

Barbara J. Coleman Oral History Interview – JFK#3, 10/31/1969
Administrative Information

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Biographical Note

Coleman was a journalist, a White House press aide (1961-1962), a member of Robert Kennedy's Senate staff, and presidential campaign aide (1968). In this interview she discusses press operations during the Bay of Pigs, the challenges faced by women in politics, and press operations during international trips, among other issues.

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Barbara Coleman
Barbara Coleman

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Barbara J. Coleman—JFK #3

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Third Oral History Interview

With

BARBARA COLEMAN

October 31, 1969
Washington, D.C.

By Ann M. Campbell

For the John F. Kennedy Library

CAMPBELL: I thought we might start this morning by just asking you to recall a little bit about your impressions on your first day in the White House.

COLEMAN: Well, my first day in the White House was actually, I think, the first of any of the staff people. When we were in the interim period everybody was supposed to make arrangements to get their White House press cards and to go over to be fingerprinted and go through all the steps that were necessary. Well, most people didn't have time, but I'm one of those people who always arranges those things that I think are first things first, and so I did. And I had a White House press card on Inauguration Day—a White House pass, I should say, not a press card. I had my White House pass before anybody, at least before other persons in the press office did. Now, I'm sure Pierre [Pierre E.G. Salinger], of course, could go in and out. But I remember on Inauguration Day it was so cold that I suggested to Chris Camp [Christine Camp] that we go inside finally and watch from inside, so we did on my pass since the guards didn't know either one of us at all by then; I was able to bring her in on my pass. And we watched from there, and that was my first day actually in the office.

My goodness, I don't remember what day Inauguration Day—what day of the week—it was. I have a feeling that that was like a Friday. Could it have been? It seemed to me we were in on Saturday, the next day. Well, at any rate, the first day we were working in there,

the President [John F. Kennedy] came into the office and wandered around, which he did not do thereafter. There was a number of announcements. One of the first

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announcements, I recall, that Pierre made in a White House briefing had to do with the inauguration and the fact that there had been the awful snow storm. So one of the first presidential acts is an Executive Order doing something about snowplows for the District of Columbia.

CAMPBELL: What were your physical arrangements in that office?

COLEMAN: They never changed very much at all over all that period of time. What they were when we first came in there—and of course, that was one of the first shocks, was to see how little room we had. Actually, Chris, who was Pierre's immediate secretary, had to be in the office with Pierre although I think at first we didn't do that. I think she was out in this little section that I was in. I think only later was she moved into Pierre's office to make some more room. Actually, what we were operating out of was a.... Sue [Sue Mortensen Vogelsinger] and I and Barbara Gamarekian, the three of us, were operating in a space that, I'm sure, was intended to be a corridor when the White House press office was first built. Jill [Jill Cowan] and Helen Ganss were in this sort of reception room right off the corridor. And then, as I said, the next room or space behind that reception room was the space occupied by three of us. Then Andy Hatcher [Andrew T. Hatcher] was in an office to one side of us, and Pierre's office was to the other side of us.

What we had done was at first, when Chris was out in that section with Sue and I, was that Barbara Gamarekian was in the office that Andy had, working with him. There was enough room for two people in there. Then, when we got a third man, he had to be in that other office with Andy; so that meant that Barbara had to come out into our area, and then Chris had to move into Pierre's office. Of course, Pierre's office was quite large, but as you know, I'm sure—this is a famous story—the ticker tape machines were in Pierre's bathroom because there was no place to put those. The wire service machines, I should say. That was a holdover from the days Mr. Hagerty [James C. Hagerty] was in that office. But nothing had changed in terms of space. We just didn't have any more. We may have had a couple more staff people than Mr. Hagerty had, I'm not sure.

CAMPBELL: I wanted to ask you about a person that joined your staff and left rather quickly, Ed Bayley (Edwin R. Bayley). Do you remember what...

COLEMAN: I'd forgotten he even worked there, yes.

CAMPBELL: What was his assignment when he arrived? I think his title was something like director of special projects or something.

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COLEMAN: I had completely forgotten about that until now. It was a very short period of time.

CAMPBELL: A couple months.

COLEMAN: And I think most of the time he didn't even operate out of our office. I think he had space in the Executive Office Building, and probably he was intended to do very special projects, but they may have had something in mind at the time that didn't materialize. I don't know of any special reasons. I'll have to remind myself of that. Perhaps we could come back to it. Yes. Then he went—didn't he go to AID (Agency for International Development)?

CAMPBELL: I think so.

COLEMAN: Yes. Yes. He was an ex-newspaperman, too, of some experience from Wisconsin.

