

William Walton Oral History Interview -RFK #1, 5/14/1970
Administrative Information

Creator: William Walton
Interviewer: Roberta Green
Date of Interview: May 14, 1970
Place of Interview: Washington, D.C.
Length: 30 pp.

Biographical Note

Walton, William; Artist, friend of Robert F. Kennedy; Coordinator, New York, Robert F. Kennedy for President Campaign, 1968. Walton discusses Robert F. Kennedy's [RFK] role in the building of the John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and RFK's presidential campaign in 1968. Walton discusses his involvement in this campaign, other campaign members, and RFK's relationship with New York and the Reformers, among other issues.

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Suggested Citation

William Walton, recorded interview by Roberta Green, May 14, 1970, (page number), Robert F. Kennedy Oral History Program.

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Oral History Interview

with

WILLIAM WALTON

May 14, 1970
Washington, D.C.

By Roberta Greene

For the Robert Kennedy Oral History Program of the Kennedy Library

GREENE: Okay, I wanted to start by asking you about the period after the President's [John F. Kennedy] death, specifically about conversations with the Senator [Robert F. Kennedy] about what he might want to do in the future.

WALTON: Yes, go ahead. Now, you want to ask me specifically...

GREENE: Well, what are your recollections?

WALTON: He really did not consult me particularly about specific subjects or steps in his career. He was most likely to take a step and then ask me to go along with him. The way he asked me to work for him in the '68 campaign.

GREENE: That incident you went over with Mrs. [Jean Stein] vanden Heuvel about asking you first to work in Indiana, is that what you were thinking about?

WALTON: Oh, I guess so. Yes.

GREENE: But he never discussed the Vice Presidency or the....

WALTON: No. Never.

GREENE: When did you first realize that he was seriously thinking about New York?

WALTON: No. Wait. I think you're confusing.... You mean in '64.

GREENE: Yes.

WALTON: I'm not talking about '64. I didn't work for him in '64.

GREENE: Yeah. No, I'll start all over. I wanted to know what conversations you had with him after the President's death about what he was going to do with his own future. That would be early in 1964.

WALTON: None, really.

GREENE: When did you first find out that he was going to run in New York and...?

WALTON: I was not really participating in his affairs. We met, as I say, in a business way, largely on the [John F. Kennedy] Library in which we were deeply involved, but not in his political affairs.

GREENE: On the Library, what's your impression of what his real interest in the Library was? How he'd proceed to....

WALTON: Well, he was instrumental in turning it into what we call "the large project" — a phrase you may run across that [Richard E.] Dick Neustadt probably coined. That meant turning it into a big piece of Harvard rather than being a totally independent Presidential library. That appealed to Bobby because of his orientation toward students and the young, which was very real and had gone on for a long time; it wasn't a campaign gimmick or anything.

It was that single ground, I'm sure, that was decisive in his decision to go with [Nathan M.] Pusey in turning this into the JFK School. This was a big decision because it involves millions, and it's what has slowed up creation of the Library. If we'd been left to ourselves and had just built a single Presidential library, like the one in Abilene or Independence, we would have opened it long ago, but the complexities of our relations with the state legislature and with Harvard have slowed us up.

He was the principal person involved in all of the Library

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decisions, of course, in close association with Jackie [Jacqueline B. Kennedy].

I'm going to use first names with all these people because that's what I do call them and it's too artificial not to.

GREENE: Sure. Did he turn over a lot of the technical aspects to other people? Or did he try to keep his hand in all of this?

WALTON: He kept a very close watch on things. His interests were so broad that, of course, he didn't give it as much time as a man would who was unemployed and doing nothing else, but in each period when it was necessary he gave it his full time.

GREENE: Was he particularly interested in the architectural and artistic aspects?

WALTON: Not really. He was interested in being certain that it was of the highest quality, and he was entirely in favor of the method that we finally used for selecting an architect. You know we had a two-day meeting in Cambridge — do you want to go into this at all?

GREENE: Sure.

WALTON: We invited what we considered the outstanding architects of the world to meet with us for two days in Cambridge. Which they did. There were about 20 — from Japan, Italy, England, Norway, and, of course, a great many from the U.S. We finally rather conned them into privately voting which man they thought should have the honor of designing. That's the man we chose, I.M. [Ieoh Ming] Pei. Bobby was very active all those two or three days in Cambridge, showing them the site that we then had in mind and explaining our relations with Harvard. [Interruption]

We'll let that noise go down.

GREENE: Do you think it's going to keep up?

WALTON: No, it's going to pass. It's a garbage truck, I think. He deferred a great deal to Jackie on problems of design and her knowledge of architects' work because she educated herself an awful lot in this period. Before we had narrowed it down to one, there were about five on our list. She and I went around the country and looked at their buildings and visited their offices and learned about them a great deal.

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GREENE: I think you came to Syracuse to see Pei's building?

WALTON: That's right.

GREENE: Yeah, I was still there then.

WALTON: During that period Bobby just listened with respect to all of Jackie's information she was getting and was very intrigued with it. Then he liked

Pei personally and knew that he was someone he could work with, and it turned out to be absolutely true. They became very close friends. Then at all of the stages of the negotiations with Harvard it was really personal between Bobby and President Pusey, with, of course, a few satellites sitting in always. The financial side he turned over largely to Eugene Black, who was then president of the [International Bank for Reconstruction and Development] World Bank; he ran investments. That isn't Bobby's dish at all, to say the least.

GREENE: Did he ever get himself in trouble by bringing in all kind of people and perhaps confusing things by overlapping functions?

WALTON: Do you mean in relation to the Library?

GREENE: Yeah.

WALTON: No. We hadn't ever gotten that far along. Maybe he might have done it, but he didn't. There wasn't an opportunity, really.

GREENE: Well, maybe the best way to ask you this is: how would you compare his relationship with Mrs. Jacqueline Kennedy during this period, as compared to the way it was when the President was alive? Was there a greater closeness?

