INTERVIEW II

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INTERVIEWEE: CHARLES M. MAGUIRE

INTERVIEWER: DOROTHY PIERCE MCSWEENY

PLACE: The National Archives Conference Room, Washington, D.C.

Tape 1 of 2

Mc: Mr. Maguire, we had been talking about your position and responsibilities while you were still a White House Fellow. This would be in the latter part of the fall of 1965 through one year of the program. We had gotten into how you became involved in the presidential correspondence, his personal letters. At our closing the last time you had mentioned two areas which you thought would be of interest to include here, one being the presidential additions on the letters, and another would be the development of how letters began being released to the press. I think I'll just turn this back over to you and let you cover these two areas, and then we'll go on.

M: To the first point of presidential additions, it was not uncommon for the President to receive drafts which were more often than not the actual finished product, and the President would then amend them with a P.S. or a footnote at the bottom, expressing a handwritten sentiment. It was almost most generally true that were the President to consider any individual letter insufficient to either the letter writer or his own feelings that he would redirect either by telephone or sometimes with an actual notation on the draft. And it was also through these directions

that one of course picked up over a period of time what hopefully might be called the essence of the President's style. At least that was a process where one was in receipt of continuing guidelines.

Just to close this out, I think that all I have recalled about the area of my responsibility involving the high level presidential correspondence--and I am not by any means implying that this is total recall--but of what I have said it seems the most important conclusion is the President's constant and detailed attention to this correspondence. If one could make a point of valid comparison by looking at some of the memoirs and other published materials of large corporate executives, their mail is a problem. We all know instances both in and out of government where a letter has been released bearing the signature of an important man and he has never bothered to read it. I honestly cannot recall one instance where Lyndon Johnson did not personally read every sentence of every letter. And I think that someone like Juanita Roberts, who knows about this aspect of the presidential office in even greater detail, would corroborate that.

To the second point of letters being released to the press, this was first of all an ad hoc procedure. In other words, it was not institutionalized. There were some rather extraordinary letters that came to the President's attention. One of which I recall particularly was a two-page letter of approximately seven hundred words from a father who enclosed a gold coin--an American coin--as an offering to help the balance of payments problem. But the contents of the letter were in many ways sheer poetry because it was a father reflecting upon his good fortune in having such normal blessings, that is,

normal to America, of a home, a car, and a wonderful family. I remember he asked in the letter, "How can I ever thank America, by taking out a billboard?" The President was quite moved by this, as were many of us on the staff.

So the President had the thought that the American public, as it were, might also be interested. The letter was then released, and I believe two or three columnists, some of them syndicated around the country, picked it up. I think also this was around Thanksgiving time, which gave it some special relevance in the press.

Another category of letters for release would be the Vietnam mail. Some of these cases actually came to our attention through the news media. I would read, for instance, of the case of a Marine who had been on the taxi squad of the Green Bay Packers losing his leg in Vietnam. He returned to Green Bay, Wisconsin, with a high award for valor, a medal, and then attending the wedding of a Marine buddy he presented his medal to his friend. I forget the other more precise circumstances except that this young Marine amputee attended the wedding in a wheel chair. The President saw this on the ticker in his office, and, I recall quite vividly, called me on the phone to write a letter. But happily I had already seen it and the letter went out of the White House within an hour or so.

That story wound up on the wires that same afternoon. There were, I would think perhaps, no more than forty or at the most fifty occasions, when we would release servicemens' mail.

Mc: Who gave the direction for that? Would that emanate from the President himself after seeing something?

M: Most often if would emanate from me. It was something that I had cleared with the Defense Department. There could have been, I thought, some prohibitions in the sense of making public what is in essence private correspondence.

Mc: Did the President okay it?

M: Oh yes, the President would always have to okay this. He would simply receive the draft with a little slip on it which would ask in the traditional "Yes, No" form, "Would you approve this for release?"