CAMPBELL: I wanted to ask about your liaison operations with other executive offices. How about with the Vice President's [Lyndon B. Johnson] press operation? Were you involved in that at all?

COLEMAN: No. No. And I don't recall that we ever handled any kinds of queries or anything for them. Of course, Mr. Reedy (George E. Reedy) was over from time to time. I certainly saw him, and I would assume that Pierre had some kinds of contacts with him. But I think that is a reflection of how little the Vice President was then involved in anything of any consequence, that it didn't....I remember when I'd see the Vice President around the White House, I used to think what a big man he was. He always filled the corridors so much, you know, just by his very presence, and yet he always seemed to be wandering around as if, you know, he had no particular place to go. That was true of Stevenson [Adlai E. Stevenson], too. He used to have that bewildered look. He always looked like he was lost every time I'd see him.

CAMPBELL: How about your liaison with the State Department, with the Department of Defense, in an effort, again, to present the united front of news releases?

COLEMAN: There was a problem that came up with Arthur Sylvester, I recall, when he was—I think they call it something for public affairs, the press officer's title, assistant sec-

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retary, as a matter of fact. He's more than a press officer; he is, indeed, an assistant secretary setting the press policy for the Department of Defense. And Sylvester, who had been one of the regulars covering our campaign, who traveled with us a great deal so some of us knew him more than we would have known some of the other men....He was working for the

Newark paper, I believe, at the time. He made quite clear that he was going to—that it was the policy of the Department to keep back certain information. I've forgotten exactly how he put that, because that became a big issue. Your saying that reminds me that that was one of the big issues of news management more than any other that we immediately, of course, got drawn into.

CAMPBELL: News as a weapon, I think, or something.

COLEMAN: I don't think that....Was that the first year? It seems to me that happened a little later on. But at any rate, Pierre had very direct and very continuous relationship with those in particular, state and defense because the problems usually arose in those areas more than any other. But in terms of coming over, I don't know how much daily contact Pierre had with them. I suppose on issues it would have been considerable, as issues arose. But they were always present at the briefings.

CAMPBELL: Roger Tubby [Roger W. Tubby] moves into that State position at first, I think, to handle State's press and then shortly he's relieved by Robert Manning [Robert J. Manning]. Did you know any details about that at all?

COLEMAN: No. No, I don't know whether Tubby himself wanted that overseas job or not.

CAMPBELL: I just wanted to ask you. I suppose the first crisis, if you will, of the Kennedy Administration was the Bay of Pigs. When were you first aware, in April of 1961, that something awfully special was going on?

COLEMAN: Well, we weren't, on a staff level, terribly aware of what was happening. When the President canceled his trip and came back, I think we accepted that fairly routinely. I know there was no....As I may have said before, Pierre didn't even know that the President really did not have a cold. So it all kind of broke on us without any notice. Really, on a staff level, I don't think there was any awareness at all of what was happening.

CAMPBELL: Then on the Monday evening when the President comes on television and announces the problem, then how did your operation change for that week or so of the real crisis?

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COLEMAN: You know, it's strange because, of course, that crisis....It's hard to say. In retrospect, some things seem much more important, obviously, than others in terms of events, but when you're working in what is considerably a crisis atmosphere all the time, or if not crisis at least event-packed to such a degree that one thing almost does not stand out from another. Now, of course, the Cuban missile crisis is a different kind of thing. I wasn't there at the time for that one. But I mean I can see where the

Cuban missile crisis would have put pressures on every person, no matter what his responsibilities were, because as an American citizen he was as involved as anybody. But in the Cuban missile crisis it didn't seem to be that catastrophic.

CAMPBELL: In the Bay of Pigs.

COLEMAN: Bay of Pigs, I'm sorry. In the Bay of Pigs it did not seem to be that catastrophic. It was only an unfolding situation which made it apparent how serious it was for the administration, of course. As an event, the country itself was not directly involved in losing men or anything. In other words, it just didn't have that kind of impact on our daily lives then. It really snowballed as an issue with which we were concerned as a press office after the event when the repercussions of what had happened were coming in. And then, of course, it was an overall White House effort to put the event in some kind of perspective that was a little bit more favorable to the White House, obviously. But I think that that particular White House and the men in it were such honest men, you know, rational men, that I think they were fully aware of how serious it was in terms of the President's position.

CAMPBELL: Did you notice...

COLEMAN: It's very difficult for men like that, I think, to try and put a better face on it.

CAMPBELL: Was there a change in the atmosphere in the White House after that?