WALTON: Oh, naturally. There was a much greater closeness than there'd ever been. He considered himself, and rightly, her closest relation. He felt not only a deep love for her, but a great responsibility for her. They saw each other a great deal and had total confidence in one another.

GREENE: Did this interest in the Library go on as time progressed, or did he start to...?

WALTON: No, he always had it very high on his list of interests. He always felt frustrated and a little guilty that we hadn't moved faster, but they were all factors out of our control. It was maddening and aggravating.

GREENE: It still is.

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WALTON: It still is.

GREENE: Were there other projects like this that you worked on? The design of the grave comes to mind.

WALTON: Oh, no. No. Of course, after his death, but I had nothing to do with it in a personal way. I did officially as Chairman of the Commission of Fine Arts. That's sort of a difficult subject I'd rather not get into.

GREENE: Because you don't think it's relevant or....

WALTON: Well, he was already dead and you really....

GREENE: Oh, I see.

WALTON: Oh, you're talking about his grave.

GREENE: The President's grave.

WALTON: Oh, no. Of course, I was involved in that. I was confused. I thought you meant his. Many people were. [John C.] Warnecke, the designer, had us come in in relays to look at the designs in various stages. I was among those people. We gave him suggestions and liked what he was doing. That's about all.

GREENE: Were there other matters of that sort that you'd be called in on, on the memorial projects?

WALTON: I can't think of any.

GREENE: I know in the interview with Mrs. vanden Heuvel you mentioned briefly the [William] Manchester book [*The Death of a President*], and the fact that you felt Robert Kennedy's role in this had been badly misinterpreted.

WALTON: Yes, I do. I don't pretend to complete inside knowledge of what went on, but he was obviously taking the heat for Jackie's, first, indecision, and then decision. She obviously had changed her mind along the way and he took the rap for her.

GREENE: But this is just really your own construction.

WALTON: Yes. Yes. It's an issue of very little importance now. It seemed big at the time, but it fades. A lot of it does.

GREENE: In the Senate years, other than these matters, how frequently and on what kinds of occasions would you

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usually see him?

WALTON: Largely on social occasions at Hickory Hill on party nights. They really did entertain a great deal, and that's the way I'd see him. Or weekends in good weather going out; he'd always invite me to bring my children and to join the fun. You really would, you know. You'd be around the pool or the tennis courts sort of all day. During that time you would have various little conversations with Bobby about serious subjects often. Recalling those are impossible. I haven't a clue what we talked about. But whatever was on his mind, he would be circulating around getting people's idea. He wasn't a man that got things off his chest; he really wanted to find out what you thought about something.

GREENE: Well, this is just secondhand, of course, but the President supposedly compartmentalized his friends pretty consciously. Did you find that Robert Kennedy did to any extent?

WALTON: No, no. I think it was reversed. His were all thrown into a common hopper and mixed around very non-selectively.

GREENE: And he liked that sort of thing?

WALTON: Yeah. His staff came to his parties in a way that the President's staff really didn't come to his parties. Some of the difference would be in their wives, the social approach of their wives, the way their social life got structured.

GREENE: Did you get the feeling that most of their so-called social friends were brought in by Mrs. Kennedy, were people that she had been attracted to originally?

WALTON: Which one are we talking about now, Bobby or Ethel? — I mean, Jackie or Ethel?

GREENE: I'm sorry. That must be so confusing. Ethel Kennedy; that most of their social friends came in that way.

WALTON: Oh, no, I don't think so. No, he was a great picker upper of new faces that intrigued him, both men and women. Half the time, she had no clues who was even coming or how many he'd invited.

GREENE: Did you get any impression, even if you can't remember specific conversations, of how he felt about the Senate and the development of his feelings

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about issues and the way the country was going?

WALTON: Well, on a couple of bigger issues. One was perfectly aware of his opposition to the Vietnam War and the increasing intensity of his feeling. This was with him so much that he talked about that all the time. He was, of course, intensely interested in the students. There wasn't as much unrest in his life you see, as there has been since; now it all seems pretty peaceful in '67.

Cesar Chavez is a better example. It, in fact, had come to a head. It was in his lifetime. He would talk about this and the unfairness of what was happening to the grape pickers in California. You were always aware in his house of what his principal issues of that kind were.

GREENE: In the interview with Mrs. vanden Heuvel, you talked about the growth of his understanding of New York politics particularly. Was this, again, from your own observation, or did you talk in detail about that?

WALTON: Well, in a much more practical way I could follow that one because I had been JFK's campaign manager-coordinator in New York City and state in 1960. Of course, Bobby was the overall national man so I did business with him on very specific issues all the time. Our relations with the Tammany [Hall] bosses, our relations with the Reformers. So, I had a measure of what he felt then.

Then, eight years later, he had asked me to come back and do the same job for him in New York. The political scene had changed a great deal, but so had he. So many of the old Tammany leaders were gone — [Carmine G.] De Sapio, [Charles A.] Charlie Buckley and [Michael H.] Prendergast; the ones that we had helped to oust, as a matter of fact. Then, some of the leaders were dead; Mrs. [Eleanor R.] Roosevelt, Governor [Herbert H.] Lehman. And the Reform movement had taken on a different character; it was rather established.

GREENE: Did you maintain your connections with....?

WALTON: Those people?

GREENE: Particularly the Reformers.

WALTON: Some I have, because they have become friends. People like Justin Feldman and characters like that I have continued to know in the heat of many years.

GREENE: By the way, that reminds me that Mrs. [Ronnie] Eldridge said specifically to give you her regards.

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WALTON: Good. I talked to her yesterday. Twice, as a matter of fact.

GREENE: Did you? Did he consult you at all on this, on whatever ongoing connection you might have had with these people?

WALTON: In these intervening years, no. We would talk, gossip in a way, about things that were happening and developments and so forth. But I didn't go to work for him in the Senatorial campaign. I was extremely busy doing a lot of other things and he didn't ask me to. There wasn't any particular need, but he certainly felt that I had kept up enough connections to be useful to him in '68. That's as much as I could say.

GREENE: When you speak of the "gossipy way," did he give you an impression of how he felt about, for instance, the Reformers, where you definitely had disputes?

