and that he just didn't feel he could do San Diego, and that he was going to have to rest. So then I said to him, I said, "Well, this isn't a matter of my personal pride in California, but I feel that all these enormous preparations have been made for a couple of appearances and a parade and all of the streets are decorated, and the people are going to be there. There's a million people down there and this could conceivably turn off enough of those who are working for you so that it might possibly mean the election in a very close one." I said, "I wouldn't care so much about it, but it was your people who went down there and asked these people to lay it on."

He was just wild. He said, "Who in the hell arranged this San Diego thing?" Ken O'Donnell was there, and he said, "I did, Senator." It was the highest political courage I have ever seen exhibited. He didn't say it was a committee decision, he didn't say that he had discussed it even with the senator, he didn't say that he thought that it had been cleared by somebody else; he just accepted full responsibility for it. And that cooled the senator off very quickly.

He went down through the whistle-stop. [Theodore H.] Teddy White had written that this was poorly scheduled, badly planned, or something of this kind. I wrote him at length and I pointed out to him in the correspondence (It was a delightful correspondence, his answers to me.) that we did just exactly what good politicians should do. The valley congressional districts were a source of our great strength. And so what we planned to do was to hit the northern valley which would be, say, Engle's congressional district, now [Harold T.] Bizz Johnson's, and John E. Moss' from Sacramento, and then we would take the train into Oakland and we would have a big showing in Oakland. Then we wouldn't have to go back to Oakland and we could have the real big one in San Francisco without getting into any problems with Oakland in the fall. And then we would pick up and go down through [John J.] Johnny McFall's and [B. F.] Bernie Sisk's and Harlan Hagan's districts down in Modesto, on south to Bakersfield and then



fly into Los Angeles. This is the best of all political strategems, nail down your strength. We thought it was our strength. I'll come to the fact that it turned out not to be.

What we did was this great political plan and program that. . . . For instance, we had several of the Dunsmuir people come to the train in Oregon. They rode down on it and had a chance to talk to Kennedy, and they had their pictures taken with him. And they had some message from him. Then they got off the train with pictures and a whole crowd from Redding got on, and they had a chance to talk to the candidate for a short time, and they had their pictures taken with him and the rolls of films were given to them as they got off. And meantime, of course, at each of these stops, you have the reporters and the radio and every radio and every TV station in the vicinity is taking pictures of the show and taking transcriptions of Kennedy's speech. And you just leave behind you the most fantastic publicity you can imagine. Front page pictures of the candidate with all the local people, and then these radio and TV and other media going for hours.

Well, after we had hit the second town, I began talking to my political friends and the Catholic thing arose, and they said, "Look out" (because the valley is very heavily populated by the Okies and Arkies and Texans and whatnot). "Lots of people think that a Catholic president would be the devil incarnate, and they won't go for one." It came to me from, say, a fellow named [Harold J.] Sperbeck who had been elected supervisor in Yuba County. And he was a Catholic himself. I said, "Sam, what are you talking about that they won't vote for a Catholic?" I said, "They voted for you." He said, "Sure, they voted for me and they voted for Brown, but the word is out you cannot have a Catholic as president of the United States." And he said, "There are people living next to me who have never voted Republican in their lives, and they are not going to vote for Kennedy. They're going to vote for the Republican." And I began to talk to others about this feeling and heard for instance that an American Legion post was having speeches against a Catholic for president; or the minister, local minister of the fundamentalist church was preaching sermons, "You can't have a Catholic for president." And I was terribly concerned and I did say what I thought to some of the professionals. And I wrote a memorandum,



and it is lost. It said, "I think the only way we can counter-act this is to meet in head-on. We've got to go and plaster the story that the Constitution of the United States says there shall never be any religious test for public office and if you're an American, you're going to play it that way." We had the feeling at the tag end of the campaign that Johnson was very effective on this because these people would take it from Johnson and they wouldn't take it from others. I remember wild applause in Fresno for instance when Johnson said, "Nobody asked young Joe Kennedy if he was a Catholic when he went out on his last mission." But I'm sure we should have been at it much stronger head-on.

CAMPBELL: You indicated to me in your letter that you had a conversation--the whistle-stop tour was in September, and then Senator Kennedy was back November first and second, I think, campaigning in California. You indicated at least you'd had a conversation concerning the impact of the religious issue.

KENT: Yeah, I was very lucky. We went out to a rally in East Los Angeles in a Mexican-American area. There was a big rally and Stevenson was there and Kennedy was there. I was looking for the car that I'd rode out in, and good old [William H. <sup>McClintock</sup> Jr.] Bill Blair said, "Step in here." So I stepped in the limousine with Stevenson and Kennedy.

And we were very enthusiastic with the way the campaign was going, but I just had this undertone of fear on the religious issue, knowing that in the areas of our great strength that it was there. And I said to the senator, I said, "I can't see it any other way but that you're going to win California, and win it fairly substantially." But I said, "There's one thing that I just really cannot totally appraise and that is the impact of the religious issue." And I said, "It scares me." And he said, "Well, it naturally bothers me. If it wasn't for that, we could all go home and quit, and we could have gone home weeks ago." But that is the one real problem. Subsequently I talked to Stewart Udall and he said there was no question in his mind but that everywhere west of the Mississippi that the issue hurt us and hurt us very badly.



CAMPBELL: It's been suggested in one quarter that some people in California, perhaps, thought that the Kennedy people may have written off California sort of early and didn't go all out in this state in 1960. Would you agree with that at all?

KENT: No. I certainly wouldn't. I'm sure a number of them felt they had to have California. And they made quite an effort here. Now, obviously they made a very mistaken division of time between California and Ohio because they went into Ohio, I think, about seven times and lost it very, very badly, whereas they went into California much less than that and narrowly lost it. I announced gaily on the TV in the middle of election night when we were ahead by maybe fifty thousand or more and moving up that it was "in the bag" because I couldn't see the trend changing. But then what happened was we, of course, lost it in the Valley and on the absentees.

CAMPBELL: I was here then. I can remember sitting up all night.

BEGIN SIDE II TAPE I

CAMPBELL: Did you get involved at all in the talent hunt before the inauguration? California got several appointments. There was an interesting indication that Hugo Fisher was, perhaps, in line at one time to be postmaster general and then replaced by [Edward] Ed Day.

KENT: Yeah, that's right. I think what happened, I think Unruh vetoed that. I think Unruh, at that time, had the power to do it, and that Hugo Fisher was in line, and then Unruh tried to get it himself. And I was aware of the fact that they told him, "Uh-uh, we can't do that. We can't do that." And then Unruh pulled Ed Day out the hat. That was it.

CAMPBELL: Were you interested in a Washington position at all?

KENT: It was very, very funny, and to some extent, sad,



but the job I wanted was the one job that, of course, I was not going to get, and that would've been the job that Red Fay got. I had no bitterness because, of course, the president can put a personal friend where he wants, if he's not unqualified. I had been in the Navy in World War II and I put in a number of years down in the South Pacific ashore with the Marines and on carriers and air command staffs and was assistant to the air planes officer on Admiral King's staff in Washington for the last year of the war. I had also been general counsel in the Defense Department in '52-'53. And when I left there in May '53 after the '52 defeat, I had Potomac fever very badly, and I wanted to go back. And I would have just loved that job.