COLEMAN: I think that that was one of the major factors for a change in the White House, but I think there was a change in the White House staff developing at that point anyway. The exuberance, you know—there was quite a bit of exuberance in the first few weeks, of course, when people really perhaps didn't understand the dimensions of the work they were involved in. Well, that's being unfair to them; these were very mature men in lots of cases. But there was a kind of much more carefree atmosphere in the first few weeks that gave way within a few months as problems and tensions began to pile up.

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That became evident even before the Bay of Pigs, but it was more so after the Bay of Pigs.

And a lot of considerations of the kind that one has read about the President: How do we change this operating mechanism we have? How do we change the apparatus so we better deal with the problems we have, and somewhat have more awareness of the problems in the whole structure, and in the State Department structure, and the decision making framework? I think that intensified, probably, some feelings that some of the male staff members had, and the professional staff members had, about each other, too, of course. I mean people like Schlesinger [Arthur M., Schlesinger, Jr.], who—well, he didn't really figure in that, but he always gives himself a role. It seems to me he gave himself a role that was not as important

as it was by any means, but of course, there didn't have to be that much shifting around for Schlesinger. He had not had the kind of assignment that required re-orienting him to something else, whereas Goodwin [Richard N. Goodwin] was shifted. Of course, again, here I'm sort of moving away from the Bay of Pigs in that particular incident because it's not the Bay of Pigs that moves Goodwin, really. But all I'm trying to say is there is this kind of reevaluation of how everything is done and who does it going on, and the Bay of Pigs figures in it, certainly, very significantly. And Maxwell Taylor [Maxwell D. Taylor] comes into the White House.

CAMPBELL: How about the press office per se? Any procedures altered there after the Bay of Pigs?

COLEMAN: No, I think the most important thing for the press office was Pierre's position in terms of knowledge of what was happening. I think on an operating basis, on a, daily basis, our work remained the same no matter what the situation was. You couldn't make it more important, less important, or the rest of it. You know, there were certain things that had to be done. And the press office and Pierre's relationship with the press remained pretty much the same in that it was a fairly open relationship. But of course, his credibility was seriously damaged, to use that expression, by his being lied to, in effect, by the other White House staff people. And I think he raised that issue directly with the President.

CAMPBELL: I just jotted...

COLEMAN: The point was that he needed to know, and whether or not he had to be trusted not to say that which he wasn't supposed to say, but he had to know himself.

CAMPBELL: I jotted some notes out of what happened in 1961, and I

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thought you might have some comments on some of these things. I think in February your office announced that there was to be no news coverage from Middleburg, and I believe that's the policy that stuck. Do you know the background of that?

COLEMAN: Well, that was Mrs. Kennedy [Jacqueline B. Kennedy] again, largely Mrs. Kennedy, and I think the President agreed with her on this score, but largely Mrs. Kennedy. I'm sure that this was supposed to be the place where the President could relax and that she wanted it that way. And, of course, the Middleburg community was such that they were unlikely to appreciate it. As a matter of fact, I think the President's neighbors in Middleburg were never too happy with the presence of the press. But there was an arrangement worked out whereby the wire services were expected and they said they'd have to cover us to some degree. So arrangements were made, and they

were accommodated at the Red Fox Inn. They just were not....

Pierre had no briefings except for the first weekend they went down when he did it just because it was the first weekend, but thereafter he just announced there wouldn't be any briefings. That did not make the press happy, in case anything happened or because the President could be dealing with very important matters or seeing very important people. Of course, they had a way of watching the road, so they could see who went in. The photographers were there as well as the—the wire service photographers were generally covering as well as the wire service reporters. They just did not have access into the grounds, into the house itself. Pierre thought that he could discourage anybody from going to Middleburg, and he did, actually, by saying that Saturday briefings—which we always had, we always had Saturday duty as well as week duty—would be held in Washington; therefore a reporter could obviously not be in both places at once. So Pierre kept in touch with Middleburg with the usual kinds of phone connections that they had. So he said he would announce anything, if there was anything to announce, from Washington on Saturdays, which was to discourage anybody from trying to go out to Middleburg.

CAMPBELL: Also, in February of 1961, the President—or it is announced by your office that there will not be a press conference, a weekly press conference, because of George Washington's Birthday, and then pretty quickly there just simply are not weekly press conferences.