WALTON: Oh, yes, for instance, he had a terribly rude scene once with Senator Lehman in which I just regretted his gruffness to an older, and very distinguished man. Well, by '68 his attitude toward that kind of person was totally different. Many of the Reform leaders were his friends by then. He knew them better, understood them better, and approved of them, their objectives. Now there are certainly leaders that are always phony and troublesome, like [William Fitts] Bill Ryan, the Congressman from the West Side. We had done business with him in both campaigns, and even his staff finds him impossible to get along with — a very good guy. But that kind of leader would irritate Bobby, and then some.

GREENE: Yeah. Did he talk about it at all in terms of the Samuel Silverman race and the promise he had then with the Reformers?

WALTON: I didn't follow that one at all. I knew about it and he would brief me every now and then about, "Guess what's happening?" You know, and every other gag, because I would be interested.

GREENE: You also said that he didn't share the sense of doom that a lot of people do, that a lot of people have about New York.

WALTON: About New York?

GREENE: Yeah. Is this something that you just...

WALTON: You mean "doom" in the sense that it's ungovernable and the problem is unsolvable?

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GREENE: Yeah.

WALTON: No, I don't think he did. He felt that he could make a mark on it. This was his general belief, anyway. Sort of the essence of the Kennedy faith is that what you do makes a difference. That's just about what all their messages to the young always have been. He felt it about himself certainly. I can remember, say if we

wanted to go into the individual reactions, at some point, I guess after Martin Luther King was assassinated, I had expressed admiration for John Lindsay's conduct of walking through the ghetto and so forth. I said what everyone had said, that he was able to do it because, because of prior commitments to the blacks and performance, they had faith in him. Bobby said rather sourly, "He really ought to stay in his office and do his work there." He was essentially jealous of John Lindsay. This was a challenge to him. It was the same kind of guy, the same kind of approach.

GREENE: Because he himself would have gone out and walked the streets?

WALTON: Just exactly what he would have done.

GREENE: That's right. That's interesting. Can you think of other comments like that about Lindsay?

WALTON: None particularly about Lindsay because I think he admired him, but he was jealous. He'd listen and play it his way.

GREENE: Yeah. I think that's true. I also remember you saying that you felt he didn't — he never really gave enough time to New York to establish a working organization and....

WALTON: I think that's true, and I think most New Yorkers agree to it as a criticism of him. Of course, he had not grown up in New York politics the way he had grown up — he and his brothers — in Massachusetts. In New York he didn't inherit a county-by-county organization the way the Kennedys have in Massachusetts. He could have concentrated, maybe the first year or so, on developing his political machinery and participating more in the problems specifically of the state.

That's a hard choice to make. He was front and center on the national stage because of his brother's death. The demands on him were nationwide. He was the principal opponent of Lyndon Baines Johnson at that moment on the stage. It would have been almost impossible for him to have done both. He could have advocated from the national stage and developed his Senatorial backing, but I would think that probably would have been unwise. So, this has an

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effect forever on New York politics.

GREENE: Yeah. Did you talk to people in New York who actually voiced this resentment to the fact that he didn't put enough time in?

WALTON: Oh, of course. It wasn't resentment; it merely was sort of — this would be a criticism coming largely from his friends, and only on the basis that it increased their political problems in New York because he hadn't been there on the spot as much as an ordinary Senator would have been.

GREENE: But he never said to you himself that he felt maybe he ought to be doing more for New York, that he felt he had to choose between the two?

WALTON: No, no. Not at all. This is an analysis I make on my own, and ex post facto, which sort of comes out of a lot of conversations that one had with political people around New York,

GREENE: Did he talk to you at all about the governor's race? The mayor's race? Did you discuss things like that?

WALTON: Oh, sure.

GREENE: Anything specific on the mayoralty race when he ended up supporting [Abraham] Beame against Lindsay?

WALTON: No. I just don't remember. Naturally it was one his heart was not in whatsoever. It was rather token, his support.

GREENE: What about '66, the Governor's race where he supported [Frank] O'Connor against [Nelson A.] Rockefeller?

WALTON: In this he was just walking through his paces, what he had to do.

GREENE: These are two instances where a lot of people felt he could have made the difference in the situation, but he didn't do enough.

WALTON: He only could have done it by having done his hard spadework in the preceding years. Therefore, he didn't have enough power to do anything good.

GREENE: Well, let's see. I know there will probably not be deep consultations, but do you remember, generally,

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conversations with him leading up to the time he decided to run, about issues and...?

WALTON: No, I didn't see him much in the exact couple of months before he decided. Or, if I saw him, it was in large groups and we didn't have a particular conversation. I was aware that he was struggling with a thought.

GREENE: Did you offer any advice?

WALTON: No, none at all.

GREENE: Do you know how he felt about that, about friends, not just in political terms, but friends who...?

WALTON: Were giving him advice?

GREENE: Yeah, offering suggestions?

WALTON: He was quite open to it, you know. Particularly if you had some specific idea, he really wanted to hear it. But he wouldn't be very friendly to someone who just said, "Now, I think you ought to do this." He could usually turn around and flare up a bit saying, "Well, if you only knew all the other factors that are involved, you wouldn't think it was so easy." I can remember Governor [W. Averell] Harriman a couple of times saying to me, "Now, you must tell Bobby to do such and such." And I would say, "Well, why don't you tell him?" And he said, "Oh, he won't listen to me. He doesn't ask my advice." I said, "Well, he doesn't ask my advice." "But you can go in there and tell him direct." I said, "I wouldn't dream of it. If you can't do it, I won't do it."

GREENE: That's interesting that someone like Harriman would feel that way, because he apparently did look to him for counsel.

WALTON: He did, I would guess, not as much as I had thought, though.

GREENE: Yeah. Was the first indication you had that he was going to run the press report?

WALTON: Well, I might have known it twenty-four hours ahead, but no more. I did not participate in any of the....

GREENE: Decision-making?

WALTON: Decision-making meetings.