But the funny damn thing was [Robert S.] McNamara called me at my brother's house about a day or so before inauguration, said he wanted to see me. Maybe this was after inauguration. I think it was after inauguration because Kennedy was at the White House. He said he wanted to see me at 8:00 o'clock in the morning. I said sure that I'd be over. So he then called me at my brother's house, and said, "Look, I'm terrible sorry. I'm not going to be there." And [Roswell L.] Gilpatric would see me. Well, Ros had been a classmate of mine at Yale and Yale Law School and was a good friend. He'd been under secretary of the Air Force when I was general counsel, and we'd done business a lot. [Interruption] Yeah, this was about. . . . What was I talking about?

CAMPBELL: The invitation for you to come over to the Pentagon.

KENT: Oh, yes. So he said, "Well, see Gilpatric." I said, "Fine. I'll be glad to see Gilpatric." So, God, it was cold, and I'd about frozen to death at the inauguration itself, and meantime I had agreed with Brown. . . . The Kennedys had not spoken to me about taking any job. (Engle told me they'd give me general counsel of defense and no doubt assistant secretaryship--but that was later.) And I had, I guess, my nose a little bit out of joint at that. And I had then agreed with Brown--Brown had asked me would I stay on in California and be state chairman again and take an active part in his reelection campaign in '62. And I had told him I would. And I thought this was important.



So I went over and saw Gil at 8:00 o'clock and he said, "What we're interested in is we want you to be under of the Army." He said, "We have this fellow. He's a West Virginia guy,"--I've forgotten his name now--"who knows a great deal about the Army, president of the university, and he'd be a very good secretary. But," he said, "he doesn't know anything about the Pentagon, and we think that you would be the ideal balance for him." And I said, "God, Gil, I'm not really interested in the Army, and I don't think I want to do it." And he says, "I don't blame you. I wouldn't take it myself." And of course, you know, that was certainly a turning point because if McNamara had been there and he just said, "This is your duty," I'd have done it.

Gradually I got over the Potomac fever, and I had some problems out here. My brother Bill died and I had to take a big position with the family business and whatnot and so it was probably a very good thing that I didn't get myself involved.

But then, good old Libby Gatov--she felt that it had been very bad that I had not been offered anything. And so talked to Bill Orrick and said, "Now, let's get this on a basis that is not going to make any friction." She told him, "I have a feeling that he and his wife would be excellent ambassadorial talent." So they had Bill Orrick come around and just in kind of an offhand way ask me if I'd be interested in being ambassador to the Philippines. And I said, "Oh, well, Bill, I don't think so." (I had no idea that it was a serious offer and would have talked to my wife and might have felt differently if I'd known it was a definite offer.) [Interruption]

I did one thing in Washington which was a lot of fun. One of my political friends up country wrote me a letter after Kennedy was inaugurated and wanted to have a particular postage stamp for a particular person. And so I wrote Ed Day a letter and said to him that this gal was a very much of a deserving Democrat and that this request of hers seemed to be perfectly reasonable, and would he kindly give this his careful and sympathetic consideration, and sent her a copy of the letter. Well, then, I thought that would be the end of that. And instead, I got back a letter from an assistant postmaster general saying, "Shortly the postmaster general would establish a stamp advisory committee, and all these requests would be sent to it." So I wrote back and said I'd like to be on it. So I was on it. And it was an awful lot of fun. I stayed on



it right up through the Johnson years. And of course, it got me back to Washington three or four times a year if I wanted to go. It was great fun. (Pointing to the wall) "There's one plaque given us by Marvin Watson with some of our stamps on it." I think we did improve the quality of the stamps.

CAMPBELL: Well, there's no question about that. That series with the historic flags was . . .

KENT: That was great, yeah.

CAMPBELL: That simply was great. What was your view in those years--you'd worked with the Democratic National Committee for many years. How effective was it under John Bailey in those early 1960 years?

KENT: You know, it very soon became apparent to anybody that John Bailey was absolutely nothing. You could walk in and talk to John Bailey any time you wanted to. There was never any problem about that, and the guys who were actually carrying the ball, like Kenny O'Donnell and Larry O'Brien and these people, of course, were the real power during the Kennedy time, and I guess, [Clifford] Cliff Carter was when Johnson was president. I don't know why Bailey continued to hold the job because he just obviously didn't have any muscle at all on the Democratic Committee.

CAMPBELL: Was it a difficult thing for the Democratic setup in California--or at least there're indications that the White House wasn't exactly sure who to deal with in California some weeks and some months, and maybe for the entire Kennedy administration.

KENT: Well, I think that was true. Now, this was very funny. They seemed to think that Unruh was the boss, presumably because he looked and acted like one. He was very powerful in the assembly but not at all with the electorate. Jane Freeman was out here in late 1962 or 1963. I was very fond of both Orville and Jane Freeman. And she was out, and she was over at our place in Kentfield for dinner. At that time Unruh was being given credit in national magazines



and other places for having switched California around and won control of the legislature and for Brown's victory in 1962 and so forth. And I had gone back and I'd given these figures to John Bailey and I'd given them to Larry O'Brien. And I said to Jane Freeman, I said, "Look, here's the story. In 1960 when we lose the state by thirty-five thousand votes, we carried northern California by a hundred and fifty and we lose it by a hundred and eighty-five in southern California." I said, "You come up to 1962, and they're giving Unruh credit for electing Brown." I said, "Well, maybe he deserves the credit because southern California went for Brown by seven thousand votes, but northern California went by a hundred and ninety-three thousand votes." And I said, "And the thing that really I can't help but being annoyed about is the business of Unruh being given credit for changing the complexion of the legislature, of the assembly and the state senate. Now, he could have responsibility for the assembly, although he'd won at least as many seats in the north as he'd won in the south, and probably some more. But in southern California, all of southern California at that time, there were only eight senators, and there were thirty-two in northern California, and when I came in in 1954, there were twenty-nine Republicans and eleven Democrats. At that moment (when I talked to Jane Freeman) there were twenty-nine Democrats and eleven Republicans." I said, "We went into those districts and we held conventions to help the local guys select the best people. We put in professional help, we put in some money and we worked hard on those campaigns. And Unruh never came anywhere near any part of that operation. It was a northern California project operated out of my political office."

So Jane looked me in the eye and said, "Have you given the president these figures?" And I said, "No. I've given them to Bailey and I've given them to O'Brien." She said, "You give them to him." I said, "Now look. I don't bother the president." She said, "That is typical. The good ones don't and the bad ones do." She said, "You go see him and give him these figures. He can count." And at this time Unruh was making noises about the fact that he was going to be the Kennedy chairman in California for the ensuing campaign.

CAMPBELL: The '64 campaign?



KENT: And he was blackmailing Brown--doing his best to blackmail Brown--by saying, "Look, there's only one man in California that can prevent me from being Kennedy's campaign chairman in '64, and that's you. Now, do you want your legislative program or do you want to exercise your veto and veto me as the chairman?" Well, Brown is such a mild-mannered, decent guy, he was just in an awful tizzy.