COLEMAN: Well, I think the President, like all presidents when they first come in, think they're going to see the press all the time, and a president like President Kennedy, who did not resent or fear but had good relationships—he did have good relationships

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with the press—I think he did intend, probably, to have....I think the pressures of their office soon just make it difficult, and then the feeling is that there isn't much useful information that comes out of press conferences because they are open, because they don't stick to one specific subject. They are so far-ranging. Reporters can ask very, very local issue questions and the discussion just ranges....The President does not have a good opportunity to explore an issue he may want to explore. You can try, and they do, they ask reporters to ask certain questions, or Pierre would talk to Smitty, Merriman Smith, and suggest something might be asked or any one of the other well-known reporters from large publications, suggest certain questions to be asked. Of course, they'd brief the President very well for all possibilities. President Kennedy was extremely well briefed for all possibilities, a number of which don't get asked, important questions which don't get asked. So the format is just not good for developing information and for the President to convey information to the public he wants to convey, so they tend to cut short on the number of times they have it. Of course, also they want to avoid press conferences in difficult periods of time.

CAMPBELL: Then, in March, a special kind of press conference was held, I think about Laos, and the President came equipped with charts and maps. Was this an attempt to kind of improve on the regular press conference?

COLEMAN: Well, they tried to use the press conference, increasingly tried to use the press conference. I think the President did do that fairly effectively with his opening statements kind of format. The President was always prepared to announce some things at the beginning of a press conference, rather than just leave it to the question and answer kind of thing, and I think he very well controlled a press conference that way, by making the news at the beginning of the press conference—"The Laos situation is good," just to give an example of that. Although, I don't recall that he did that ever again with the charts kind of situation. It may also have been that the reporters—and here I'm just speculating, but I would think it would be logical—that reporters would object to a press conference in which the President controlled to that large degree. It takes a lot of their time, you know, and especially if they're televised, there's a certain time period that they try to fit it in, and just by common rule, it's going to be a certain length of time, anyway.

CAMPBELL: In April of 1961 the President was asked in a conference about the charge that the White House press association barred Negroes from membership. Do you recall that?

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COLEMAN: I remember the Cosmos Club problem with Negro membership. I know a lot of the members of the administration were members of that club and then resigned I don't recall the newspapermen themselves. If it was, they...

CAMPBELL: I may have not correctly identified the organization. It was the News Photographers (White House News Photographers' Association).

COLEMAN: Oh, yeah. I thought it was the photographers. Yes. There were just a few black photographers at that time, and I suppose under White House pressure they did open it up. That particular example just reminds me, there were several things that.... You know, as I said, the Cosmos Club. There's also the Women's National Press Club used to complain about the [National] Press Club's policy of having speakers and not allowing women reporters to ask questions at that or actually participate in the luncheons that are a part of that whole thing. And we used to get that brought to our attention. As a matter of fact, I think it was Sarah McClendon who used to insist that Pierre ask the President to bring his pressure to bear on the organization and also discourage any Cabinet officials or Administration officials from appearing as long as the National Press Club would not allow the women to participate in the functions. And so all of these situations used to be brought to the door of Pierre and the suasion of the White House invoked. As a matter of fact, it was in both those cases. Without having to do it directly, I think the very fact that the issue had been raised and Pierre's involvement brought some

combination. It did in the case of the women, and something was worked out on the black photographers situation, too.

CAMPBELL: It's been written that the Kennedy Administration was negligent in appointing women to positions of responsibility, administration-wide. I wondered how you felt about that as a woman, as a White House staff member?

COLEMAN: Well, I tend not to be a feminist. But I think that was true. I wasn't concerned about it as a part of the administration, a small, very small part of the administration. I think that, first of all, it's part of American society, so it's not....The administration can take a lead, I suppose, in appointments of women to certain positions, but first of all, there really are a limited number of women who have risen to the position where they are qualified by experience to be appointed to a lot of positions. And they don't play as active a role in politics either, which means that the political rewards, the rewards that usually go to politicians, are not available to them in terms of

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posts in the administration or those honorary kinds of positions. So many women who are big contributors to the Party do get some attention in terms of those honorary positions, but there are always just a smaller number of them that have to be satisfied that way anyway.

I think probably my impression of President Kennedy, he did not probably assume that women were as—well, I don't want to say he didn't assume women were as competent. I would think that it's just a part of his philosophy that women had a different role. But he knew, certainly, a number of competent women through politics, and some of them were given positions in the administration. I don't think they made any overall attempt at all to improve on the appointment of women. It was an issue raised, as I recall, as it has been ever since, too, by certain women reporters at press conferences. Did May Craig [Elizabeth May Craig] bring that up or was it Sarah McClendon from time to time would raise the question of appointments? As a matter of fact, I'm sure President Kennedy dealt with that in his press conference—always in a humorous manner, I'm sure, too, as if, "Is this something I really have to take terribly seriously?" So I'm afraid it did have sort of low priority in his thoughts.

CAMPBELL: What were the....You had a wide range of staff members there in the White House. What were the relations like between the secretary from an office and Sorensen [Theodore C. Sorenson], for example? Were these people approachable?