Of course there were also many occasions when we would simply provide the press with material like this and they would not use it, for one reason or another. I thought, and other staffers with me, that in terms of the needs of the press for insights into not only the minds of the American people about public issues, but most particularly in learning some of the genuine thoughts of the Vietnam military personnel, that we should give this Vietnam mail the widest dissemination in keeping with the rules of good taste and good sense.

There were some other occasions where a columnist such as Drew Pearson would through one source or another learn about a piece of correspondence either lying on the President's desk or a letter that had already left the White House, and Mr. Pearson would contact the President's office and ask could he see the correspondence. This happened on two specific occasions, I can recall, concerning Vietnam mail. Such newspapers as the New York Times and the Washington Post also became quite interested in late '66 and early '67 on the specifics of Vietnam mail. They wanted to know the details of quantity, content, and asked if they could do stories on this aspect of the presidency.

We gave them permission, and I believe both of these newspapers did run such pieces.

Whitney Shoemaker would have much more of the detail on that aspect of it.

Mc: Charles, let's go on to the speech writing end of your work, and if you would, tell me a little bit about--let's say, begin with your first speech that you began writing; what your directions were like as far as content, length, and type of speech.

M: This would bring us back to my first weekend in the White House.

Mc: I think you may have mentioned some of this, and I might stop you, but let's go ahead.

M: That's what I'm getting at. But it is relevant in the terms of direction. That experience was the one I've already described of spending a Saturday afternoon in the Cabinet Room with the President and a half dozen members of his Cabinet discussing the problems of beautification policy and legislation. In that sense I received specific and direct instructions from the President himself as to not only speech content, but also the number of speeches.

This was not typical of future experience, but neither was it atypical. I think the question as to directions received is a very important one. But like so many important questions about the American presidency, it's extremely difficult to give a complete answer. I think you will find that one would have to range across the entire range of speechwriter experience in the White House because there were great variables, and those variables in themselves are the most revealing thing about the direct presidential participation in the speech writing process.

I don't want to specify this too much, but let me compress my own experience in some sort of consecutive time frames. I began as an assistant to Jack Valenti. I took the vast part of my direction from Jack. We had at that time a group composed of Will Sparks, Bob Hardesty and myself. Frankly, this was not the firstline team. Dick Goodwin was upstairs; Harry McPherson was somewhere around upstairs; Jack Valenti was doing a good deal of the writing himself, that is, the initial drafting, as well as editing other people's drafts. It was quite common for Jack to hold writers' meetings to discuss a given speech or speeches for the next week, which would be determined by the speech calendar. The speech calendar of course was derived from the President's appointments calendar. This is something we might also want to talk about. It's very important to the entire speech writing operation.

Mc: Let's begin with that. Tell me about the speech calendar.

M: Ninety percent of the time the speeches followed the President's appointments. Ninety or ninety-five percent of the time the appointments were set by Marvin Watson, or whoever was filling the job of appointment secretary. One of the fundamentals of the Valenti operation, which I largely came to handle, was a simple coordination between those two calendars. One of our most stubborn problems is still somewhat inexplicable to me because it involved the simple business of two men sitting down and putting their heads together to arrange a mating in the President's best interests of his appointments with his speeches. The problems that could occur were such things as five speeches

on a given day. The dimensions of that problem are more than the simple burden on writers. After all, they are beasts of burden. It presented severe problems in terms of press coverage. It is simply impossible for the press to cover five presidential speeches on a given day. They perhaps should not even be asked to cover five speeches in a given week.

From the speechwriter's viewpoint we would argue that the President could seek to achieve a certain set of headlines on a certain day. He could, quite literally, arrange his speech schedule to make a measured impact on a measurable set of problems in any one week of any one month of any one year. That's something else that we can talk about, because what I'm saying is that the President can control the press and a smart speech writer or speech editor can always--and I repeat, always--draft the actual headline that will appear out of any presidential speech in any newspaper in this country.

Jim Jones and I worked quite closely, and I think in the long run quite well indeed, on matching up the appointment and speech claendars. There were occasions when a speech took priority; that is, precedence over the appointment. They were not the rule, but Valenti could go to the President, as I did many times myself subsequently, and suggest or argue that a speech on a given theme needed to be scheduled and that we would work with the appointments people to find a forum.

