

Phil Fine Oral History Interview, 05/28/1964
Administrative Information

Creator: Phil Fine

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Biographical Note

Phil Fine served as the Deputy Administrator of the Small Business Administration from 1961 to 1963; worked on John F. Kennedy's [JFK] senate and presidential campaigns; and remained a personal friend of JFK and his family for many years. This interview focuses on Fine's work with the Jewish communities of Massachusetts on behalf of JFK's Senate campaign, Fine's personal relationship with JFK, and JFK's response to Senator McCarthy, among other issues.

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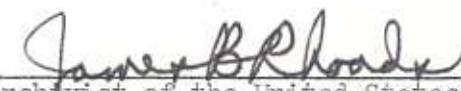
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Oral History Interview

with

PHIL FINE

May 28, 1964
Boston, Massachusetts

By Ed Martin

For the John F. Kennedy Library

MARTIN: Phil, your association with the late President Kennedy [John F. Kennedy]....When did it begin and can you tell us the circumstances surrounding that beginning?

FINE: In the Spring of 1950 the then Congressman Kennedy was speaking on a Sunday morning at a synagogue in Chestnut Hill, Massachusetts. I was also on the program as a speaker, and by chance we sat beside each other at the breakfast. Following the breakfast, we went out together and had coffee at a local restaurant. We became friendly over the breakfast and then as the months went by became quite close personal friends.

MARTIN: Did you know him at all? Had you met him prior to that?

FINE: I had met him periodically before that, knew him as a Congressman but had no close relationship with him, had met him, had talked to him, perhaps, but that was, as an acquaintance, rather than as a friend.

MARTIN: Had you followed his career any, I mean his political leanings?

FINE: I had followed his career as a member of Congress. I had known what he

had done but in the period prior to 1950 I was in law school and didn't have much time for politics. As a result my interest was educational and academic rather than participatory.

MARTIN: Well, the district he represented, you didn't live in it?

FINE: No, I didn't live in that district.

MARTIN: So when he met up with you at that time during that breakfast, did he make any overture?

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FINE: No, we went out afterward for breakfast. He was only a few years older than I, and we had a number of similar interests. He indicated, at that time, that he was thinking of running for other office, and I told him that I was graduating, I had just graduated from law school, and visited Washington periodically, and he said, "Well, why don't you drop in some time and see me." Over the next year up through 1951, I would guess that I saw him a dozen or twenty times, most of them social visits where we perhaps had breakfast together occasionally in Boston when he came in, or we'd have lunch in Washington together or something of that sort.

MARTIN: Did you get the impression that he was trying to size you up as to your political leanings? I mean, he knew....

FINE: I think he knew that I was a Democrat and knew that I was interested in him and was interested in where he was going. I had never really been active in politics before that. As a youngster I had been involved to some extent in the Roosevelt campaigns but had no active interest in it, and as a practical matter I have had no interest in any candidate other than the President. I had friends who were in politics, but he's the only person that I've been interested in and worked with in any great effort.

MARTIN: Well, among those visits, especially the ones down in Washington, was this a question of your going down there or him calling you there?

FINE: It would be both. He'd call me down. There'd be issues before the Congress involving matters that I was interested in; in some cases, the question of financing of industry here. At that time, the small defense plants administration was under discussion, and we'd talk about that. To a large extent it was a relationship with the Jewish community. His District, as a congressman, did not include any substantial Jewish population. He had no close connection with the Jewish community of Boston, and when it came to a question as to what the sentiment might be, we would talk about it frankly. I was probably the first of the later group of Jewish people who became associated with him, and many of those people I introduced him to and arranged for him to

meet; on most occasions in the Bowdoin Street apartment.

MARTIN: Phil, during the period of those meetings what was the Jewish sentiment toward, say, the Kennedy family?