COLEMAN: Oh, yes. We were not a very large staff, particularly those who worked directly in the White House, and we tended to know each other from the campaign and some from the President's Senate office. So we had known each other by this time for a good year, a number of us. And we were all on a first-name basis. We didn't socialize outside the White House on a secretary-professional level, at least I didn't. I don't know if anybody else did. I would, for instance, in the press office. Of course,

we knew so many newspaper people that if we had our own social activities outside the White House, it would tend to be with newspaper reporters and their families and Pierre and Andy and their families more than we would with any other White House staff people. As a matter of fact, we were pretty insular, as I recall. I can't recall a time that I ever attended or gave a party in which I invited other White House staff people. That's interesting. I didn't think about that until now because we did know so many people who were the people we dealt with everyday that, although....It was like working in a big corporation where you know people in another section, but you don't see them very often except passing in the

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corridors or when you have some business to deal with them.

CAMPBELL: I wanted...

COLEMAN: And I suppose we carried on some of the preferences and prejudices of our bosses on the score of other White House members, and then we had our own little frictions with the other women on the staff and their own little jealousies. I think probably....It seems to me that the other women were more jealous of us than we were of them because we did have a sort of favored role in terms of the trips and the other activities. We were more involved in these things and so....And then there were personality differences that put us in different categories. Several of us were much more high-strung and aggressive than the other women in the White House, particularly women who had come through a more normal secretarial kinds of work and were used to certain very normal kinds of routines. Even though they weren't in a normal atmosphere in the White House, they still maintained the same personalities, the same mode of operation; the same kind of work habits, while we were a different kind of group. And I don't mean to be arrogant or anything, but I think we tended to be the kind of people drawn to that type of work, so we tended to be more aggressive and more active and, in addition, more high-tempered.

CAMPBELL: Who do you include...

COLEMAN: No question we were more bad-mannered sometimes.

CAMPBELL: Who do you include in the former group, the professional secretary?

COLEMAN: Oh, Helen Lempart, who worked for Kenny O'Donnell [Kenneth P. O'Donnell]; and Phyllis Maddock, with Larry O'Brien [Lawrence F. O'Brien]; and. I guess there was Mary White, wasn't it, who worked for Ted Sorensen; and of course, there were some White House holdovers who worked in some of the offices. There was a woman—I can't remember her name now—who worked with Helen.

[Interruption]

CAMPBELL: Oh, I wanted to ask if your operation got involved at all with Robert Donovan [Robert J. Donovan] in the writing of PT 109?

COLEMAN: Oh, yes. He certainly advised us that he was writing the book and did ask for...As a matter of fact, well, he had to interview the President, as I recall, several times. So he was around. He knew Pierre quite well anyway. I've forgotten where they had first established their rapport, but they

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did get along very well and he was around quite a bit. He was kind of what I would call one of the insider reporters.

CAMPBELL: He was a Los Angeles reporter, I think.

COLEMAN: Well, the *Los Angeles Times*, but before that he was—a New York paper. Wasn't he on the *Herald Tribune* as bureau chief? *Herald Tribune* bureau chief.

CAMPBELL: Let's talk a little bit about the trips that the press office made, many of which you made. You went to Canada with the President early, and that's when he injured his back. I wanted to ask if you people were aware, while you were still in Canada, that there was a problem?

COLEMAN: No. And I don't think Pierre knew it either. He never indicated afterwards he's been aware of it. The President seems to have kept it to himself. It was a very pleasant trip, as a matter of fact, in all regards for the staff and in terms of the pace of the trip and the purpose of the trip. It was all very low-keyed and very pleasant. He spoke to the—is it called the parliament in Canada? And that was a very nice occasion. It was a very nice couple of days and without the strains that go on a lot of international trips or even political trips. So it stands out in my memory that way. It was the first major trip outside of the country, and it may have been the first, period, not just major, but it may have been the first trip out of the country. But, as I say, it was very low-keyed and no feeling that anything had happened amiss. As a matter of fact, I recall that—it was spring, and it was cool when he dug up the ground in that symbolic act. It was all very nice, and I didn't recall noticing him strain or show any sign. I wasn't standing too far from him.

CAMPBELL: What sort of thing did you get involved in on a trip like that?

COLEMAN: Well, that particular one we really didn't need the three of us—I guess there were probably three of us—along at all, because often on a trip it's a question of speeches having to be typed and having to do a lot of routine things for the press that there was very little of on that trip. Sometimes, of course, with a foreign government you had the help of their press office as well. As a matter of fact, the burden was on their press office. And there would be several briefings, and it's a question of

providing information to reporters who might have missed something, and there would be certain kinds of handouts of information. But mostly I enjoyed myself, as I recall.