Another way it worked was for the President to simply change his mind. An outside group or organization would write months in advance and request a White House meeting with the President. They would be politely refused.

The group would then come to town--holding a convention was the most common occurrence--and the President would find a gap in his schedule or, as is the presidential habit in American history, change his mind and decide that he would like to meet with them after all.

In some of these instances, if we of the writing squad had been wise, we would have a speech standing by. In most instances we were caught flat-footed. But that's what you got paid for.

The mechanics of what we used to call speech coordination, or speech management, in the White House evolved out of this nexus of the Watson office and the Valenti office. Subsequently it was the Kintner office and the Watson office, and then it was myself and Marvin, and later myself and Jim Jones.

I'm not much of a man for even discussing paperwork, but there was an enormous amount of paperwork involved, and I took it as one of my principal tasks to simplify that tonnage without overdoing the details.

We wound up with a system whereby Jim Jones would provide me with the President's appointment calendar on a Thursday night. When I first worked on this problem with Jim, the writing branch would not receive the appointments calendar until Saturday morning. This I quickly learned, and as quickly set out to correct, made for one hell of a problem. If you only got the President's appointment schedule for the following week on a Saturday afternoon, it automatically meant that one or two writers were going to write all weekend for Monday morning speeches. It meant that your research facilities were seriously foreshortened because as willing as some White House writers were to work weekends, you always

ran up against the closed doors of government offices. You also found high government officials, men you needed, away on yachts, boats, tennis courts, vacation lodges. Weekends were murder!

I want to give Jim Jones great credit here, if there's any place for credit in these reflections. He did not help me to solve the problem overnight, but in the course of events, as Jim and I both rose to the White House surface, or closer to the top, we had a very fine working arrangement and we licked a lot of these problems. From the last half of '66, I would simply receive advance notice of the forthcoming week's appointments on a Thursday evening or a Thursday night. I would then make speech assignments and tabulate them on a single page of white legal size paper. I would always try to do this Thursday night. Each writer would receive the complete week's writing assignments, that is for the entire writing squad, on Friday morning. It gave us that very precious advantage of having all day Friday, a working day, to get to work on Monday morning's speeches, and that of course was our priority--first things first.

Now I've skipped over a good deal here. Bob Kintner had a similar system. In fact, I largely ran it with Bob the way I ran it for Jack Valenti. To be candid, there was always some dispute as to who really assigned the writers to the speeches. I will simply say that the names of Valenti, Kinter, McPherson, Moyers and Maguire, would loom large in that process.

Speaking for myself, I found it most useful to talk to the writers

about the speeches before assigning anyone to a given speech. You did of course have a general, and I suppose even a very specific, knowledge of the differing capabilities of differing writers. You also had to know about their workload because some of them were engaged in other projects, and some of the projects were not necessarily speech writing assignments. You had to juggle the normal managerial problems of workload, temperament, availability, suitability, etc.

We did reach a point of predictable stress. I think I have touched upon it earlier in recounting the commotion that followed Valenti's departure. We had Moyers, Cater, Kintner, and Christian heavily and variously involved in the actual management of the speech writing system. We had too many cooks and we spoiled a good deal of the soup.

Following Kinter's departure, Harry McPherson was given formal mandate by the President to assume general management of the speech writing operation. As I recall, that mandate was confirmed two weeks after its issuance in a general meeting of the writers with the President. It didn't really work that way, but it helped glue things together.

In this transitional period I suggested to Harry something that had been very much on my mind for several years. I felt we needed a weekly meeting of all the writers where assignments and, more importantly, the substance of speeches could be discussed by the entire group. This was not simply a matter of coordination or managerial mechanics More importantly, I felt it could be a needed boost to morale, a binding force hopefully conjuring up some esprit. We instituted that system

within two weeks of Kintner's departure. The meetings were held every Friday evening at 5 o'clock in Harry McPherson's large office. I was able to work even more closely with Jim Jones in coordinating the appointment and speech calendars so that every writer had the forthcoming week's schedule in advance of that 5 o'clock meeting on a Friday.