FINE: Well, you have to go back to what the sentiment was generally in the country back in 1951 in that area. When the President decided that he wanted to run for the Senate seat, he began organizing a campaign. His campaign manager was Mark Dalton who had no relationship with the Jewish community. The President himself had no relationship with it and he attempted to bring in a number of people to work with him. The problem basically was that the Ambassador [Joseph P. Kennedy, Sr.] had had a tremendous amount of adverse press during the war depicting him as pro-Hitler. As a result, many of the sins attributed to the father were visited on the

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son, and if you would talk to some of the Zionist leaders or some of the Jewish community leaders, they would pretty generally talk to you in negative terms. They pointed out rather strongly that Senator Lodge [Henry Cabot Lodge] had been a friend of the Jews for many years, that what you know is better than what you don't know, particularly when what you don't know has been under the influence of a man who at least was reputed to have done things during the 40's that were offensive to the Jewish people of the country. In addition to that, he was accused in 1951 and 1950 as voting against economic aid for Israel which had only been a nation for three years. You had a certain amount of resistance to proposals for supporting him. This was overcome to a very large extent by arranging individual meetings, by bringing the two or three key people who worked for him in the campaign up to meet him in his apartment, and subsequently, by arranging a meeting with two or three additional people with Ambassador Kennedy, and having the Ambassador explain to them just what his philosophy was and what his thinking was and how he had not done what he had been accused of doing and, in fact, what he felt that he had done during this period.

MARTIN: Phil, what were the facts behind the charges that Jack Kennedy, as a Congressman, had voted against economic aid to Israel?

FINE: I have in my hand, Ed, a clipping from the *Berkshire Eagle* of Pittsfield which says, in effect, that Congressman Kennedy did not seek to cut economic aid to Israel by forty million dollars. The *Congressional Record* shows that he would have reduced an overall \$175 million from the Near East and Middle East allocation. In the debate that followed his amendment, he explained that he was uneasy about pouring some money into certain countries which were ruled by an oligarchy, and this, he said—and it was certainly the fact—did not include the Republic of Israel, which was a democracy. He was concerned about putting money into the hands of certain emperors or dictators, or the like, where the money would never get to aid the people. And this article from the *Berkshire Eagle* apologizes for printing the story in the first place that he had asked to cut aid for Israel and for other democracies in the Near East.

MARTIN: Were these meetings prior to his announcement for the Senate?

FINE: These meetings began early in 1952. There were eight or ten that took place with people such as David Rose, Jackson Holtz [Jackson Jacob Holtz], Dewey Stone [Dewey David Stone], Hirsch Freed, Lou Weinstein [Lewis Weinstein]—the people who at that time were most active in the community. After meeting with the Congressman and talking to him and being with him, there was just no question. These people came along, and what was established was a Friend's Committee. My recollection is that Jack Holtz became the chairman of it, and I became the treasurer or the secretary of it. We put together a list of 150 people across the State, all of whom were active later in both fundraising and in working for the President in that campaign. It was almost a labor of love after a while.

Actually, beginning in May or June, I took full time off from the office and worked almost full time in the campaign headquarters. Jack Holtz spent

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a fair amount of time travelling throughout the state speaking. The other people were engaged in an educational campaign which succeeded. We actually set the format there for the type of minority group campaigns that we used in other areas later on within the same campaign, and which have been used in subsequent campaigns.

We finally felt after two or three months of working that we had to bring together once and for all the Jewish community leadership of the entire state. We did that at the Boston Club where we had a dinner meeting. We brought in some 100 people in the community; told them that they weren't going to be asked to endorse Congressman Kennedy or to subscribe funds to him, but rather to listen to him and hear his story. When they finished, they could walk out or not walk out and do as they saw fit, but at least he was entitled to have a hearing on his views and his position. He felt, at this time, that it was extremely unfair to charge him with things that weren't his doing. Of course, during this whole time the Republican candidate kept up a continuing barrage of under current attacks as to the McCarthy issue [Joseph R. McCarthy], as to the Kennedy father issue and this type of thing. We had this meeting at the Boston Club on a night in the summer. We had, as I say, well over 100 people there, many of whom were skeptics. The invitation was issued as a joint invitation from Dewey Stone and myself. The people came. Dewey got up and spoke for a few moments, and I spoke for a few moments. Then the Congressman spoke, and after he spoke, Jack Holtz and one or two others got up and gave rather stirring endorsements of him. Before the meeting was over that night, every person in that hall had voluntarily come over and said they wanted to work for him. And they did work for him. They exerted great efforts in his behalf and were able, not so much with their vote but with mustering the sphere of influence at their command, to develop strong support in the community. When you realize that in the prior campaign Lodge had carried the so-called Jewish wards substantially, and it was reversed in the '52 campaign, you realize the effect that was achieved. This was one part of the campaign.