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CAMPBELL: Then shortly thereafter is the President's major trip to Europe and...

COLEMAN: Again, you know, one assumes that the White House press staff....I've met a lot of people who are always surprised at the small size of a White House press staff. Actually, its small size is much harder on you on your day-to-day, ordinary business of, for instance, just answering the telephone, because you really....If you have six lines going all day long, you really have to sit there and answer the phone most of the time. But on international trips it's not at all an inconvenience because there's so many other people involved.

And the State Department—for instance, on that Canada trip, we had the USIA people who were stationed in Canada who did a great deal of the advance work for the trip, who were prepared when we arrived to give reporters all kinds of information and had done all the arranging for the press quarters. Of course, somebody from our office always went out ahead of time to advance the trip like that to make sure that the USIA person understood what it was that....We controlled the situation. That is to say, that Pierre would determine what would be made available to the reporters within the constraints of the host countries, what they could make available. So it was important on the European trip to have Pierre go out ahead of time and spend some time talking to his counterparts in the French government, and because the foreign governments are often not prepared to deal with American reporters in the same way that the American government is; our reporters always had many more demands and were accustomed to being given a great deal more attention, I think, than in a number of other European countries. And USIA and State Department people tend to be reflective of their departments and that is that they're more inclined to hold back than to give out. But they're often very good on detail work, and they were, indeed, on the European trip where Malcolm Kilduff [Malcolm M. Kilduff] did a lot of the work in Paris, in particular.

And the press arrangements were quite considerable. We had a very large, of course, contingent of newspaper people going on that trip, and press quarters, an official press headquarters, was set up in the hotel. Oh, it involves quite a complicated logistics in terms of having teletype people available right there, telephone lines, just all kinds of services which the White House winds up making the arrangements for although sometimes newspaper people make their own arrangements as well. And then, of course, the larger newspapers and wire services have their offices, so they can use those in the European capital as well.

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And then in Vienna it was that much more complicated because we're in one country and dealing with the press people of another country. We had excellent help from them all. You know, as a matter of fact, that trip went very smoothly in terms of press arrangements. I created one of the few crises. In Vienna. we were supposed to catch the plane to go to London, and the newspaper people had been given a deadline on filing time and then they

were supposed to be on the buses to go to the airport. And Pierre had gone ahead or done something else, and I was to get the newspaper people on the buses. And I think it was David Wise, who was then with the *Herald Tribune*, who wouldn't come because he was finishing his story. When I said, "It's time for everybody. You have to come now." And he wouldn't come. Then I finally took the bus off without him because I said we had told everybody else what the filing deadline was. And we always had grumblings about things like that, you know, "Why did we have to leave at this time?" if they needed more filing time. There were always logistics problems about how much filing time they had. And I think, you know, it's pretty difficult to do that when you're moving around. It's very, very difficult in political campaigns, of course. You try and give them time to file stories after an event, but there's never enough time. There's never enough time. So that's a constant battle, how much time they will have in between stops. He made it to the airplane all right. He wound up.... Well, the thing is that when Pierre found out what I did, he said, "Well, we have to hold the plane for him. I mean we can't take off without him." I said. I thought we could take off without him because the reporters were upset, as I said, about the filing time and he got unfair advantage.

CAMPBELL: This is the press-plane as opposed to Air Force One?

COLEMAN: Oh, yes. Oh, yes.

CAMPBELL: I wanted to ask, the President had...

COLEMAN: By the way, that press plane then skidded down the runway, and we had to get off it. Something was wrong with its wheels. It's the only time I recall that we ever almost had an accident. We had to get off and go sit for two hours or something while they got another plane. That was awful.

CAMPBELL: The President had had a serious meeting with Khrushchev [Nikita S. Khrushchev], and there's some indication he came away a more serious president. I wondered if the staff sensed a change in atmosphere between Vienna and London or in London.

COLEMAN: No, I... You know, we didn't see the President any-

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where along the line. You're so separated it's worse than even in any ordinary day-to-day situation where you can be more aware of the currents in the White House, somewhat, from your bosses. But on a trip like that, of the magnitude of that trip, I don't recall even having much opportunity to talk: to Pierre, see him or know what was going on. Well, Pierre.... Again, we're dealing with the very routine things, and Pierre is dealing with the President and the important newspaper reporters, important problems that come up. So you just live in different worlds. You really do.

CAMPBELL: Then, you went to South America—to Puerto Rico first.