As for the general pattern of these meetings, even though I had assigned the writers to the speeches in advance, it was understood that there was flexibility for change. On some occasions we actually did change the assignments because of some particular interest evinced by a writer that I may not have known about, or some scheduling problems weighing heavily on another writer's back. Estimates of the ultimate value of these meetings vary from writer to writer, and I say that because I've heard them all, but I do think that McPherson did a fine job of running them. The President also helped greatly in the beginning by attending at least two of them, and there is just simply nothing like that.

Now this of course gets us back to the most important point of all, which is where we began, and that's the point of presidential direction of speech writers, speech writer involvement with the President. It probably was the greatest plaint of the White House writers.

Mc: There are so many things in this area as far as direction that I'd like to have you discuss, not only the big one being Mr. Johnson's style, which is how does a writer acquire it, but the inclusion of quotes or humor, the how and when of that; how did you limit a speech or expand it or make

room for ad libs. I'm just touching on a few things I'd like to have you consider in this area.

M: As you've gathered, it's a very complex operation. It shouldn't be that way, but that's the way it was.

Mc: You've indicated that one of the ways you wrote a speech for the President was by having some contact with him. Of course you've also explained that that would be rather limited.

M: There are some broad generalities. I am reluctant even to set down generalities because they are so deficient. There are some guiding principles which may or may not have been observed.

The fundamental, I suppose, is that every speech in one way or the other was guided by the President. Every speech was closely read by the President in one draft or the other. This was a man who would rather throw away a poor draft, one submitted too late for him to get a better draft,and walk out onto a platform and ad lib a speech.

Mc: I believe that happened in Baltimore, didn't it?

M: The Baltimore incident is now world famous, judging from that insight. Yes, the Baltimore speech was a failure of the White House speech writing system, but the President put it to good purpose. He made us aware of our errors, and let us hope that because it did not happen again that we learned from that experience, That, too, is not a simple story.

But I want to get back to some of these fundamentals, or at least what I see as some of the fundamentals. And it's like looking through a glass darkly even now. Let us say that the President was in total

command of the speech operation at all times. Now that is a generalization. But in point I believe it was always true. After all, he did have the ultimate authority to throw a draft on the floor and to ad lib. It is simply not possible for a modern President to give personal directions to his speech writers, and that is a plural, for a multiplicity of speeches in a week. He can, for instance, select out the most important speeches, and that is one device that Lyndon Johnson used. He would discuss in varying detail his thoughts about important speeches with the Valentis, the Moyers, the Goodwins, the McBundys, the Walt Rostows, and in the last two years with myself.

But to throw a skew into this neat analysis, or cop-out, Lyndon Johnson would also discuss in great detail the nuances of perhaps the most inconsequential speech on the week's calendar. He had, for instance, a very fine feeling for the importance of a toast given at a White House dinner or a state occasion in the East Room. As a small digression, I think here too is an example of how I literally broke through with Lyndon Johnson. I have the same feelings about the after-dinner toast as a means to somewhat special ends, special in the sense that they are given in a special setting and can achieve a certain special grace and style that would be foolish to aspire to and perhaps impossible to attain in the Rose Garden or out among the folks. Lyndon Johnson paid a great deal of attention to his dinner toasts. He enjoyed giving them, he enjoyed writing them. I have spent more time working at the President's desk, side by side with him, on toasts than I have on any other general category of speeches. I do not believe this is coincidence.

I have spent my share of time sitting at his desk at the Ranch or across from him in the Ranch office where we were both working on drafts of some rather important speeches.