Of course, we did everything else from having him carry on sidewalk campaigns....

And if you saw Jack Kennedy, as you know him, walk down the streets in Roxbury and Dorchester in the older Jewish districts and go up to the elderly bearded gentlemen and tell them who he was and get their votes, it was an amusing sight. But he had the charm then that he always had.

We went into this Israel attack frontally. We brought a movie up. It came out of Israel. We used to show movies again in the Roxbury and Chelsea and Dorchester areas. We put sound trucks out in the area saying, "Hear John Kennedy on Israel." We'd give them a free movie on Israel and then have him get up and speak. Then we brought Frank Roosevelt [Franklin D. Roosevelt, Jr.] up. There were, I believe, thirteen or fourteen Jewish members of Congress at the time, and we had them all up, out in the street shaking hands, working for him. And this really was, I think, the best testimonial to what these people in Congress thought of him.

MARTIN: That's amazing, Phil. That certainly sounds like a formidable campaign. Just going back for one final thought on these meetings you had at the beginning with the Congressman and then with the father. There's no question that the Congressman sold himself in behalf of

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these people. But how about the father? What percentage, would you say, of these Jewish leaders were sold on the father? Were they completely sold on him?

FINE: I think so. It's hard to evaluate what someone else thinks. And I have to go back and say at that point I was young, impressionable; I was sold on the father who became a friend over the time from when I met him and as time went on. I know that he answered the questions that were asked of him straightforwardly. He must have convinced these people, because you couldn't have got the support otherwise. Also, there was another factor. You had the factor that when you would talk to the Congressman, he would say, "Look, I am my father's son; I don't disown him, but I have a mind of my own. My father has never told me what to do up till now in a vote, and he's not going to tell me in the future. I'm going to do what I think is right." I think if you look at it in retrospect, now, after the time in the White House and you look at it after the time in the Senate, these people who worked for him back then, and myself, should thank God that we had the foresight to, because no President has done more for civil liberties. No one has done more for human rights, including aid to Israel, consistent with his duties under the Constitution. He gave the fair hearing that he said he would. And that's all you can ever ask of a President or of a Senator or of a Congressman.

You know, these people had problems. It was not an easy thing. It was not an easy thing in 1952 to support John Kennedy in a community that had supported the Lodges over the years, where the Democrats in 1952 were not especially notable as the party of respectability. In this state the Democrats have had less than an aura of responsibility for many years, and back in 1952 the party was often a spawning ground of scandal. If you recall, the Senator did not run in the same campaign headquarters as Governor Dever [Paul Dever], so that you had a split campaign then as you have now. And here you had a stirring