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GREENE: You related in your tape with Mrs. vanden Heuvel about the call from Mrs. Kennedy — or the call to Mrs. Kennedy?

WALTON: Well, whatever I said in that is correct.

GREENE: You volunteered to work and she called and suggested Indiana. What you said was that you told her that you felt there was a need for new faces, young faces in Indiana?

WALTON: I meant it, too. I was too old for that scene.

GREENE: For Indiana specifically, or...?

WALTON: Well, no, I meant that kind of athletic campaigning. Indiana was the big scene; that's all I really meant by choosing that state. There wasn't another big one mounted except California. Nebraska was very small.

GREENE: Oregon was really short.

WALTON: They ran very short, and relatively small, too. Indiana was one that was more parallel to the '60 campaign in which a real saturation job was being done.

GREENE: You also said that you were aware of the disputes between the young and the old at the — the young and the old! — the young and the older hands that had been going on, that the books have written about. Do you remember specifics about that, things that you got involved in? You mentioned that a couple of times he would say to you when something had gone wrong that this would never happen if you had been in charge?

WALTON: I can't remember what they were. They always seemed earthshaking, and now one can't even remember the issue.

GREENE: Yeah. Did you do anything on occasions like that to convince him that the young people did have an effectiveness, even if they made mistakes?

WALTON: Oh, I'm sure, because that was the side I was on. I thought this bad advice was coming from the older advisors, not the young.

GREENE: Do you think it concerned him to have so many young people in charge of a campaign like that?

WALTON: I really don't know what that would — how that would

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come out.

GREENE: Okay. Was your role in '68 to head the Citizens' effort in New York?

WALTON: No, it wasn't. Essentially it was to be what we call a campaign coordinator. Now, the main element that hadn't been yet put together was the creation of a Citizens' organization. I was not to be the head of anything. We were putting together one that would function, and then I would be the coordinator between the Citizens', which could bring in a lot of Republicans and non-aligned people and

coordinate the effort with the regular Democrats and Reformers, too. Sort of three elements. That's the way the job was framed, sort of. That's what it had been in '60.

GREENE: Yeah. How did it work out in '68? How far along did you get?

WALTON: Well, we had done the... We were just on the threshold when he was killed. We had the framework of a Citizens' organization. I think we had taken our first ad and were hunting for money.

GREENE: Was money a big problem? I know it was for the regular organization.

WALTON: Yes. A terrible problem. We couldn't raise a dime. We were in a very critical moment.

GREENE: Why was the raising of funds so difficult?

WALTON: The Kennedys are rich, and ordinary people when you would approach them would just say, "Well, they're rich, richer than I am. Why don't they pay for it?" They had no conception that no one is rich enough for this. It's bad politically anyway, even if a man were rich enough, to allow him to spend all his own money.

GREENE: What about [Eugene] McCarthy? Was he a big factor in getting supporters?

WALTON: He was our principal opponent in the New Left and Reform movement; our struggles were with McCarthyites. They seemed to have a bit more money than we did. They had some dedicated fat cats that they'd had for quite a while that were at least supporting them provisionally.

GREENE; How was your relationship with people like [John] English and [John J.] Burns?

WALTON: Oh, very good. I had known them slightly before.

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Particularly with English. I admire him and like him, and also he was a totally dedicated Bobby supporter. He was trying not to be too partisan in advance of the primary. But there was.... Any arguments I ever had with him would always be on technique. I kept trying to make peace between him and Ronnie Eldridge. They were at each other's throats every minute.

GREENE: What was the basis of that? I've never really understood it, and I haven't gotten that far with Mrs. Eldridge.

WALTON: You'll have to talk to her. Again, I can't remember; I really can't. I would have to.... What it would revolve around would be — well, it was, of course, delegate slates. What we were trying to work out with the McCarthy people was joint slates. Then English and Eldridge would get down to arguing about specific people because they would know the reliability of certain people and the orientation of certain people. I wouldn't know at all, say, in Rockland County. And I would try to arbitrate then between them. That was my role. Then I would try to go over their — English and Burns were making big money demands on the Kennedy organization; money for, oh, printage and material, money to get campaign workers around the state. With [Stephen E.] Steve Smith I would try to go over it, and did go over their demands to try and shake the budget down to a workable size.

GREENE: Did you expect this all to open up and become a lot easier once the other primaries were over?

WALTON: Of course we were. The night he was killed, when the phone call came, I thought it was going to be Bobby because he called me at the end of each primary out West. We'd discuss then the next steps and what had happened. He'd give me his version of Nebraska or Indiana, and we'd talk about the next one. He was due in New York two days later. That was what I thought the call would be. We had the problems just lined up for him to then settle. We had to decide how much money we would spend on printing, how much we would spend on radio-TV.

GREENE: Would you take things like this, specifically funding and financing, to him directly at that point?

WALTON: Only on policy. We would discuss it with Steve principally. But Steve would want to talk to Bobby about what he wanted, too. We were going to have to have a joint conference, certainly, with the three of us and a couple of other people, too. "All right, now is the moment. What do you want to do? How much travel will you do around the state?"

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He hadn't committed himself to all these things because California had taken his time. He had been into town about two weeks before to look over some tapes, make some tapes. That wasn't but about two weeks, or one week?

GREENE: Well, the one where he made a public appearance was May 8th at the Inn of the Clock. Do you remember that?

WALTON: Oh, yeah, I remember this one.

GREENE: That was the day after the....

WALTON: Oh, I spent the whole day with him that day. I guess that's the day I'm thinking about. Did he also go over to the television studio where we had a meeting and saw some films? Was that the day?

GREENE: I think so. I think that's the day, yeah.

WALTON: Well, it was such a long day that I can't remember all the stages in it.

GREENE: Do you remember anything specific about the conversations after the Indiana, Nebraska, and Oregon primaries?

WALTON: No. He was analyzing what had happened. We were guessing about what the returns meant.

GREENE: Was he satisfied with what he did in Indiana?

WALTON: He was very happy about Indiana. Of course, he wasn't happy about Oregon. And Nebraska was just sort of funny, you know, weird little things.