So what I am saying is that I suppose there is no pattern to the system. There are generalized situations arising out of general principles, but the bedrock remains. Lyndon Johnson's hallmark of office, the dominating characteristic of his presidential conduct was, I think, involvement--personal involvement. He had a hand in the daily and sometimes dreary details of speech making, speech coordinating, and speech writing, even though that hand may not have been visible or felt, or even though it was by delegation. What he was doing, of course, was reposing great trust, great responsibility, and ultimately great confidence in the individuals he deputized to act as his alter ego in the middle stages of the speech process. But he expected initiative, indeed he demanded it. He expected the initiatives that would force the creation of speech forums, not alone speeches that would make their mark in tomororw's newspaper and, as in other areas of the White House operation, I personally found that the President knew just about everything that was going on around him. He was quite interested in what went on at the weekly writers' meetings. He might ask obliquely, but he asked often enough for people like me to sense that he realized the importance of these meetings.

On more than one occasion the President also told me of his regret that he could not have a greater personal involvement with the writers. I raised the matter with him from time to time because it was part of my job, but he would also bring it up voluntarily. Time,

the most precious commodity of a President, was of course the great deterrent to a more personalized relationship with any one of eight or nine writers.

But to be hard-headed about it, time was only one of several other obstacles. There are advantages to presidential detachment. There are good reasons, and many of them, why a President should keep himself at one or two removes from his writers. Not all of his writers, but the bulk of them.

Just to touch on one of them, writers talk too much. To mention something more fundamental to executive style, a President has no business wasting his time with writers when he can delegate that job to one of his managers who can do it just as well as he can. This is hard news for a writer's natural ego, and let us be clear that without the ego he is probably not a writer, but that's just the way it is.

To attempt some halting summary of this, I personally never felt that the system as a system suffered in any way from a failure of presidential leadership. We had the access, the closeness, the direction, the guidance that we needed. Anytime that we felt that we did not have it, we could get it. In other words, if you were really in a management bind, the manager himself would help you out of it.

Now the "we" there applies to the managers delegated by the President to run the operation. They had the authority to speak for the President, to interpret his thinking or to relay it, and of course they had the far more important responsibility to anticipate his thinking. So in this sense, a very, very important sense, the writers or selected of their numbers, did have the power and responsibility to

direct the President's thinking. And this happened on a surprising number of occasions.

We're getting into very deep waters here, and you can't swim without realizing that what we have come upon is the nature of the presidential staff. Let me just say that if you take the word adviser in its formal meaning, you begin to come pretty close to the truth of what a writer could do. He could be a man who had some interest in oceanography. If he were smart enough and strong enough and tough enough, he could actually sit in his office of a midnight and write a speech for the President which would set oceanographic policy. If he had strong feelings on Vietnam, he could write a speech for presidential delivery on Vietnam. Both of those speeches could be delivered by the President. That's what access really means. That's what hundreds and perhaps thousands of people in the executive branch would give their left and right arms to have.

The President's door and mine were always open to his writers. More importantly, the President's intermediaries--such people as Valenti and McPherson, particularly--would always encourage such initiatives by speech writers, and in many more cases than not, forward them to the President. It would really have to be a very rash or foolish speech not to wind up on the President's desk.

Mc: You've mentioned an area here I'd like to ask you about, which is speech writers becoming involved in policy making. Perhaps we could pursue that a little bit.

M: The first question has to be what about presidential advisers being involved in policy decisions? What about the Cabinet being involved in policy making? I don't know if there are any great differences

in this sense between a presidential writer, a presidential adviser, and a member of the President's Cabinet. Here again, there are no hard and fast definitions. In my own personal experience, however, and certainly in the experience of many writers with whom I worked and who I managed, we all had the opportunity. Presidential policy has a very grand and noble ring to it, but presidential policy can also be small bits and pieces. It can be one sentence in a speech for good or evil. It can be a writer such as we had who was working on a Medal of Honor speech, and put in a line about a bombing pause enabling a crate of hand grenades to come down the Ho Chi Minh Trail, one of those grenades hypothetically having blown off the head of the young soldier who was being posthumously honored in this Medal of Honor ceremony. By the nature of things in the White House, the sentence or paragraph slipped through, and in the next morning's press all hell broke loose.