symbol of respectability in Lodge's candidacy. You had a man who was a friend and had done things that were reasonable. You had a Max Rabb [Maxwell M. Rabb] as his Administrative Assistant and a Honey Mann [Hyman Mann] as his closest friend, then a Glovsky [Myron Glovsky]. And suddenly here we were coming in, saying that "these other fellows are all nice, but we're better." You know it was a tough thing, and as I said, the Lodges and the Lodge campaign team did their utmost during this time to keep hostility to the Kennedys going under the surface. On the Saturday night before the election they distributed in the basically Jewish areas of Roxbury and Dorchester and Chelsea and Brookline a yellow sheet that was literally a yellow sheet, printed on yellow newsprint. The headline on it was a reprint from the *Jewish Weekly Times* of July 21, 1949, and in rather bold black type it said, "German Documents Allege Kennedy Held Anti-Semitic Views" on one side with a fairly long article that you'd have to read into at length to find out that they were not talking about John Kennedy but about his father. And then you turned the page and on the back side in bold type it said: "America Firsters vs. Senator Lodge. Why has Congressman Kennedy been endorsed by Westbrook Pegler, Colonel Robert R. McCormick and his *Chicago Tribune* Constitution Party, which is the party of Upton Close and Allen Zahl? Is it because Congressman Kennedy sponsored a cut of twenty-two million dollars on a loan to Israel? Is it because he refused to join with

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Congressman McCormack [John W. McCormack] and Martin [Joseph W. Martin, Jr.] and 163 Congressmen that supported the one hundred fifty million dollars aid to Israel bill? Is it because Congressman Kennedy has never had a secretary of the Jewish faith? Is it because his father and campaign director, as Ambassador to Great Britain, in 1938 informed the German Ambassador that he completely understood and approved the Nazi anti-Jewish policy and the methods of the Hitler government, according to captured Nazi documents in U.S. State Department files?" Then it went on to say, "Vote and re-elect our friend, Senator Henry Cabot Lodge, Jr." Well, this was the type of thing; this was an overt tactic that was used, this campaign went on for four months. You'd be interested, Ed, in how this was answered.

MARTIN: That's what I was going to ask you.

FINE: This came out on a Saturday night at 10 o'clock and was left in every doorway in the area, and we found out about it about 7 o'clock the next morning when the calls started coming from the early risers. We got hold of a publisher, and we put out a document of our own. I don't have a copy, but the headline on it—it was a sheet about twice the size of this, well, 14 x 17. It started out with, "Shame on you, Senator Lodge," in bold black type. And the next line, as I recall was, "You endorse Senator McCarthy in Wisconsin and you use his tactics here." And then it said, "We know the truth," and it quoted Eleanor Roosevelt and Harry Truman [Harry S. Truman] and a half dozen other people. And it said, "Vote for a man of distinction," or something. "Vote for John Kennedy." And as so frequently happens with the type of campaign waged in Rocky's [Nelson A. Rockefeller] behalf, it just backfired. I think up until that time we had serious

doubts as to where we were going but the attitude that our response evoked in the community, that any man of substance would allow himself to do this type of thing—and whether Senator Lodge knew of it or not, I don't have any idea; I rather doubt it. That anyone would do this in a campaign just raised people's hackles....

MARTIN: It had a backlash effect.

FINE: ...that it backfired. And we got them out on Sunday night. As a matter of fact, my recollection is that we hired the same goon squads to pass them out. So we sent them to the same place, and the votes came out.

MARTIN: The election then was that Tuesday.

FINE: Yes, two days later.

MARTIN: Can you recall just how the vote went in those various communities, Phil?

FINE: Not specifically. But my recollection is that the plurality in the total of these wards, Brookline and Newton and the like, which were basically Jewish, in the Jewish wards in those communities,

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came to about 40,000 votes, which is about what the plurality was in the entire campaign. You know, you go back, Ed, and as you ask questions you think. The only time in my entire life that I can ever remember having conferences—with a man in a bathtub was during that campaign.

MARTIN: Was this up at 122 Bowdoin Street?

FINE: This was at 122 Bowdoin Street, and the only time you could find to talk was when the Congressman came in to change his clothes. He would take a bath and sit and soak in the bath. The quietest place in the apartment to talk was in the bathtub, with him in the bathtub. You'd go in and you'd sit down on the closed toilet seat and you'd be able to discuss business there in an effectual manner as opposed to going out in a room and having six people yelling at him.