GREENE: So short.

WALTON; Yeah.

GREENE: One week. What kind of impact could you see these primaries having on the people in New York that you were trying to get to?

WALTON: Immense. Everyone was watching them with magnifying glasses to try and read what his strength was. On his strength re: other people.

GREENE: Was the Oregon primary as big a setback as it's....

WALTON: No, I didn't think so because California was coming

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so close and so soon. We seemed to be going better there and, of course, did better there. Had it been isolated by itself it would have been worse.

GREENE: Did you have very much contact with [Louis] Lou Oberdorfer and Walter Sohler?

WALTON: No, not in the campaign. Well, I did just during the funeral arrangements. Well, I'd known them both for a long time, but I didn't work with them during the campaign. Walter wasn't particularly involved in the campaign.

GREENE: Well, they were the head of the Citizens' ...

WALTON: Oh, he was a cultural. He was on the arts and letters staff. I did do a lot of business with him. I had forgotten this whole thing.

GREENE: What about does the name Jane Suydam — I hope I'm saying this right....

WALTON: Sidam. Yes, I know her well.

GREENE: Now, she came into New York a couple of times didn't she?

WALTON: I didn't see her, but she may well have. New York is an enormous place.

GREENE: Yeah, it was my understanding that she was the one who was trying to coordinate the national Citizens' effort with the state Citizens' effort.

WALTON: Well, she may have been.

GREENE: I guess it gets to be a blur after a while.

WALTON: Well, it does. If she reminded me, I might well say, "Oh, God, yes, now I do remember." Because when you question me I do remember now Walter Sohler was sitting in Washington making up these lists. We had a number of conflicts, but we were always on the same ticket in a way.

GREENE: Were you working primarily with Steve Smith in the...?

WALTON: In New York, yes.

GREENE: Among the major...?

WALTON: ... figures entirely. I consulted [Lawrence F.]

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O'Brien maybe a couple of times by telephone, and then he came in for a couple of days and I saw him. This is very at the tail end. I had lined up all the appointments for him and laid out the problems. Ordinarily I really communicated through Steve and with Bobby.

GREENE: Was there any problems getting Smith or Robert Kennedy to act on your suggestions to telephone people you recommended?

WALTON: Oh, sure, because that's a damn lot to do. We've always had a longer list for Bobby than any man could do. You always wanted him full-time for your own state. He had to slice it up his own way.

GREENE: Did you have anything to do with the boiler room, with Esther Newburg? You didn't go to them at all?

WALTON: No. I knew of their existence and they were all.... Well, I've known [David L.] Dave Hackett so terribly well; it was his operation. Anything I wanted I could just tell him and have it. But I didn't have to have a real working relation; I would have later, you see.

GREENE: Were the people in the state, among the regulars particularly, who objected to this kind of effort at all prior to the convention, who felt it was premature and unnecessary?

WALTON: I suppose there were, but I wouldn't see that kind of people. I'd be so totally surrounded and submerged everyday with all the people that were working for us. I kept trying to get lines out to new people and drag them in. The ones that were against us wouldn't communicate.

GREENE: Where was the most effective — well, what was the most effective of special groups that you had: the arts, the lawyers group?

WALTON: I think probably that general arts group was on the verge of being the most useful. An awful lot of well-known singers, actors, and so forth, would go anywhere we wanted them to go, within their own time schedules, and were being very generous with that kind of help. To give a rally a certain zing, you could send out a star. They were terribly useful.

The lawyers were just getting underway, and I think it was going to be a very effective organization. It was going to bring an awful lot of downtown. They were young lawyers that we were getting. We had a whole different kind of lawyers committee than we had had in '60. It was almost a new generation. They were

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working on their own a lot.

GREENE: Without any supervision, or just separate?

WALTON: No, that was, you see my job. I would try to be there, after they had gotten a skeleton organization going, and connect them up with us, tell them how we thought it should be done, and give them a little help. Sometimes you had to pay for an office worker for them or a full-time clerk, or a secretary, or something to get it started because it'd be enormous secretarial work — the damn mailings, you know.

GREENE: Yeah, What kinds of things did you reserve for the lawyers? What were they best at?

WALTON: Oh, well, we certainly hoped to get money out of them eventually. We were going to use them to organize small rallies of their own in downtown, which we had done with some success in '60. We were going to go much more for small noontime rallies or meetings that they would put on themselves, of say thirty people that they thought would be interested in having the issues debated in their presence. That kind of meeting.

GREENE: Was all the money that you were raising, as little as it was, being used in the state, or were you also funneling it elsewhere?

WALTON: Oh, my God. We weren't funneling a penny. There wasn't anywhere near enough to support what we were doing.

GREENE: Were they feeding you funds from outside?

WALTON: Of course. I don't know where it came from. There were general funds.

GREENE: Oh, I know, I wanted to ask you if Mrs. Smith, Jean Smith, was particularly helpful on the arts? I know she got into that somewhat?

WALTON: She got her finger into it, but she was largely unhelpful by not following it closely enough, frankly. Buddyism would get too involved there, some particular pal of hers. The useful women on that were the ones who came to the office and worked every day. You see, she wouldn't be in this category. But Mrs. [Eileen Lao] Pei, Freddy Plimpton, and a marvelous third woman, ran this operation. They were hot-shots. Barrett, her name was Barrett. You know who....

GREENE: You don't mean Barrett Prettyman's wife?

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WALTON: No, no, no. Her last name is Barrett.

GREENE: Oh, because I know his wife did work in....

WALTON: Yeah, but she wasn't in New York. I think she was here. Anyway, they were in the office every day and they kept the master lists and all the cross-checking you had to do on these people.

GREENE: Among those that you were dealing personally with, what were the big issues and questions that were being raised that you had to answer to?

WALTON: Policies?

GREENE: Well, just everything. The entry issues and...

WALTON: Oh, well, you know. There were such cliches as "ruthless Bobby," and it was constant, "Why did he wait till after the New Hampshire primary?" You can imagine what they were.