It is the word "policy" that is the stumbling block. Some writers are conscious of "policy" as they sit at their typewriters. Others would not know it if it bit them. But of course there's a very easy out for this discussion. Everything a President says is presidential policy. If not on the day he delivers the speech, then ten years after he gives it. Just think of the importance of President Eisenhower's farewell reference to the military industrial complex! Nobody knew of its importance at the time of its delivery, although some might have prized the prominence it has today. Think also of the actual positioning of President Kennedy's initial declaration of our space

goals, putting a man on the moon by 1970. Think of where that actually stood in the speech he gave to Congress. It was right down at the bottom of the speech. I'm sure some people knew it was policy, but I doubt very much if the definition of policy then would be the same as its definition now.

This of course is also why the President, I think every President, reads every last word and nuance of every speech. Presidents know these things better than presidential speech writers do.

Mc: There is no level to check this with? A person who particularly--well, say Rostow, for foreign affairs or foreign mention, foreign policy.

M: Yes, of course there are. There are experts at every level of government. It is the wisest course to check that expertise on any given subject of every speech. The process might begin, as it did often in the White House, by securing a first draft from the experts at Justice Department or HUD, or even State Department. As the speech went along, you also touched in with the appropriate people at NSC. You checked back with the departments, and you checked with some of the more expert specialists on the President's staff. You also had a built-in check by the process that had Douglass Cater, the special assistant for HEW, do most of the drafting of speeches in the areas of health, education, and welfare. Harry McPherson had his areas of speciality. When Lee White was in the White House working on regulatory agencies, we always ran drafts by Lee if they touched on his area. Rostow was extremely important, of course, to all foreign policy speeches. He did indeed do a considerable amount of drafting.

He's an extremely facile writer. And I personally found Walt very useful in drafting the important one or two paragraphs that could go in the body of a speech. Now that's the rosy side of the picture.

But where are you going to get an expert when you're flying at twenty thousand feet and you're alone in the cabin of Air Force One with the President and you have a major speech on labor relations which he dislikes intensely and wants rewritten? Or what do you do down at the LBJ Ranch without a battery of experts? Or what do you do when the experts disagree? Or what do you do when the Secretary of Labor is disputing the speech policy of one White House special assistant who in turn is disputed by another White House special assistant who has formal mandate to run the speeches but maybe not the mandate to govern policy in this area? And then, finally, what do you do when you have a writer doing the drafting who doesn't understand what the hell you're talking about in the first place?

Mc: What do you do?

M: That's what you call speech management. [Laughter] It's a mix. It reminds you of the description of history given by Max Beloff, the English historian--"History is the collision of the contingent, the unpredictable, and the unforeseen." That's about what the White House speech writing operation boils down to.

It's all human parts in the end, it's human intelligence, human temperament, human adaptiveness, human psyche. And maybe the best you can say about it is that it is not at all a dehumanizing process. You think the best you can, you get the best information you can, you write the best you can. You're always aware of the razor edge, even in a little joke in the speech text. And you keep your eye on the Oval Office. You think and write with the President's interest in mind.

Now, having said that, my own mind immediately recoils because I suspect there were many moments when I personally wrote speeches that had much more, or a little more, of my own interests in it than the President's. And if that's true for me, it is far, far truer of some other men on the White House staff. But, again, the President knows this. At least I am certain that Lyndon Johnson knew it, and in his own expert way, made the proper adjustments and compensations.

Frankly, to leap ahead, for all my own criticisms of the speech writing operation and my own part in it, as something of a student of the presidency I think Lyndon Johnson was particularly well served in that aspect of his presidency. I would point, for instance, to the remarkable continuity of excellence--excellence of thought and of style in his messages to the Congress. Every one of these is a back-breaking operation. They are enormous compilations of fact, concept, and verbiage. And yet I hope someday that somebody does both a content and style analysis of them, because in my judgment they will hold up very well indeed.