MARTIN: Let's go back prior to and during that particular campaign, the climate in Massachusetts at that time, and perhaps really across the nation but more so in Massachusetts was this strong anti-Communist feeling and the appearance on the scene of Senator Joe McCarthy. I think that the *Post* then went into new ownership under the editorship of John Fox and, if you recall, Phil, he made this a tremendous issue. I think he personally saw to it that McCarthy made frequent trips up here. How did this generate around the Jewish community? There must have been a strong....

FINE: There was an extremely strong anti-McCarthy feeling in the Jewish community. And again I have to go back to what.... John Kennedy never had a problem in selling John Kennedy. What John Kennedy had to do in the Jewish community during this time was to prove that he was an entity and an individual with a mind and a character of his own as opposed to that which might have been attributed to him by his father or by other people. Beginning in August or September, there were daily stories, either published or circulated, that the biggest financial contributor to Joe McCarthy was Joseph P. Kennedy. Again this was an area where the Congressman didn't speak out at the time. He was basically quiet on it, and you had to convince voters that this man was a man of integrity who was going to fight his campaign and not get involved in someone else's. It was not easy.

MARTIN: Well, there's no question that it became sort of an undercurrent issue running through the campaign and that neither candidate took any positive on it. But, Phil, this I would like to establish: at that time was there any segment of the Jewish community that made an attempt to get John Kennedy to take a positive stand against McCarthy?

FINE: I think there was. I think all of us spoke to him at times.

MARTIN: It failed.

FINE: I would say that it did not fail if you were in a room with ten or fifteen people who understood the problems and were asked to understand that he was running in a campaign and that there were many

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people in this state upon whom he had to rely for votes who supported McCarthy. He would say at that time that, well, he would say basically, "Look, you know how I stand. I told you before I am opposed to McCarthy; I don't like the way he does business. But I'm running for office here and while I may be able to get X number of votes, because I say I'm opposed to him, I am going to lose Y number, which is 2 times X, by saying that I am opposed. I'm telling you, and you have to have the faith in me, that at the proper time I'll do the proper thing." So that he never made the public statement that we wanted.

MARTIN: So it became a matter of political expediency rather than his own personal views.

FINE: I think this is basically what it came down to. I think others may disagree with me, but this was my impression of it at the time.

MARTIN: Well, Phil, after his victory did you have occasion to keep in contact with him during his first term in the Senate?

FINE: Yes, we were very friendly. I'd get down to Washington and frequently he'd come up here, and I'd visit with him. As a matter of fact, my recollection is that we had a cocktail party for him, my wife and I, a week or so after he returned from his honeymoon. We had talked jokingly about it during the campaign that neither of us were married; that was why I had the time. I got married shortly after the campaign was over and before he was sworn in. When he got married, based mainly on what we had talked about in the campaign, I arranged to have a cocktail party at our home, and he and Jackie [Jacqueline Bouvier Kennedy Onassis] came. It was the first visit that she had made, basically, in a Massachusetts political community. She met all the people who had worked in the campaign in this area. We had perhaps seventy-five or a hundred people there. To this day—of course, now you hear more about it than you did then—"Hey I remember seeing the President at your house, or the Senator at your house at that time." But she came with him and met all these people, and we became friendly.

And then, of course, over the years every week, or two or three weeks, you'd get a letter. Here's one that I opened by chance: "August 14, 1951, Dear Phil: Are you familiar with so-and-so of Boston? I understand that he's a very active member of the national NAACP [National Association for the Advancement of Colored People]. There appears to be a continuing personal political vendetta directed at me by the national staff of the organization. Can you talk to this person?" And periodically over the years he would call up or write, and I'd go down and have lunch with him. I probably was one of the first to know when he was going to be operated on. By chance, I was there. I had lunch with him, and he was telling me that he was going to go in and be operated on. He'd just decided; he said, "I just made up my mind. I'm going to do it." We remained good friends.

As I said, I was never really that active in politics, that political. We have basically a corporate practice; it doesn't fit in with that type of practice. I did raise money for him in 1958. As opposed to a political friendship, it had turned back to what it was prior to '51; a personal

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friendship where we would go out together, get together, or that type of thing.