GREENE: Yeah, just about what you'd expect. Did you get involved at all in organizing minority groups?

WALTON: Of course, Every one of those, theoretically, were under me. The Negroes were essentially for us, and we had Percy Sutton's support and many black leaders. We were going to do all right with the black population.

GREENE: Was there any particular problem in getting the white-collar blacks as opposed to the poorer?

WALTON: I don't know really. We haven't refined it down that much. I'm just not sure.

GREENE: I just know elsewhere that was in question.

WALTON: New York is different in this sense that (a) the black population is bigger; the black world gets more like the white in a funny way. There are more levels economically in New York of blacks, and greater sophistication.

GREENE: Did you work in the upstate area, too, or did you concentrate only on the city?

WALTON: No, only on the city. I had connections with various spots around, and, theoretically, their budgets were supposed to filter through me. But there were a lot of independent workers up there; Jerry [Gerald J.]

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Bruno was on his own, completely organizing.... Some of it came under me though; I can't remember the name of it. Some professor at the Maxwell School was running it.

GREENE: [Alan K.] Scotty Campbell?

WALTON: Scotty Campbell was running a committee, but he was doing it through me. That leader in either Saranac or Lake Placid, a well-known name that you know, too, was working through me. I had special relationships with

several guys like Bill — the leader of Westchester. Bill; it's a blank. Oh, I just saw him all the time, and various ones of this kind.

GREENE: Was there anyone that stands out as being particularly helpful, besides, I know English, of course, but any of the other leaders? When you said, "the Saranac Lake one," did you mean the county leader up there?

WALTON: Yes, yes.

GREENE: I'm not sure I know him.

WALTON: Oh, you know his name. He published a small paper up there.

GREENE: Oh, you mean [James] Jim Loeb.

WALTON: Of course, of course.

GREENE: That's who I was thinking of, but I never think of him as a political leader.

WALTON: That's exactly who; that's who. That's exactly who.

GREENE: In Westchester I know Luddy, [William F.] Bill Luddy.

WALTON: Bill Luddy, of course. Absolutely.

GREENE: Yeah. And [Peter] Crotty. Did you work with Crotty at all?

WALTON: I didn't at all. I knew about him, but... We may have talked a couple of times. His connection would be to Burns or direct to Steve. His would be sort of a special one.

GREENE: What about [Robert F., Jr.] Wagner and his people? Did you have any contact with them? Was there any hope for....

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WALTON: No, there wasn't any hope for them. We were at odds.

GREENE: Yeah. I mean, even after Johnson dropped out? There was no...?

WALTON: Oh, I can think of old Wagnerites that I went to see. Let's see, there's a lady labor lawyer who's a great friend of Anna Rosenberg's. Does this ring a bell with you yet?

GREENE: Not on that description.

WALTON: Lillian Poses. Now, she'd been great help in '60. We'd had a little lunch in '68 and she was very cool to Bobby. She couldn't go, wouldn't at least, there was sort of a group around her that she was reflecting or vice versa, I don't know. We didn't really have anywhere to go with the Wagnerites.

GREENE: [Stanley] Steingut, [Anthony J.] Travia, people like that?

WALTON: Bobby ran his own relations with them. He really did. Oh, and Steve; the two of them did. I would only see those guys in Bobby's presence. I note that on his last visit, that one we went to the Hall of the Clocks, or whatever you call it...

GREENE: Inn of the Clocks.

WALTON: Inn of the Clocks, Steingut was.... I was sort of running his apartment that day — running it, you know, it means ushering people in and out. I may have already told you that that was the day that I brought in Norman Mailer.

GREENE: You did discuss that.

WALTON: I did, yeah. Steingut was there at the same time, so that was the kind of thing that it meant, balancing these groups off, so that either one wouldn't feel slighted. Not all would have private conversations.

GREENE: Did you get the feeling that he was very worried about New York?

WALTON: Yes. Indeed he was. He thought that the situation was favorable, but dangerous. That was the only place he could have been struck a mortal blow in his candidacy. He was very aware of that, that he had to win there a sizable hunk of the New York delegation.

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GREENE: What is your feeling about how he would have done? Did you get...?

WALTON: I think he would have done all right.

GREENE: Just all right?

WALTON: He wouldn't have had the whole delegation, certainly.

GREENE: Do you have any figure in mind? Did you keep a tally?

WALTON: I did at the time, but I don't now. I don't know.

GREENE: Did you work on...

WALTON: Ronnie would be awfully accurate on that. Her memory is awfully good.

GREENE: A fantastic memory, a very good memory.

WALTON: It is just incredible. She would give you a delegate count today.

GREENE: A woman's attention to detail.

WALTON: It's marvelous. It really is good.

GREENE: Yeah, it is very helpful. In fact, I neglected to ask you about how closely you worked with her.

WALTON: The closest possible. I just saw her constantly, all the time, and consulted her and asked her advice, and also held her hand and calmed her down. I took her to dinner and pumped her and everything else. She was the key to the operation; there's no question.

GREENE: Did he realize that do you think?

WALTON: Did he? When he asked me to go all he told me was the first — I never met her you know. He just gave me her phone number and said, "You go first to talk to her and then we will discuss what you're going to do because that's the key." And so I went, one morning late, to her flat on the Upper West Side. We fortunately got along like a house afire from the first. He laughed like hell about it because he had known this was going to happen. You see, I hadn't even known how close they were. I knew that there was this mysterious lady reformer that he kept talking about, and I knew nothing about her.

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GREENE: Did he ever talk about it in terms of his attitude towards women in politics in general?

WALTON: No, because you see that's the kind of conversation Robert Kennedy never engaged in. People who say that he did are inventing it.

GREENE: But, I mean, you don't see her as somewhat unique?

WALTON: Oh, I do because I've seen the way he felt about other ladies in politics often. Oh, I can go back to one in Wisconsin named [Marguerite R.] Marge Benson. I think she was probably pretty effective, but Bobby really would be privately laughing at her in a way, in an affectionate way. She did sort of make a fool

of herself a lot. She was a good deal older than Ronnie, and she was an old-line politician. The thing that Ronnie had was that she was a new politician as well as being a woman.