But anyway I called up and said I wanted to see the president. And immediately they set up an appointment, at the end of the day, quarter to seven, something like that. I walked in. I was there alone with him. And I said, "Well, I'm just not sure whether you have these figures or not. This is what's happened in California." I gave him a memo and he listened most attentively, asked me a few personal questions on voting and whatnot. And I don't even know whether he made any notes; I think he may have. And about two weeks later Unruh was on his way out to Japan to talk to some Diet about education in California, and Brown was halfway to announcing that he was going to be the Kennedy chairman for 1964. Now, I'm sure that wasn't the sole reason, just on account of the trip or anything of the kind, but I'm sure it did have some impact.

CAMPBELL: That's very interesting. I had a note here. I wish, if you have a few minutes, that you'd talk for a few minutes about your '62 gubernatorial race. I found someplace where you had predicted Vice President Nixon would be a candidate as early as June of 1961. How did you look ahead in a crystal ball and know that?

KENT: Oh, I think I can recreate that, I think it was for this reason: I thought that the Republican party was going to put such heat on Nixon as to make it impossible for him not to be a candidate. I don't think Nixon wanted to run, but they were going to tell him "Look, Brown is nothing like John F. Kennedy. He doesn't have anything like the strength that Kennedy has. You beat Kennedy in California. You can mop up the floor with Pat Brown. You are probably the only person who can do it. If you go in and mop up Brown and become the governor of California,



you probably will swing the legislature. You will be able to influence congressional races. You will add strength to the Congress on the Republican side and you will make a Republican bastion out of the state of California. And if you don't go, just say farewell to politics as a Republican." I had the very definite feeling that--I don't remember now all of the straws in the wind that led me to this very, very definite conclusion that he was going to go in and the reasons for him going in.

CAMPBELL: And you at the same time predicted that Brown would win. Was that the party chairman talking, or did you have confidence in that?

KENT: Both. Probably it was apt to be the party chairman talking, except I've always been an optimist and I felt that Brown had been a good governor and . . . . I've also always realized the difference between people running for one office and running for another office-- I mean people will vote for a guy for this office, and they won't vote for him for that office, and they'll vote against him for this office, and they won't vote against him for another one. So I had the feeling that Brown had, of course, won that by more than a million vote victory in '58, and he hadn't yet made a number of enemies that he made by '66. So I felt that he could probably be the winner.

They made a lot of mistakes and we made some very good hay on some of their mistakes. There's one thing that I've just written Larry O'Brien about now, and that is on this business of this [Carl L.] Shipley on these ads accusing Democratic senators of encouraging crime and drug abuse, et cetera (the '70 campaign). And [Charles W.] Colson in the White House calling up Shipley's boss and saying, "Look, don't can Shipley because he did that at the insistence of the White House."

Well, I'm of the opinion that probably Nixon himself participated in those ads for the reason that in that '62 campaign, we had this smear sheet come out under the name of four or five Democrats saying it was the Committee for the Preservation of Democratic party in California, and it was a red smear sheet business. It was ostensibly an appeal



from Democrats to Democrats, and we got an injunction on some technicalities and then got into it, took their depositions and, of course, traced this thing right straight back to Leone Baxter of Whittaker and Baxter and then to Nixon himself, and she said Nixon himself "had sharpened" up this smear sheet and we proved that it had all been financed by Republican money. We got that exposed in the last, closing weeks of the campaign, and we had some picture cropping jobs (false and composite pictures) that they had done which we had money enough and talent enough to expose, and we just gave them unshirted hell on that. I never had more fun in a campaign than standing up before TV cameras and showing the real pictures and then the doctored ones. We, of course, used big blow-ups. And it moved very rapidly against Nixon in those closing weeks.

CAMPBELL: The other major statewide race in '62 was [Thomas H.] Kuchel against Richard Richards. Were you pleased with the amount of support that came to Richards from Washington and from the administration?

KENT: Let's see, '52.

CAMPBELL: '62.

KENT: Oh, '62, '62. I supported Richards in '62. I think I did in . . .

CAMPBELL: He'd run before in '56, I think.

KENT: Before in '56, that's right. That's right. And that one I really very much sat out because Richards matured a great deal between '56 and '62. But '56, I'm sure I voted for Kuchel; I didn't support him openly. I can't remember that I had any particular feelings about him. I know that, of course, Engle and Kuchel were on very good terms. That senatorial courtesy is such that you very seldom will have anybody get into a fight on it. But Engle did come out for Richards and did make some speeches for him. And I think we got a little money out of Washington, but I don't think we got enough.



CAMPBELL: We've had a good talk here today about California politics and we haven't mentioned Senator Engle's name very much. Did he sort of stand aloof from . . .

KENT: Not at all, not at all. He was. . . . I was very close to him in those days when I was traveling to Washington a great deal. I'd stay over always on Saturday and go down and put my feet up on his desk and we'd talk about every aspect of California politics. He was absolutely delighted with what we had going for him in northern California and with Libby Gatov and Don Bradley and myself, and he was close to George Miller and we just had a terrific rapport. He had the loyalty of the congressmen who were colleagues and whatnot. And he had started organizing southern California and organized very much of an Engle campaign setup because he didn't have confidence in the Paul Ziffren, [Elizabeth C.] Snyder, or these other outfits that had moved up. But when you say, "Did he stand aloof?" then I'll say he didn't. About, I guess it was early in '62, January--this was publicized as a secret meeting at "Roger Kent's hideaway" in Kentfield--Engle came out with a blueprint for how he felt the Brown campaign should be run. And there was Engle and Hale Champion and Brown and Don Bradley, Tom Saunders and Libby and Jim Keene and a couple others. The whole first team of northern Democratic politicians were there. And Engle had outlined how he thought Brown should run the campaign and what the emphasis should be. And, boy, we hardly changed a comma in the plan that he had.

The principal aspect of his plan was that you shouldn't try and change Brown. They were giving Brown unshirted hell on the [Caryl] Chessman thing, and that kind of softhearted, softheaded thing. And Engle said, "Look, you don't want to change Brown, and you can't meet these kind of issues head on. You've got to deflect them." He said, "The way I suggest we handle the Chessman thing and Brown being softhearted and being indecisive and so forth," he said, "is we'll deny that and we'll show that in matters of importance and where Brown has taken a stand, he's used every power of a strong executive to put them over. But," he said, "we'll admit that when you come to an issue of human life, Brown is going to be giving a long and careful look at it." He said, "if you want somebody



to, say, send him to the gas chamber, elect Nixon. And explain that the apparent indecisiveness was due to his warmheartedness and his lack of killer instinct." And we did run the campaign very much that way. But Engle said, "I don't want to be running for the Senate next year or two years from now in '64 with a Republican governor." And so he. . . . Of course, Engle was the chairman of our delegation.

CAMPBELL: Yes, he was.

KENT: [Eugene L.] Gene Wyman and I were vice chairmen. No, he took a very definite part in politics. He was helpful to us in providing some compensation for the secretary in the northern California office. The greatest loss to the Democratic party in California was Engle. If Engle had lived, we wouldn't have had anything like the troubles that we subsequently had.

CAMPBELL: Well, I thank you very much for your . . .

KENT: Right. But one other thing I was talking about . . .

CAMPBELL: Oh, good.

KENT: . . . and that is I was thinking about that picture you see up there.

CAMPBELL: Yes.