MARTIN: Well, he had no problem in the '58 campaign, of course.

FINE: No.

MARTIN: Phil, did you also remain close to him during his campaign for the presidency?

FINE: As close as you can be to a presidential candidate. I received a call in '60, I don't recall when, asking me to help out. I ended up in New York City with the splinter group, if that's what you want to call it, of the party up on Park Avenue, the Citizen's Committee. I spent seven or eight weeks down there coordinating the campaign. It worked basically again with the minority groups, worked with Julius Edelstein [Julius C. C. Edelstein] of Senator Lehman's [Herbert H. Lehman] staff, who was

then running that area. I was basically watching over what he was doing and working with him on it. I went out to a couple of other states and raised some money. I saw him, spent time with him in New York when he was there a couple of times, traveled with him around New York the day or two before the election, came up to Connecticut that night, then up to Massachusetts with him the night of the rally in Boston before the election. And I saw him infrequently in Washington when I went down there with the SBA [Small Business Administration] in '61.

MARTIN: Well, Phil, as you moved nationally then, was there any evidence at that time of the apprehensiveness that existed back in the beginning with him?

FINE: No, it was all over; it was all long gone. It had disappeared by '54. It was hard dying. It was hard getting rid of it. But again, what he had said he wanted, was the chance to show; and when he had the chance, then there were no problems. Beginning prior to '52, but on a much accelerated campaign subsequent to '52, every time he spoke at a civil rights or Anti-Defamation League, or Jewish affair, his points were brought home that this was a man of fairness and if he knew the facts he could act intelligently. And by '54, at the latest, this was a lost argument. It came up; it raised its head in 1960. It was inevitable that it would, and you heard a little bit about it but by 1960 most of the Jewish leaders in the country were supporting him, and it's difficult to mount a campaign based on anti-Semitism when every Jew of any substance in a really closely integrated community is supporting the man.

MARTIN: Well, do you recall any tactics from the Nixon [Richard M. Nixon] camp as to what specifically they did? Was it an undercurrent type of thing?

FINE: It was basically undercurrent, and you'd have to ask Edelstein, who I imagine kept many of the documents. I recall seeing some circulars in New York. I don't recall what they were offhand,

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and I'm sure that I don't have copies of them, but there were things. Now what they were I just don't recall. It was there, but I don't recall what they used.

MARTIN: Phil, did you become friendly—did you have any associations with other members of the Kennedy family besides the Ambassador and the candidate?

FINE: Well, I was never really that close to the Ambassador. We knew each other; we spoke to each other. You'd see him almost daily during the campaign. I worked quite a bit with Sarge [R. Sargent Shriver] up in the fourth floor office, I guess it was on Kilby Street. Bobby [Robert F. Kennedy] had, of course, become campaign manager, and I spent a tremendous amount of time with him during '52. When Bobby came back from his trip with Justice Douglas [William O. Douglas], I believe it

was in '56—'55 or '56, I arranged for him to make some speeches before Jewish groups in Boston. He brought his slides, and his slide machine operator in those days was Teddy [Edward M. Kennedy], who was a student at Harvard, and I got to know Teddy. I got to know Ethel [Ethel Skakel Kennedy] and the girls. I would travel with Jean [Jean Kennedy Smith] and Eunice [Eunice Kennedy Shriver] about when they were knocking on doors back in '52. So you got to know the whole family.

MARTIN: Did you get a chance to go down and visit in Hyannis Port at all?

FINE: Yes, I haven't been down there in years, but years ago I used to go down there.

MARTIN: Do you remember any occasions of that?

FINE: They were mainly social. You'd go down there, and before you knew it, you were involved in playing football. This goes back to '53 and '54. Unfortunately, you don't have the time to spend on non-business things as time goes on. If it had been a situation where you looked for something, then you'd probably spend more time. But it was social more than anything else, and the time just wasn't there to do it.