GREENE: What about [Albert H.] Blumenthal and [Jerome] Kretchmer?

WALTON: He liked them. Of course, they were Ronnie's sidekicks, but it was part of package. I can't remember him really seeing very much of Kretchmer, but he certainly did of Blumenthal.

GREENE: Were they helpful to you in '68?

WALTON: Enormously. I could call them anytime. And [Jack] Newfield, of course. You know what Ronnie's coterie is, sort of. Well, when she's your friend, she just gives you all of her friends, too, which is great. They accept you on her say so.

GREENE: Recommendation.

WALTON: Yup.

GREENE: Was there anyone else among the Reformers that was helpful and effective?

WALTON: Oh, lots of them certainly were.

GREENE: I mean, among the more major figures.

WALTON: Name them and I'll say yes or no. [Manfred] Ohrenstein certainly was.

GREENE: Did you have much to do with Feldman at this point?

WALTON: Of course, all the time. Julian? Julius?

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GREENE: Justin.

WALTON: Justin, of course. He was one of the principals. I wish I had a list of people, but I haven't. Justin was in and out of my office constantly. He didn't have an office there. Ronnie's desk was just down the hall, of course; Carter Burden sat right next to me. I fell for him hard. He worked so hard and did his homework. He was enormously useful, and to me the most unlikely guy in the world.

GREENE: You mean, from his background?

WALTON: Yeah, his background, and he seemed so unsuitable for politics in a way. But he got on awfully well with the workers that were on his level. He was building up, assembly district by assembly district, a real network of workers and supporters. That was the nitty gritty of our operation, and he was doing it.

GREENE: Did you have much to do with Earl Graves?

WALTON: Earl was always in such full flight. [Interruption]
While Earl was in town he'd be helpful, but he's one of those guys who wants to stay with the candidate, where the cameras are and the action is.

GREENE: You couldn't rely on him or his people too well?

WALTON: I wouldn't know who his people were.

GREENE: Well, he apparently set up some kind of little organization before he went out to Indiana and put it in charge of the woman in his office whose name just escapes me at this moment.

WALTON: I know what you mean, I know well. It didn't amount to much. Maybe it would have, but it hadn't yet.

GREENE: Did you get involved at all in the plans and scheduling for the first couple of weeks in New York?

WALTON: Oh, of course. The schedule we never carried out? Oh, sure. We had been debating that for weeks, everyone putting in their requests. I was trying to help evaluate them and give my ideas. The scheduling wouldn't have been mine in the end. It would be Bobby's own staff who would do it finally.

GREENE: Who were you working with on that, English and

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Burns?

WALTON: Well, I was receiving their demands.

GREENE: Oh, they would feed into you?

WALTON: Not primarily; it would really go to Steve and to [Joseph F.] Dolan and [John] Nolan. But I would get a copy of it and express my opinion, and also I would tell Bobby's staff what I thought of their request, in constant consultation with Ronnie.

GREENE: Did you have anybody specific who promised, or you have good feelings about coming over after California, assuming it was a substantial victory?

WALTON: Any big defection on our side? No. We didn't have any big guns lined up that I can remember.

GREENE: You don't remember anything about [Allard K.] Al Lowenstein for one? No?

WALTON: No. What would Ronnie say? I can't remember.

GREENE: We haven't talked about it. I've heard this from other people that he had said that he would come over, officially, after California.

WALTON: He would have probably said this to Bobby, I would think. Not that it was any particular secret, but I wasn't particularly involved in it.

GREENE: Well, do you have anything else on the '68 campaign that sticks out?

WALTON: Well, I remember one incident. I don't know whether you consider this particularly appropriate for your kind of record, but... I remember Bobby's anger — you asked about his emotional reactions to different things — to a dinner party that [Elinor C.] Elie Guggenheimer had lined up for him. It was, I think, largely Jewish leaders, and rich. The purpose was to try to win them back from hating Bobby. [Interruption] They were so hostile that Bobby just turned off. It was apparently a very cold, unpleasant evening, because he didn't respond to this kind of hostility well. If it was the hostility perhaps of a huge audience he could laugh at himself and tell a few stories and win a lot of them over very successfully. But with this kind of upper-middle class — and higher — rich he was resentful; he didn't like them. He therefore took an absolute dislike to Mrs. Guggenheimer. He just kept saying, "Never leave me along with that woman ever or line up anything through her." This was always a problem because she was trying desperately to get

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a big role in the Kennedy campaign. It created a lot of problems. I did not go to that dinner. My only report is what he told me.

GREENE: Was this your impression of how he felt about the Reformers, also?

WALTON: Not in general at all.

GREENE: I don't mean the few that he was close to, but....

WALTON: No, he wouldn't react with them in the same way. It would be more a reaction on issues. Naturally what would bother him most about the

Reformers was their deep attachment to McCarthy. He felt so often that they didn't know McCarthy or what he stood for and felt that they were being taken in hook, line, and sinker. And he believed this implicitly.

GREENE: Did he ever talk to you specifically about McCarthy?

WALTON: Oh, sure. We'd tear him to bits.

GREENE: You shared his....

WALTON: Oh, of course, I never could stand that man.

GREENE: Do you think his hostility goes from the earlier period with the President?

WALTON: There is no question. He wanted to be the first Catholic nominee himself in '60. He never got over it.

GREENE: Did he admire McCarthy for his courage in coming out openly or did he feel that was....

WALTON: I don't really think he admired McCarthy for anything. Now, I may be doing him an injustice. I may be interpreting him through my own prejudices. I probably am.

GREENE: You know, one thing that occurred to me before that I forgot to ask you. You said on the vanden Heuvel tape that it was always kind of assumed in a half joking way while the President was alive that Robert Kennedy would one day run for the office. Is this something that carried over definitely into the period after the President's death?

WALTON: I would assume. I think, yes, that all of us assumed that one day he would be a candidate and the only debate was when. I think there was not a

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dissenter from this view.