COLEMAN: That was just a stopover, really, in Puerto Rico. That was just one of those extras that the newspaper people love and so do the staff because it's just a free night in a nice place, and you have a nice time, really. That's all.

CAMPBELL: And then to Caracas where the troops were out.

COLEMAN: The President was dedicating some Alliance for Progress project, and Mrs. Kennedy was with him. It was a goodwill trip to South America in that sense. And in Colombia it was, as I recall, to sort of pat on the back a South American leader whom the President had great rapport with and who was—our policies jived, at any rate. But Caracas had been a problem because there was a great deal of violence and potential violence. The government took extreme precautions and had the roadway into the capital itself lined with troops on both sides with guns, and it was a very tense atmosphere when we came in in our motorcade from the airport. It was a very frightening, actually, experience because you were much more aware of the potential for trouble once you saw all those troops. And you could see behind them, particularly as you were going right into the capital, great numbers of poor people. There was a very large turnout, and I suppose they weren't hostile. I don't recall seeing them cheering, but by that time—I don't know how much further behind the President's car mine was (when I was in one). But there were these terrible hovels that they were living in up on the hillside, and you really could see that the conditions were very, very poor.

CAMPBELL: In a place like that, with the potential for trouble, were you White House staff members ever advised to stay in your hotels, to not do certain things?

COLEMAN: No. No. We had to be present, some of the press people at any rate, at several events to provide help of one kind or another, and nobody ever cautioned us about

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going out. The tendency was—you know, you couldn't go any place, anyway, apart from being on an official part of the trip. For some reason there was no place for you to go socially. Really, then, I suppose we ate in the hotel because you didn't know the city, and your only way of getting around would be if reporters took you out to dinner, say. But on a trip like that, which is short and which is a very significant trip, as opposed to going to Palm Beach or someplace where the President is basically relaxing, the reporters don't have time. They're too busy filing stories, so that....And we're usually too busy preparing whatever—you know, a speech, speech texts and that kind of thing to worry about socializing that very much anyway.

I remember that there were several stops around the city that we, a couple of press people, press staff people, were supposed to go along or help and then also because we were going on a series of stops that led to the airport, so we had to go along, if we wanted to leave, along in the motorcade, in effect. We had the wildest drivers I've ever....They were

Venezuelans, and they apparently had never had access to such marvelous cars before as they had provided for them. So they were just the wildest drivers the world has ever seen. I never thought we were going to get out of that country that way. But that was all I ever saw of Caracas either, was going from one stop to another.

CAMPBELL: When we just talked before the tape went on you'd had an interesting comment about when you'd come back from trips and about the trips. There are all sorts of stories we run into and you had an interesting comment about, perhaps, the source of some of those.

COLEMAN: Well, I was suggesting that a great deal of the gossip that went around the White House (at any rate when I was there) about some of the private affairs of staff members and high ranking officials was usually passed on by the Secret Service men. Secret Service fellows protecting the President were generally young men. There were a number of them who were regular Secret Service men assigned to the President who were there the whole time we were and certainly had to know us because they had to know who was around the President at all times. And generally, because they traveled so much and because several of the people on the press staff traveled almost as much, they got to know each other. The press staff people knew the Secret Service men better, probably, than any of the other people in the White House did except some of the men, so that they became, to some degree, drinking friends as well. And occasionally, in those social situations on trips and all, they would pass on some gossip about what

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was happening in the White House. Of course, they were always in the best position to know. And then the gossip would be passed on from whoever they told it to, to the other people on the staff who would then presumably pass it on to the public, at large. But I was really quite surprised to find out how much talking they did. I would have supposed they had to swear an oath that they would be more discreet than that. But discreet they were not.

CAMPBELL: Are you aware of any attempt that was ever made to silence the Service, as it were?

COLEMAN: Well, I don't know. The trouble is that the White House staff—I mean Pierre could be a considerable gossip himself, and the White House staff, in the middle of all its tensions, lives in the midst, also—especially with a young president and a young staff—of getting a great deal of, you know, personal intrigues, if you want to use that word. And I think it's normal and not unusual for people to like to gossip about each other. So there was a certain amount of it going on all the time. Maybe it's not unusual for the Secret Service, except again, as I said, they're just in a privileged position. But it would have happened anyway, certainly. Pierre would have told somebody in the press office something or....As I say, again, I don't know. Somehow I find it hard to imagine Sorensen engaging in little stories about other staff members, but our particular operation,

again, in a good focal point for all of this, was full of stories. Everybody exchanged them back and forth.

CAMPBELL: You left the White House. First of all, when did you leave?

COLEMAN: June, '62. I guess it was somewhere in June, '62.