KENT: And what happened was that I was in Engle's office one day and we were talking about something, and he said, "I've got to go down to the White House, and I'm going to the ceremony down there signing a bill involving some conservation issue in southern California. The president kindly asked me down there."

So we went down and I came in with Engle and they had the picture taken, the traditional one with the pen and the signing and all this. And then Engle stepped back and the dear president said, "Maybe Mr. Kent would like to have his picture taken with me." And I said, "Indeed, indeed, indeed, Mr. Kent would." So we stood there and had that picture taken. I



later sent it to Pierre Salinger, and asked him to get the signature on it, which he did, and got the president to put on the message. Salinger and [Andrew T.] Andy Hatcher had done business with us when Salinger was a [San Francisco] Chronicle reporter and Andy Hatcher was working for some minority office.

And then the last time I saw the president--it gives me still this warm, warm feeling for him. It was not long before Dallas, and I was in Washington and I was up talking to Larry and I came down to the Rotunda and he had just been saying good-bye to some dignitary and he and four or five other people were walking through back to his quarters and I was standing there. He stepped out of line and came over and said, "Roger, what brings you to Washington? I'm glad to see you. What are you doing here?" And I said, "Well, I'm talking to Larry. I've given him some messages to give you. I don't need to bother you about them. Thank you very much, Mr. President." He went on his way. But I didn't have many contacts with him, as you can see.

CAMPBELL: You found Larry O'Brien a worthwhile higher echelon  
. . .

KENT: Oh, he's a great guy, a very great guy.



ADDENDUM TO ORAL HISTORY TRANSCRIPT - ROGER KENT

Re: John F. Kennedy

You've asked if I would like to expand my answer to Ann Campbell's question concerning Larry O'Brien and I'm happy to.

"Larry O'Brien was in the White House. I could always see him even on very short notice. He was interested in my reports of what was going on in California and at one time I was Chairman of the Western States Democratic Conference and could give him a little information on what I thought was going on in other states of the Thirteen State Conference. I remember that he was particularly pleased with the accuracy of my assessment of the situation in Hawaii when Ben Dillingham was running against Dan Inouye and a San Francisco PR firm was telling Dillingham he had a chance to win and that was diverting most of the Hawaiian money sources to the Dillingham campaign. I told Larry that Inouye would murder Dillingham and that the funds being dried up for the congressional candidates would undoubtedly assure the victory of the Democrats over the Republicans. It worked out the way I predicted.

I remember one time during Johnson's incumbency when I went up to see Larry and the telephone rang and he said there is only one call that I have said should be put through and that concerns the roll call I believe to amendments on Taft-Hartley on right to work. He quickly wrote down the tally and said to me that is very close to what I told the President yesterday and at that point he looked at his desk and picked up another piece of paper



and passed it to me and the tally was exactly the same.

Whenever we wanted a speaker or some other political favor, Libby and I nearly always got in touch with Larry and it was very seldom that he ever failed us.

I was also on the Stamp Advisory Committee when Larry was Postmaster General and he did an excellent job there in the area that I could see as he had done everywhere else.

I think he's making an excellent and outstanding National Chairman and I was delighted that he was willing to accept it.

I should go back a few years on Larry. He and Pierre Salinger came to my house at Kentfield one lovely, sunny, Sunday afternoon in early June/<sup>1960</sup>before I had seen Kennedy and talked with him about Stevenson as Secretary of State. I still had not firmly made up my mind. They stayed there several hours and from time to time they'd get my dear wife Alice aside and tell her that I was making a terrible mistake in not going for their man. She just told them that that was my life and my decision and that she wouldn't take any part in trying to persuade me to move their way. Pierre and I were good friends. He had taken leaves of absence from the Chronicle to help us on writing chores at which he is excellent on some of our special elections up in the mountains and he'd been very successful.

One day he came to my office and told me that he was in very bad financial condition and I knew that he was getting a divorce and could understand it and he said that he had to have



\$200 and would I lend it to him. I did and that night I realized that I would never get it back and that if I tried I'd get mad myself and probably make him mad so I called him up the next day and told him that he was on the payroll of the State Central Committee for \$200 to write releases for me as State Chairman and maybe speeches and other writing chores until he worked off the \$200. He agreed and that led to amusing arguments that we used to have where he would put a value of \$150 on a release and I'd tell him that he was credited on the books with \$7.25.

Sorenson told me once in the Sheraton Park Hotel in Washington at a big Democratic meeting that because of the tale I told him that I had probably been responsible for them picking up Salinger. The story went this way: I had learned that Salinger who was then working for a Senate Committee, where Bobby Kennedy was counsel, was dissatisfied with his job and was looking around. A week or so later I got a call from Marietta Tree from New York asking if I knew a skilled writer with an aggressive, liberal philosophy who might be used by I believe the "Democratic Advisory Committee". At any rate, that was a Committee formed after Stevenson's 56 defeat when it appeared that Johnson and Rayburn would be the voice of the Democratic party and a lot of people didn't want it that way. The Committee was composed of Eleanor Roosevelt, Humphrey and Truman, Soapy Williams and a number of others including Stevenson and Marietta Tree, I suspect was probably the "angel". I told her that I had in the past had many requests for information about a person with particular talents and had not been able to fill the bill but that I felt that in this case I had the man that they would want and could use. I told



that Salinger was exceedingly competent as a writer and that he was plenty aggressive and plenty liberal in philosophy. They started to check him out and decided that he checked out very well and offered him the job at around \$18,000. I told Sorenson at that meeting at the Sheraton Park that I had recommended Salinger to the Committee and he replied "well if you're the one that's responsible for his getting the job then you are responsible for his getting the job with us because we figured that if he was good enough for them, he was good enough for us." I'm sure, of course, that Bobby knew and liked him but also sure that Bobby didn't have a knowledge of his professional talents in the writing area and would have been reluctant to recommend his own guy unless there was an independent, favorable evaluation.

I'll give one story on Ted and Bobby from the 1960 campaign which may be amusing. After I had been selected as State Chairman of the Kennedy Committee, I took the position that I would appoint the Southern California chairman with the concurrence of Brown, Engle and others and that then I was to the most extent done with Southern California organization. Unruh came in with the name of a man who escapes me at the moment, he was later on the Racing Board and was a big contributor. He was absolutely unknown to the rank and file of Democrats or even to the organizational types. I insisted that he was unsatisfactory and recommended Dan Kimball. I eventually got Brown and Engle (on the North Carolina coast) to agree that it should be Kimball but on that occasion I had an example of Unruh's toughness. I went to my room in the hotel and made a lot of calls and after a few hours a slip of paper was pushed



under my door and it turned out to be a note from a newspaperman who told me that he was not pleased with being told that I didn't want to talk to him or anyone else on the telephone or in my room. It turned out that the Unruh people had cut-off my telephone at the switchboard but I had made my point and my appointment before it was done. Now for the Bobby, Teddy story. Ted was, of course, a very young man at that time and totally inexperienced with politics and particularly in the West. However, he felt that he was the Senator's representative and a representative of the Kennedy family out here and that he had authority in the campaign and he proceeded to appoint several people to very important positions in the campaign without consulting me. I had a meeting with him and with Bobby in a hotel room in the Fairmont and I told Bobby something like the following: "We know that there are going to be a great number of people coming into this campaign because of their wish to support Senator Kennedy who have not been involved in other Democratic campaigns and I want you to know that all Ted has to do is to bring me these peoples names and their qualifications and we will put them into the campaign structure where they belong and not in any sense put them in the menial jobs of stamping envelopes. Bobby looked at Ted and said 'that's the way it's going to be isn't it? " and Ted said "yes" and that's the last trouble we ever had with him. We put him on the speaking tour and of course he was absolutely spectacular, particularly with womens groups because he sounded so much like his brother and was such a handsome young man. He has, of course, come along and very



fast run up to being an exceedingly able political leader (at this time, 1971) and for many years prior to the present.