MARTIN: Phil, when would you say during this association that you had with him did he show any definite indication that he was going far in political life, beyond being a Senator? Or did you have that feeling at all?

FINE: It's hard to answer, Ed, for two reasons. One, I can recall talking to him before the Convention of '56 with regard to the vice presidency. We talked about it, and certainly the effort was made, and certainly there was disappointment afterward. But I can recall very specifically talking to him at the Convention and before the election when he said, "Next time we go for the whole thing." So that it was prior to '58. It certainly wasn't in '52, and it wasn't in '54 or '55. You'd have to try and recall back

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just when it was. Perhaps by reconstructing I could, but not offhand.

MARTIN: Well, how about a snap answer to something like this: What single quality of character would you say that he possessed that made him apart from many?

FINE: I don't think it was a single quality. I think the fairness which I have talked about, the willingness to hear out a story, and the ability to make a decision based on the facts. There are few people today who can make a decision which is made in a vacuum: these are the facts; this is what is right; this is what I'll

do. And I think that in many instances.... This developed as the years went on because, if you recall, I've mentioned things of political expediency in '52. But I think when it came to a decision on a vote and a decision in the White House, and I know from my own experience in matters that I had when I was in Washington. It was based on facts: "What's right," and "This is what I'm going to do." This is not easy, for a politician. It's not easy for anyone.

MARTIN: Was the Jewish community generally satisfied with his tenure of office as a Senator and also as President?

FINE: Oh, yes. They were satisfied with him as a senator. They were satisfied with him as a Congressman when they found the facts out. And by 1960, when he ran for President, he was the darling of the Jewish community. A very large portion of the funds contributed to him came from the Jewish people. Substantial efforts were put in by them. People such as Abe Feinberg [Abraham Feinberg] and Dewey Stone worked hard for him. The answer to the complaint that I read you from that yellow sheet had long gone by when he had Mike Feldman [Myer Feldman] there and Lee White [Lee C. White] there. His first Cabinet had two Jewish people in it. I don't think it was a question of picking them, because they were Jews. These were able people, and to a large extent, it was in spite of the fact that they were Jewish that they were picked. You know, by the time of maturity he was, and remains the darling of the Jews. It's unfortunate that this talk is limited to the Jewish aspect because you can...

MARTIN: I didn't mean it to be.

FINE: And I didn't either, but I got it started off that way, and so you go on. There are so many other areas of what he did, for example, to aid small business, what he did to develop the economics of this state; the reasons he used to give when you'd go down and you'd beg him to get involved in politics in Massachusetts. There are letters in here back from '54 and '55 saying, "For the Lord's sake, send Bobby up here and let him run for something so we can clean out this mess." And this is basically, as I say, from someone who is not political in nature, but you could see this type of thing happening. But all of these things I am sure will be covered by other people.

MARTIN: Well, Phil, while he was a Senator, he took some pretty unpopular

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stands as far as this community went...

FINE: The St. Lawrence Seaway, but this is what I get to when I say this is a man who by this time in his career had said, "I'll listen to the facts and what is right is right." I'm sure he felt he wouldn't have to worry if he came up for re-election in the state, as he didn't in '58. But even so there are very few senators who will vote against local interest. What he did for New England is perpetuated today with this New England Senators' Conference. There never was any working together as senators. I can

recall going down there and talking to these people back in '55 and '56 about things that were needed in the area. It was the first time they had ever met together. Prior to this time, they had been a group of senators representing individual States; each one was interested solely in his own state. You had the southern senators working as a Southern bloc, the Western as a Western bloc, but with the New England states you had different states having different senators with no community of interest. He created a community of interest among the senators when he started introducing bills jointly with Senator Saltonstall [Leverett Saltonstall] when he first went into office. This was the first time you had bi-partisan support for this state. Prior to that, you had senators representing the same area, representing the same people, fighting one another as opposed to working with one another. So that all of these factors tie together the development that he brought along. Even as recently as three months ago, I went to Washington and met with the New England congressional group on a matter involving transportation. I don't think that you could have ever got this group together had he not started their meetings many years back. All of this ties back in with him.