GREENE: And he'd have no objection to your kidding, or seriously talking about it?

WALTON: Oh, no, no. If we didn't start it, he would. [Laughter]

GREENE: What about the Johnson relationship? Was he touchy on that subject?

WALTON: No, certainly not with me. We both understood so completely what we felt about Johnson. I would never question him about the details of any

conversation or anything that they had and I never did, but we both knew what the other one felt about Johnson.

GREENE: I keep going back to the tape because I don't want you to have to repeat things. You also talked about his growth in terms of even the kinds of things he was reading and the development of his interest.

WALTON: I think it was terribly apparent; the effect on his public life was apparent. His breadth of vision increased a thousandfold.

GREENE: How would you compare him in the last couple of years of his life with the President? Do you think he had gone well beyond that?

WALTON: No, they were [Interruption]

BEGIN SIDE II, TAPE 1

WALTON: Is it ready yet?

GREENE: Yes.

WALTON: We were talking about the parallel and differences between RFK and JFK. It is so easy for people who are principally Bobby supporters to say, now, seven years later, that he was far more liberal than his brother and had gone much farther. But it was only in relation to issues that developed in his own time after his brother's death. His position, while his brother was alive, was almost parallel to that of his brother, though Jack, certainly in 1960, was more liberal than Bobby. We're splitting hairs about liberalism when we talk in these terms. Jack was leading Bobby toward a broader view of

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society, rather than the reverse. When one speculates had Jack lived, I think we can assume that he would have evolved somewhat along the lines that Bobby did because their thinking had gotten to be very close together.

GREENE: In the spirit.

WALTON: It wasn't Jack's death that suddenly made Bobby a liberal. He was already on the way toward it. [Interruption] ... Covered, don't you think? Or not?

GREENE: No, I do. I was going to ask you on Vietnam if you felt he carried an extra burden because of the relationship from his brother's Administration.

WALTON: Of course he did. He was intimately tied up with, particularly, [Robert S.] McNamara, who was a close advisor, and with McGeorge Bundy not as

intimately, but certainly very closely. So, he felt that he, too, shared some of the responsibility for bad decisions in the Kennedy Administration. He always wanted to be responsible for them. One of the lines that Governor Harriman kept using on me — because he knew I was strongly against the war — he would shake his finger at me and say, “Your friend, Bobby, is not for cut and run like you are. He’s much more responsible than you are.” I’d repeat this to Bobby and he’d say, “Little does he know.” Absolutely. And he certainly debated with McNamara whether McNamara should resign. The decision, I think, was a very wrong one. He should have resigned and spent whatever power and authority he had in the issue.

GREENE: How early do you think that might have been discussed?

WALTON: I don’t know how early. I’m aware of it in ‘67, strongly. I believe that there are sort of two periods in ‘67. I’m not a real expert in this stuff, but I would say in the winter of ‘67 and again in the late summer of ‘67 they were searching their souls together on this subject.

GREENE: Well, McNamara’s position apparently was in a state of flux, but what about people like General [Maxwell D.] Taylor who did not change?

WALTON: I think General Taylor’s effect on this whole problem has been absolutely sinister from the very first. It was his original report, along with Mac Bundy’s, that misled the Kennedy administration. I think he, in general, gave Bobby very bad advice. I could never understand why Bobby listened to him.

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GREENE: Do you think he listened and put it away with all the rest, being polite?

WALTON: He had a capacity for doing this, but I’m afraid it did have some effect. I hate to keep quoting Harriman — he should speak for himself — but he always deplored Maxwell Taylor’s effect on Bobby. He knew much more about the details of the policy, of course, than I had any idea of.

GREENE: I have nothing else unless you do.

WALTON: Okay, fine.

[Interruption; Mercedes H. Douglas Eichholz is present from here on.]

EICHHOLZ: I was married to William Douglas for a period of 11, 12 years. During that period Bobby was in law school and then came to the Senate with Senator Joe [Joseph] McCarthy. At the period when he was working for McCarthy, his father was very anxious that he travel into Russia with Bill Douglas. I used to argue against it because I felt that Bobby was not really very much, that anybody that worked for Joe McCarthy

was pretty terrible. He had gone there against all of his mentors' advice, but he thought it was good experience, so he went.

Well, when it came to Bill's decision whether he would take Bobby into the Soviet Union or not, I fought it. Bill said, "Well, anything that Joe [Joseph P. Kennedy] wants I must do because he is my friend." So, Bobby went into the Soviet Union with Bill Douglas. He went into the Soviet Union totally prejudiced: Communism was bad; everything was bad. He came out, seemingly with the same feeling, but from that time in his life on his whole outlook on foreign affairs changed.

WALTON: What year was this?

GREENE: This was '54, wasn't it?

EICHHOLZ: This was '55. It's been very interesting because from that time on — within a year after that — you could see his outlook change. Then when his brother was President and he went to Asia, you could tell; you saw it then. I now know why Joe wanted Bill to take him. He knew it would broaden his space of thinking to the extent that it did.

WALTON: He was very provincial up to this point.

EICHHOLZ: Very provincial.

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GREENE: Do you have any other recollections of him as a young man?

EICHHOLZ: No, nothing that is of any interest. He was always a very, a very — he always sought out Douglas's advice on everything he ever did, even when he went against his advice. The one time he followed his advice is when he became a Cabinet officer. Douglas said, "Go ahead and be your brother's Attorney General and show him you can be the best damn Attorney General there is."

GREENE: He mentioned that to me.

EICHHOLZ: Did he tell that to you?

GREENE: Yeah.

EICHHOLZ: Because he was very frustrated about that decision that he should serve with his brother. I give him full marks for having sensed the undercurrents and felt them with a mentor of the type of Douglas in terms of the feeling about how Asia feels and surges. It was very interesting because years later when I'd go in to see him he would scream, he'd say "Ahhh." I'd say, "Well, why don't you run for President and change the whole thing?" He'd say, "It's almost too big for anyone to change."

GREENE: Anything else?

[END OF INTERVIEW]

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