I hesitate to tell this story because it was so totally personal between me and the President but here it is. After the death of Patrick, after a few days of life, I heard comments from unknowing and unthinking people that if he had such a malady it was a good thing he died early and that, of course, the parents couldn't feel too badly about his death because they hadn't known him as a person. I wrote the President, calling him "Jack" the only time in our correspondence and told him of our loss of a two-year old, our first, and of the death of a girl born to my son and his wife in India under almost identical circumstances as those surrounding Patrick's death and of the death of a son of my daughter, Alice, who was born after she was hit in a crosswalk by an automobile, shortly before his birth. I said that I and my family were probably better able to appraise his anguish than those who have never suffered the loss of a very young child and told him that we could and did feel the deepest sympathy for him in his days of deep sadness. I got back the nicest kind of a short but warm letter from him in his own handwriting and of course signed "John F. Kennedy" but equally of course addressed to me as "Dear Roger".



September 7, 1961

Mr. Theodore H. White  
160 E. 64th Street  
New York 21, New York

Dear Ted:

I finished your magnificent book about a week ago, and it isn't quite as fresh in my mind as it was then, but I did note as I read the book several things that I wanted to write you about. At the time when that primary campaign was going on I was Northern California Chairman (having been State Chairman, 1956-1958, and definitely in line to be State Chairman which I am for the term 1960-1962). As you can imagine, that position resulted in very considerable courtship by all candidates, and your description of the various campaigns of the Democratic hopefuls was almost to a tee deadly accurate and most sensitive and perceptive.

Before I get into some particulars I would like to advise of a couple of campaign analyses involving Hubert Humphrey that were given me by the President. The first was a meeting in Ellie Heller's suite at the Morrison Hotel during the 1956 Convention. I think there were only four of us present, Ellie, Libby Smith, Bill Malone and myself. Senator Kennedy had asked for a meeting to discuss his Vice Presidential campaign. He knew that I was for Humphrey and so was Libby, and also that Malone and Ellie were for him. It was a most salicable discussion because none of us were for Kefauver, and it was pretty much agreed that the Humphrey-Kennedy forces would unite after the first



40

ballot on the candidate having the best chance. Kennedy described what was going to happen in the vote with deadly accuracy, i.e., that Humphrey's diffused strength throughout the country would not stick with him, and that he, Kennedy, was going to pick up many states that Hubert thought he had and almost the entire South. It is easy to see the picture now, i.e., that a great part of the campaign was anti-Kefauver, and that the anti-Kefauver people saw that Kennedy had his big block of votes in New England, and therefore had a better chance than Hubert. Later in 1960, in his office at a lunch alone with me, Senator Kennedy described what was going to happen in the primaries, and again this was extremely accurate. He knew of my warm personal friendship with Hubert and mentioned it, but went on to say that Hubert would not be in the running when convention time came around.

Now let me give you my observations on the individual campaigns as described by you. I couldn't agree more with you about Hubert being such a nice guy that people didn't regard him as a President. There was, in addition, that intangible that he "didn't look like a President" and there was widespread feeling that he was "glib" and not a deep thinker. It is easy to see how people who didn't really follow his career and his speeches carefully could arrive at this conclusion because it is almost impossible for people to believe that any man's mind could work as fast as Hubert's and be as rapidly transmitted to his tongue. I mentioned this to him at his house in Washington one afternoon prefacing it, of course, by telling him I liked him just as he was, but this was a widely stated criticism. He answered somewhat along this line: "I am trying to stop and give the appearance of thinking when somebody asks me a question,



41

but I am having trouble because I never thought it intelligent not to give the answer when I had it." He was eliminated in West Virginia, of course, and you were kind to a number of people, including Hubert, himself, probably when you did not describe the P.D.R., Jr. attack on him as a World War II slacker.

Now for Symington and Charlie Brown. There just couldn't be anybody more courteous or pleasant than Stuart Symington and, of course, your description of his strategy was exactly what was worked on me and many others. I wish I could give you the slight Southern inflection of Charlie Brown in repeating his approach. It went something like this: "How glad I am to finally meet you, Roger Kent. I know that you are the man responsible almost single-handedly for the great Democratic victories in California, and do you think that Stuart Symington would come into your State and disrupt what you have built here. I can tell you no -- Stuart Symington is a builder, not a destroyer." I later gave this speech to Salinger and O'Brien when they spent one long Sunday luncheon afternoon with my wife and myself at Kentfield in June, 1960, and they said that they could learn something from Charlie Brown. Symington can be a good speaker, and he made a good speech in San Francisco behind Senator Kennedy, and he started his speech by saying that he didn't want to make any further career talking after his friend, the Senator from Massachusetts. That was also late in the primary campaign, and at a time when Senator Kennedy had really achieved a tremendously effective approach to a Democratic audience.

I would say that one of the handicaps of the campaign, and not merely an ineffective part, was the support



of Truman and the stories that were published that Truman and Rayburn were going to pick the candidate for the Democrats. This did not set well with the new Democrats, and as I said was a positive handicap to the Symington campaign.

Now for the Lyndon Johnson campaign. This one I never regarded seriously, and was amazed to find a tremendous amount of Johnson talk when I went back to Washington in the early months of 1960. It isn't only Johnson who thinks the Senate is American life, but a large number of the Washington press corps who were impressed with his tremendous legislative skill. I had the very definite feeling that what they considered to be his strongest point could and would actually be a source of weakness. In other words, the picture of the successful legislator, and particularly Johnson, is one of a man skilled in maneuver trades in the back room which is not the image the great American voter sees as the man to be the President. To repeat, I think the very reason why the correspondents thought Johnson could be nominated and elected is one of the reasons why it couldn't happen.

I was also certain from the beginning that the big Northern states would not take a Southerner as the presidential nominee. One of the Michigan leaders told me that if Johnson should be nominated, they would run their local campaigns without reference to the presidential campaign. This was probably a foolish remark, but it was about in line with the thinking of about all of the political leaders in California with the exception of some of the Congressmen and state legislators. I don't think Johnson had any support in this state from any other politicians. I know, too, that this was the attitude of Pennsylvania and New York Democratic



leaders. That's why I felt that the big newspaper build-up for Johnson in the Washington press in early 1960 was just plain foolish.

Later on I certainly had real sympathy for Johnson in his appeals against prejudice, where he very properly included an appeal against prejudice based on section as well as color or religion. I write this addendum on August 31, the day after the peaceful integration of Atlanta schools, and hope that by 1968 it will be possible for a Southerner to be nominated. I have a very definite feeling that one cannot be nominated for President until there is complete cessation of the Little Rock, Birmingham and Freedom Rider situations.