CAMPBELL: I'd like it if you could just talk a little bit about why you left this what one would assume was...

COLEMAN: I was the second one to leave. Helen Lempart was the first.

CAMPBELL: ...an exciting place for a young person to be.

COLEMAN: Well, as a matter of fact, the President....It was the tradition, going back before President Kennedy, that a person leaving the White House had his picture taken with the President and got the autographed picture from the President. So I was going in to have my picture taken by a navy photographer so it could be color. You'll remember how I explained the photographers

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responsibilities. Navy photographer was color pictures. So I felt like a head of state. And the President said as I walked into the office, "Why the hell do you want to leave the White House, Barbara?" Oh, no. "What the hell's wrong with the White House, Barbara?" What was wrong with the White House was simply my own responsibilities, which were not considerable enough for me. I think at a certain age you're—certainly if you're working in Washington and you're interested in politics—you're very much intrigued by the idea of working for a senator or in a political campaign, and certainly very few people expect they're going to work in the White House. But I had started out as a newspaper reporter, and I kept thinking during the campaign that at some point I was going to go back to being a newspaper reporter. And as a matter of fact, I used to ask my newspaper friends after the President got elected what I should do, should I go on to the White House staff. It really was a question in my mind that they thought....Of course, they encouraged me, I'm afraid, to go on the White House staff. And, of course, they were right in the sense that they said, "Well, you know, how many people get this kind of opportunity?" The difficulty is that if you keep on allowing yourself to be seduced, in effect, by those kinds of circumstances, you don't ever get back out of them again. You know, it's fine to say, well, there you are in this intriguing atmosphere—and it is, it's certainly an experience you wouldn't want to miss if you had the opportunity—but on the other hand, the years pass and there you are.

It's very hard to go back to a newspaper job, and it was. And, as a matter of fact, I never really did, except I tried several times. But it was....As a matter of fact, I got told afterwards by the *Washington Post* when I tried to go back there that in addition to the fact that they did not want to have a policy of having staff people leave and try to come back, a "revolving door" as the managing editor put it, they also thought at that point I was tainted

politically, which is, I think, some irony in that, of course it's well-known that most reporters are Democrats and very difficult to be completely objective in your reporting. But at any rate, I had worked there and had worked in the campaign and so I was very corrupted, apparently, by the experience. But I was trying, and I was making an attempt at that point, when I left the White House, to force myself out of the atmosphere and into something which I thought would be more useful for me as a person.

There's no way of changing your functions in the White House. It's one of the most stratified places. There's no such thing as a....And for a woman—and I really doubt that any president's going to be different for quite some time to come—you could have a position of some responsibility on what we used to call the women's side of the White

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House, or the east side of the White House, where the assistants to the First Lady are, and it's possible you could have some kinds of responsibilities, I suppose. There are offices in the White House where they write statements for important occasions and write messages for groups that want a message for the President. I see no reason why a woman shouldn't eventually be promoted to at least that, although they did not have a woman doing it at the time. There was the fellow, Fred Holborn [Frederick L. Holborn], who did that. He did have some girls working for him who, I assume, did almost as much or some of that work. Well, you know, there are any number of places where you can do some things of substance, any number of places within the White House you can occasionally do something of substance, but they basically need secretaries and that's all there is to it. And although those of us in the White House press office were less secretaries than perhaps in any other office, because there isn't a need for taking correspondence or taking a speech, you know, having a speech dictated to you, answering the telephone, still, in all, we essentially performed a form of clerical duties. You know, how long could you do that?

CAMPBELL: Did you have much contact...

COLEMAN: And one also assumed that the President was going to be in the White House for quite some time.

CAMPBELL: Did you have contact with the press office people after you left?

COLEMAN: Oh, yeah. Well, I went to California because I thought that I should get myself out of the Washington environment entirely, the political environment, but unfortunately the political environment was the only one I knew. So when I came back, I went to work for the Democratic National Committee for Steve Smith [Stephen E. Smith], which was a job intended—we were going to prepare for the '64 election of the President and Steve was in Washington two to three days a week and we were starting to organize some activities in the states that were considered most critical: Michigan and Pennsylvania and California, New York, that sort of thing. So Steve was beginning to get coordinators, men who would be responsible for given areas. As a matter of fact, I'd tell you who they were if you wanted to do that.

CAMPBELL: Yeah.

COLEMAN: Do you want to go right into that now?

CAMPBELL: No, let's do it next time.

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COLEMAN: Okay. So, of course, in that position I did see the White House people, was in contact with them from time to time. And when the President died I went back over there to work for the few days, you know, to help out.

CAMPBELL: Great. Thank you for today.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

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