MARTIN: He started this type of meeting as a Congressman and then carried it on?

FINE: Carried it on. Right.

MARTIN: Phil, did you get down from time to time while he was President to visit him at his White House office?

FINE: In 1959 and '58 he and I talked at some length about the Small Business Administration, and he didn't forget things when you talked about them. I ended up in '61 as Deputy Administrator of Small Business. I went down for a little while and spent thirteen or fourteen months there, and finally one day called up Kenny [Kenneth P. O'Donnell] and said if my resignation wasn't accepted, because I had to go back and support a family, that I didn't know what I was going to do, so I had a nice letter accepting it. Yes, I would see him to discuss business. It's interesting. I saw him frequently. When he'd come up to the Cape, I would fly up with him because my family stayed here when I was down there and travelled. I travelled about 100,000 miles in fourteen months making speeches, and I would fly back and forth on the plane. You'd see the President as he got on the plane and you'd see him get off but if you asked me—Yes, I would go in and talk business with him; yes, I would go in and discuss

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legislation with him. It's funny the memories you have. In all the time he was President, and I saw him many times, the most vivid memory I have is that on one Monday morning I brought my children down to Otis and figured that they ought to at least see the President while he was President. We got down there a few minutes early, and I took them on Air Force One and showed them the plane. Then we stood down at the foot of the steps as the President came along to go up. I was going to run up through the back door. As I stood there with the kids, he walked by shaking hands with the crowd out front. When he was up two or three steps, and he turned around, did a double take, recognized my wife and the kids and

came back down and thrilled three little girls by shaking their hands—something totally unnecessary but something very typical of him.

MARTIN: Did you attend his funeral, Phil?

FINE: Yes. I was in Tulsa on the day that he was killed. I, as a matter of fact, had talked to people in Dallas a few moments before it happened, and they called back to tell me what had happened. That's how I happened to turn on television. I flew back to Boston and flew down to Washington with my wife. A very amazing—you never can describe the emotion of it. I think perhaps the closest thing to emotion that you could feel during the period of numbness was that we had been invited to go up to the rotunda, and not bother to stand in the crowd and go in through the door and go in with the guests. My wife decided that she didn't want to do this, that she wanted to stand in line. And we went down there, and we stood in line for some hours and listened to the people talking and to hear their comments. People from miles away. People that didn't know him, that didn't have the relationship with him that we did. This was an amazing experience. We spent quite a bit of time at the White House with his friends and with the staff and went to the church and went to the cemetery and.... How do you answer something like that?

MARTIN: Phil, how do you think history will assess his brief term as President?

FINE: There's no question that he started the country moving again. If you look at the economic growth rate during the past three years and what's happening now, he did. He said he would, and he did. There's no question that he stood up to the big interests when he stood up to steel. There's no question that he stood up for the people when he stood up for civil rights. There's no question that he helped the economy with the tax cut. There's no question either that he had his problems as President. I think in a second term he would have done many things that you couldn't do in a first term when you are trying to work with a Congress that knows you had a very small plurality of the popular vote. There's no question that more things would have come because he certainly would have been reelected by a large majority. He was a good President. He was as good a President as there was in my lifetime. He certainly will go down that way in history. I think that the love that the people had for a man who wasn't of

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their type—people don't really like Harvard men. The accent is there, and you respect it, but it doesn't mean you always like it. And here's a man who, let's say, he overcame the picture of a Boston Brahman to have people love him. I tie that in to what he accomplished, and he succeeded in what he started out to do. It was almost as if this had been fore-ordained; that he would die for his country in the manner in which he did. He cheated death once while serving his country, and perhaps it was ordained that he would give his life for his country later.

MARTIN: This has been an interview with attorney Philip Fine at his Boston law office at One State Street. The interviewer was Ed Martin. The date May

28, 1964.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

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