Most of us on the California delegation felt that the Johnson nomination for Vice President was a mistake (in which we were proven to be completely wrong). I spoke to Dr. Dan Collins, a most impressive colored dentist who was on our delegation, and asked him what he thought about the nomination. He said he was all for it, and added that the South would never be let out of its archaic attitudes by anyone except a Southerner.

From the very beginning I had taken the position that I would be satisfied with any one of the three liberal candidates - Kennedy, Humphrey, or Stevenson. The Stevenson campaign was, of course, the toughest of all for me because I have such an admiration for him and a personal friendship involving two weekends he spent with us in California, and one that I spent with him in Libertyville, and a number of long intimate talks. Politics, as we play it in California,



and I suspect the way it is played successfully elsewhere, is to a very considerable extent based on the personal friendships and loyalties of the people involved, and it just killed me to get off Stevenson, and I didn't do it until I thought there was something constructive I could do for the country and for his future. Early in June, Senator Kennedy had a press conference in San Francisco, and then a series of individual meetings. He made the statement that he thought any President would appoint Stevenson Secretary of State, and then told one of my friends in answer to a direct question that he did intend to appoint Stevenson Secretary of State. I called Stevenson in New York, and he told me that the invitation would have to come in the right way and that this was a two-way street. I then decided that there was something I could do and made an appointment to talk with Senator Kennedy in Washington.

Meantime I had checked out the Mouroncy operation and found to my satisfaction that it was a house of cards. I asked Mike where his support was going to come from, and he answered, "the South, after Johnson is eliminated," and I asked him then what states were committed to go for Stevenson after Johnson was out, and he answered, "Georgia" and I told him I will give you Georgia - what else have you got? From thereon it was the same vague generalities that I had heard for several months.

I also had checked with Humphrey's people and Hubert, himself, and they felt that Stevenson could not carry Minnesota, and with Meyner and with Dillworth and some lesser lights in New York, all of whom gave a pessimistic appraisal of Stevenson's



chances to win against Nixon. I feel absolutely certain that California could have been carried for Stevenson, but from what I hear it would have been one of a few states.

I came in and told Senator Kennedy about June 20th that I was his man and would vote for him and would do what I could in the delegation (if you check out the votes by section you will see that the great majority of the Kennedy votes came from Northern California). I then repeated my conversation with Stevenson, and urged him to appoint Stevenson Secretary of State because of his personal relationship with every political leader around the world and his standing with a tremendous number of Democrats. Senator Kennedy told me that Stevenson was making it kind of tough, and that Bowles was helping him every day, and then added that if he did make the appointment he would not announce it until considerably later in the campaign because he wanted Nixon to run against him and not against Stevenson. I agreed with this strategy. Of course, I didn't ask for any commitment and he didn't give me any.

You have described to some extent the pressure that was brought on the delegates by the Stevenson supporters, but you can't imagine the pressures that were brought on the members of the California delegation. I guess I must have received one thousand letters and telegrams, many from my best political friends, urging me to vote for Stevenson at the Convention. I am certain that we could have done much better in the original and final <sup>Kennedy</sup> ~~Stevenson~~ vote if a certain party in Southern California had not made a terrible mistake in moving to adjourn our caucus at a time when I am certain we had the votes to postpone our vote to the next day giving me and several others all



night to give the facts to and persuade other members of the delegation.

The Kennedy campaign played it hard and soft with me. I had a call from Joe Alsop which I found was from Senator Kennedy's office which was in effect a threat that Kennedy would come into the California primary, and I had the same threat bluntly given in his well known Texas from Abe Ribicoff. I was, of course, adamant and pointed to the fact that the top leadership of the successful Democratic Party in California was all on the Brown delegation and would fight to the last ditch to win, and if they should lose, there would be a shambles in the party in the state. In this I am sure we were backed up 100% by Hy Reskin and Pierre Salinger, who knew a lot more about California politics than anyone else in the Kennedy campaign. After the decision was made, the Kennedy people were as courteous to me as Charlie Brown. I am sure they knew my internal turmoil. After the Convention and the nomination, I went up to call on Stevenson, and talked briefly to Bill Wirtz while some other people were in. I told him of the fantastically difficult and painful decision, and he said, "don't think we haven't got a guilty conscience about that." I said, "you mean the hell you put me and others like me through," and he said "exactly." I agree with you completely that few Americans believed that Stevenson was utterly honest in his approach, i.e., "I have had the high honor twice. I will not lift a finger to seek it again, but I will not refuse a draft." Any other politician that I know of could have said "and I will refuse a draft" and later accepted one, but not Stevenson. I only saw of course what was going on in



California except what I heard from other people. We saw a lot of Jim Rowe who is an old friend while he was working for Humphrey and later while he was working for Johnson.

Now for a few very brief comments on the part of your book dealing with the final campaign. I think you said about the whistle stop tour through the valley that Kennedy was poorly scheduled, under exposed, and badly advised. I will take exception to the first two charges and do what I can to explain the third. I am quite sure you weren't on the whistle stop, as I am sure I would have talked with you if you had been. The Kennedy people thought it was "great" at the time, and the President in my presence asked members of his staff to review their Eastern schedules and see if he couldn't do more of his campaigning in that manner. What we did was starting in Portland to put a few local Dunsmuir dignitaries on the train, have their pictures taken with Senator Kennedy, and talk with him. Then there was a crowd at Dunsmuir considerably larger than the population of the town with complete radio, TV and newspaper coverage. There we picked up the crowd that was going to ride from Dunsmuir to Redding with the same routine of photographs with local dignitaries, the roll of film being handed to the local chairman as he or she stepped off the train. Again, the crowds, radio and TV. We were gunning for the crowd impact and also for the front page impact with pictures in every daily and weekly in the valley, and we got it. The same routine was followed all the way down the line. We moved into Oakland and filled the biggest auditorium in town with an overflow crowd, which is the first time that this happened in my eight years of political experience as Chairman of Northern California.



I, with considerable difficulty, made arrangements and saw that we boarded the train again after the Oakland rally. We then traveled to Sacramento, where we spent the night in the yard where there was water and other facilities, and saw that the candidate got two nights in one bed and very little automobile travel. We then picked up the tour at Stockton early in the morning, using the same tactics and with facilities for the newsmen at every stop. The Southern Pacific handled the assignment on a split-second basis, and I think we made more impact on the valley than we could have with any other approach. I disagree with "badly scheduled and underexposed" and you must remember that this was at the time when Senator Kennedy was most fearful of losing his voice.

Now as to "badly advised," this trip was the first time that I got an inkling of the strength of the religious issue. I had Catholic friends in Chico and Marysville tell me that there were diehard Fundamentalists who had never voted for a Republican and who would never vote for Kennedy. I communicated this to the staff, but not with the emphasis that I should have given it. I am going to quarrel with your analysis of why California was lost. I lay the blame squarely on the religious issue. I think Clair Engle is right that if we could have had Johnson for three days in the San Joaquin and Sacramento valleys that we could have carried the state handily. Johnson made a beautiful corny speech in Fresno and Sacramento that was just what was needed. It dealt with Joe Kennedy, Jr., and the fact that nobody asked him his religion when he flew the dynamite-loaded B-17 to his death,



repeated the Constitution and Kennedy's words on religion. I think the people would have taken it from Johnson where they would hardly take it from anyone else. Incidentally, I was delighted with your analysis of Johnson's corny speech. The one he made in Fresno must have been interrupted fifty or sixty times for laughter and applause, and I couldn't have been happier. However, if he had made that speech in the Bay Area, I am afraid most of his audience would have been shocked and disgusted.

It was during that trip that the Norman Vincent Peale thing hit, and Kennedy gave that beautiful tight-lipped answer to the correspondents at the Los Angeles airport when we landed there. I never saw a man as angry as Kennedy hold himself under such restraint and reach for such telling language. There were those in the campaign staff that disagreed with me on an approach which I suggested, which was that we ought to meet the religious issue head on, particularly in the valley, with advertisements quoting the Constitution and signed by leading and respected Protestants. I regret that I didn't really push my hunch. That might have done it.

Your analysis of the loss in Southern California being due to a split-off of the Stevenson people I am quite sure won't stand up. Kennedy did run of course way behind the Assembly and Congressional candidates in Los Angeles suburbs, but he also ran behind Senator George Miller, Jr. in Contra Costa County by something in the neighborhood of 40,000 votes, and this was never considered to be a Stevenson strong-hold. Miller is certain that the drop-off was very largely due to the religious issue.



I was State Chairman for the Kennedy Campaign as well as State Chairman of the Democratic Party, and I went to Los Angeles half a dozen times and to San Diego once or twice, but I had been firmly instructed that Southern California was being managed by Jess Unruh, and I think he did a pretty good job. He had Joe Wyatt, president of C.D.C., and Don Rose, Los Angeles County Chairman, both vigorous Stevenson supporters at the Convention on his committee, and within the last two days I have discussed this matter with Don Rose, and discussed it at the time and later with Joe Wyatt. They assured me that their experience had been the same with constructive club people in the South as our experience had been in the North. These people have largely grown up from being exclusively Stevenson people. We have had them working in special elections for Assembly, State Senate, and Congress, and on the State-wide races. They are now Democrats, and getting on to being "yellow dog Democrats" (in the words of Senator Kerr). All of us are Stevenson Democrats, if by that you mean when and why we came in so vigorously, but in this campaign Wyatt and Rose assure me that every person who had ever done constructive work in a campaign was vigorously and constructively working for Kennedy. Don Rose points out that some of the Hollywood people who were ardent Stevenson fans probably dropped out, but it is doubtful if they ever voted after all their talk in the past.

We carried the State by 600,000 for our Assembly candidates, and 500,000 for our Congressional candidates. (The State Senate isn't of much use because there was no race in Los Angeles County.) It is my judgment that with a good candidate and a good campaign we should be able to win the



state by half a million votes (one million vote margins of 58 were due to the Republican fratricide). We had a good candidate and a good campaign. I am certain that the Nixon blitz on TV was a deciding factor in a state as close as California. Our committee chucked the last \$25,000 into the campaign in the last ten days so that in Northern California people would see and hear Kennedy once in a while between the Nixon speeches and spots. I think the way the figures will work out is that we won Northern California by about 150,000 votes and lost Southern California by about 185,000.

I probably should have written a lot of this down before or talked it into a tape recorder, and I am grateful that your book stimulated me to make this contribution to history. I remember with the greatest pleasure our lunch at the Pacific Union Club several years ago with Pierre Salinger.

Best personal regards, and again congratulations on a magnificent book. I could read the parts about the Rockefeller and Nixon campaigns and the Kennedy campaign outside of California in the knowledge that I was getting the straight dope.

Yours,

Roger Kent

P.S. One story from the campaign that I love is on the courage of Ken O'Donnell. Just before I left by plane to pick up the whistle stop at Portland there was a series of frantic calls from San Diego where I was told by every important Democrat, including State Senator Hugo Fisher, who is the most important Democrat in the area, that it would be disastrous if Senator Kennedy



canceled out his San Diego schedule for, I believe, the following Sunday. All arrangements had been made, bands hired, platforms prepared, newspaper ads put in, letters out to the faithful, etc. Libby Smith and I went into the Senator's private car and sat down over a cup of coffee and urged him to make the San Diego appearance. He said he was afraid that he would lose his voice and told of the fantastic travels behind him and things ahead, and I couldn't quarrel with his position. However, I made the final appeal about along these lines. "Senator, I am not making this appeal because of any personal reason such as my prestige as State Chairman. I am doing it purely and simply because there are a million people down there and this might possibly mean the election. The serious problem is that it was your people who went down and urged the local Democrats to put on the best kind of a show which they have now planned at considerable expense, and I am afraid there will be some people who will be really affected by the canceling out." The Senator looked somewhat shocked. He was tired and a little angry and said, "who was responsible for scheduling me into San Diego?" Ken O'Donnell answered in the fewest possible words, "I was." There was no explanation that he thought this was what should be done or that this had been a committee agreement or that the Senator, himself, had indicated approval - nothing, merely the full acceptance of responsibility which was obviously very displeasing to the candidate. I am certain I have never seen as much courage displayed by anyone in a political campaign.

**P.P.S.** I didn't cover in the body of the letter post-election reaction on the religious issue. A few days after the absentee votes were counted and we were counted out, a U.P. man called me from Sacramento and asked for my analysis. I gave it to him and proved by cities, counties and precincts that we had lost heavily in the area of "Dust Bowl" Californians. He put the story on the wire and there was an immediate reaction from the Republican State Chairman, pointing to the election of Governor Brown by a million votes, etc., etc., and pooh-poohing my theory. Following that exchange in the papers we had a unique experience in receiving between 10 and 20 letters from people I had never heard of who wrote to tell me that I was right and the Republicans were wrong. The letters cited individual, concrete instances such as "The family next door, which has never voted Republican, did it this time on the basis that they would not vote for a Catholic for President"; or "The local Shriners' group put out a mailing -- or a newspaper ad -- or went on the radio -- urging all voters to vote for Nixon and not for a Catholic." Other examples that I recall were letters which stated that the local minister (and this was in several) advised his flock from the pulpit that no Catholic should be elected President of the United States. I have a fair sense of the historical value of raw material of this kind and could probably dig up the correspondence, which I am quite sure has been preserved.

KK



September 14, 1961

Dear Roger:

What a Hell of a nice guy you are to take all that time to write a letter of that length-- and of that much charm, lore, fascination and wit. It was almost as good as having a talk with you.

After all the nice things you have to say in the letter about the book, I would be a churl to argue with you about the passages in which we disagree; and I will start by saying that I am not going to dispute the ~~Chairman~~ State Chairman of California Democrats about California politics.

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It is quite possible, almost ~~unthinkable~~, that you are right and I am wrong; I know Bobby Kennedy has written to protest the passages on California, too. And I am here at my summer cottage and my California returns and data are stored in the filing cases at my house in New York-- so that I could not, even if I dared, dispute you by citation and reference.

So let the following rambling passage stand as a general stretch of dialogue in which you and I might be talking of the '60 election.

To start with, I was indeed along on the whistle stop through California. And you are right in describing the absolute and meticulous exactitude of the scheduling on the train, the press facilities, the worry about Kennedy's voice. You are even more right when you ~~say~~ say "I am sure I would have talked with you if you had been"-- for we did have just such a talk, on the morning after we left Sacramento, and you were as full of wit and charm as I always remember you as we rocked down the roadbed. My notes of that conversation (which was before lunch that morning) certainly reflected all your worry about the religious issue which was uppermost in your mind as you say and, if you wish, when I return to New York I can transcribe them to prove how prescient you were!

I remember that trip, however, as one of the happiest of all the episodes of the campaign (apart from the worry about the voice)-- I remember it mostly, though, as a political picnic, the smell of the pines and the fir in the morning at Dunsmuir, the fruits and the gifts in the Central Valley, and that romanesque evening in the bar car when the train pulled out of Oakland and all the politicians (large and small) of California drank themselves into a mood of blowsy good feeling and goodwill before going to bed.



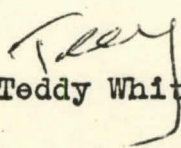
What I did in the book, perhaps, was to take unfair advantage of the reporters license to hindsight,-- for at the moment of the trip I felt as full of goodfeeling about it as did everyone else; only after I came to study the returns, months later did I change my mind and think that the trip was, perhaps, bad scheduling--- might it not have been better to have scheduled him principally in the suburbs of Los Angeles and San Francisco, might it not have been better to have hit the religious issue hard right there in the Valley, etc.

I won't go on with this-- else I will seem to be disputing you. As for your weight of the religious issue in California, Perhaps I should have stressed it more--- the figures from the Valley, where Kennedy ran barely abreast of Stevenson in 56, certainly bear you out. But as for L.A. County-- there I am confused by the struggle between Unruh and the Stevensonians, and I must wait until I see you again for clarification. As the Chinese say--- I wait upon your instruction.

But it was such a good letter! And recalled so many episodes. You were right about the Humphrey-FDR smear in West Virginia; I left it out for the reasons you surmised; your passage on Charlie Brown is so good I can almost hear him talking; Joe Alsop's call surprised me--- he played a similar role in the Wisconsin fray; I'm interested in your story of Kenny O'Donnell and the San Diego scheduling-- I was in the Kennedy plane from Boise to Tacoma and Seattle when Kenny first set the date up and I know he was worried but he felt he had to do it.

--- and again, thanks for writing; and I'm filing your letter in my history file---

all best,

  
Teddy White



September 25, 1961

Mr. Theodore H. White  
168 East 64 Street  
New York 21, N. Y.

Dear Teddy:

Thanks ever so much for your very good letter of September 14th. This correspondence is, as you suggest, very much like a good conversation.

First, I am very sorry that it slipped my mind that I had talked with you on the whistle stop and I now do recall it. I am delighted that you confirm my concern about the religious issue. I knew we were going to have it, but had no idea of its importance or intensity until I talked to my friends from some of the good Democratic valley towns. Of course, you are exactly right in saying that we should have hit the religious issue in the valley right then and hit it hard, but I don't think any of us really realized how badly it was going to hurt.

Your suggestion that we could have more profitably spent our time in the suburbs of Los Angeles may be right, but I doubt it, even under the circumstances. It was in our minds that we would nail down the areas of our strength on that trip which is generally accepted and specifically by me as being elementary good politics (it so happened that this was not to be our area of strength because of the religious issue which we didn't realize at that time). In that day and a half we covered substantial parts of five Congressional Districts verging on a couple of million people. I am sure you reporters are wise enough to know the secondary impact of local media, and that is primarily what we were gunning for. We wanted and we got pictures and banner headlines on the front page of every daily and weekly in the area. The pictures had local interest because they depicted the candidate with local Democratic leaders and, as I said in my first letter, the leader of the between-town riding delegation was given the roll of films when he left the train. Then, of course, we got TV coverage wherever there were TV stations and radio coverage on all the local radio stations. This was all left behind as the train rolled through the valley, and was something that you and the other reporters didn't see, although I am sure you realized it was going to be there.



Mr. Theodore H. White

-2-

September 25, 1961

I don't see how we could have spent the night between the pleasant rolling down the valley more profitably than to go into Oakland and jam the auditorium. Again, it was working our area of strength and covering the East Bay base so that they would never have a legitimate squawk that they hadn't seen the candidate when as we did later we brought him into San Francisco. As you know, Alameda County is a Democratic stronghold, and it was a hell of a good affair.

As far as covering Los Angeles suburbs is concerned, I am convinced that the only way to do it is with the little black box. That's what people look at, and I think the impact of several good short TV programs banging away at the religious issue would have been more valuable in terms of votes than bringing the candidate into those areas. They are, as you know, unstable, shifting and leaderless. I know what you have to do if you want to come out of a Northern city or town on top -- there are recognized leaders, and if you get them on your side and work with them and work their good ideas and your own into the campaign, it pays off, but when I fly into Los Angeles and look down on those dozens of square miles of tract houses I realize that that kind of campaigning won't work. I haven't got the figures before me either, but I was in Glen County a couple of weeks ago and the local editor told me that Kennedy ran behind Stevenson in that County, and that there was no explanation other than the religious issue.

A friend of mine, Ed Davis, owns the Willows Journal, a daily up in Glen County, and I mentioned the fact that I was writing you a long letter about your book which he had enjoyed as much as I had, and he asked for a copy of the letter which I sent him. The following is an excerpt from his letter:

"In my opinion you are absolutely right about the influence of religion in the valley. And your mention of the 'hate' mail! After we had gone to press for the last time before election, a friend (ex-friend - Bob Jensen) showed me a piece of anti-Catholic literature - which scrupulously, I presume, had not been sent to me - which had been mailed by a local bigot, and it was so despicable I couldn't imagine any U. S. citizen being responsible for it. At any rate, as I mentioned last weekend, I'm sure the religious issue - as you say - was responsible for Kennedy's California defeat.

Your analysis of Johnson's fatal weakness, too, was excellent. Sometimes I get the idea that maybe you have brains."



Mr. Theodore H. White

-3-

September 25, 1961

I enjoyed your letter ever so much, and look forward to rehashing the fascinating campaign with you in the near future. I have been to Washington nine times this year and expect to be back in mid-November.

Very best personal regards, and thanks for your letter again.

Sincerely yours,

Roger Kent

RK/bjc



Addendum #2 to the Oral History Transcript of an interview with Roger Kent

July 17, 1972

Largely for the sake of my daughter Molly I would very much like to make an addition to the "oral history." In June of 1958, we had the smashing turnover victory in the California primary that foretold the victories of Brown, Engle and Mosk for Governor, Senator and Attorney General. I was then State Chairman and had gone east right after the primary election to be at daughter Molly's Smith College graduation and had stopped in Washington and at Paul Butler's request had gone to a press conference arranged by him for the eastern and other media press, who had not had any previous idea of what was in the making in California. It was very well attended and lasted perhaps about an hour and a half. Following that, I went up to Smith where John Kennedy was delivering the graduation address. I made arrangements to see him after the commencement exercises and we met at the President's house and I brought along daughter Molly (who had graduated with Scientific Honors). We had a most pleasant conversation and I think that he had either just won the most overwhelming Massachusetts primary election ever or was in the process of doing it. In his opening and informal remarks he made some comment that he was not here to talk about some of the important current matters such as the "California primary" (to the amusement of the crowd).