The same, I think, is also true of what is popularly referred to as "Rose Garden rubbish." And seeing as I have the opportunity, I'd like to make a point for this private record anyway. Bill Moyers is given credit for that phrase, which is usually used in a pejorative sense, but it should be noted that Mr. Moyers was the last man in the White House ever to give a Rose Garden speech the back of his hand. Bill Moyers would write until dawn on any speech for any presidential occasion. They were all important to Bill because they were all important to the President.

Mc: Mr. Maguire, to continue on with this, an area which actually would touch upon policy making would be the occasions of the President ad-libbing in a speech. I wonder in the realm of speech coordinating and speech management what sort of provisions you make and what Mr. Johnson's attitude was towards ad-libbing.

M: It's an interesting question. It's interesting because it gets to one of the other central points of the President's needs as a speech maker and his style as a speech giver. I don't doubt that we will hear a good deal of what I would characterize as nonsense about Lyndon Johnson's speech commandments; for instance, that he wanted four-letter words, four words to a sentence, and two sentences to a paragraph. That's baloney! It's baloney because it ignores the most basic characteristic of the President. Lyndon Johnson is a very intelligent man, also a very sophisticated man, also a man, unbelievably, who has spent thirty years of his life making speeches. Now that simple longevity of experience is one of the principal determinants with which the White House writers had to work. He brought his own style of many years to every speech.

One of the components of his style, to be overly analytical for a minute, was that he very often spoke at length. Like many speakers, public speakers, public men, once he got going he was hard to stop. When I first entered the White House speechwriting picture we were on the crest of what I learned were recurring waves of displeasure about the length of the President's speeches. Mrs. Johnson was a factor in this periodic calling of attention to the fault. Recurringly, there would be emphasis in the speech operation on helping the President to

overcome this problem of inordinate length by keeping his speeches inordinately short. It follows that the worst disservice you could do for Lyndon Johnson was to give him a very long speech. The danger was always that it was open-ended. If there were fifteen or twenty minutes of written text, he just might add another fifteen minutes to it--not necessarily because you had failed as a writer to cover some points in the text, it would just be that given a receptive audience, given the presidential frame of mind on that day, given X number of X factors, he would simply wish to keep on talking.

I don't know of many people who have been bored by any Lyndon Johnson presentation of any length, but I suppose there are some. He is, frankly, at his best as an ad-lib speaker. I have no doubt whatsoever about that. He is one of the last of the spellbinders. He has within himself a forty foot shelf of anthologies, thesauruses, dictionaries, histories, lexicons, all of which he can draw up by the virtue of his magnificent memory and deliver with great effectiveness.

There were those rare but highly publicized occasions when for one reason or another, the President, as any other public speaker, might lose his hold on his audience, might lose his interest in the speech, might have a headache or a toothache, or other things on his mind, and what would come out would be gruel or worse. But it is true that we did, as a group, attempt to create or devise some artificial environment to match the best of the President's native style and avoid the worst. It is true that he preferred short sentences, but as I often said to myself and sometimes to other writers, who doesn't?

He made a great point of it in his meetings with the writers, and I suppose too much of a point because the more naive or feebleminded of them would concentrate on these neat little commandments instead of on the real point of the President's message. All we had to do was to look at any important Lyndon Johnson speech and you would find there the denial of four-letter words, four-word sentences, and all that bunk.

There was no denying the fact that he preferred short speeches. And, again, an intelligent reaction would have to be "Why not, when I'm giving five speeches a day in between fifteen crises?" But short speeches are not easy to write, not for any of us. It became almost routine in my own case for the President to regard me as his hatchet man. When he used that term first, it took me a while to understand that he just meant me to be the man who did the cutting of the over-long texts. It must have been quite irritating to Lyndon Johnson to ask time and time and time and time again for a five-hundred-word speech, and then lower the limit to a four-hundred-word speech, then to a three-hundred-word speech. For a short period we all thought there was not going to be any need for our services at all because the LBJ limit was down to about a hundred words. But as long and as often and as patiently, or as unhappily as the President asked for these short speeches, along would come the seven hundred, eight hundred, nine hundred, twelve hundred word drafts.

I don't think any of the writers who really reflects with some depth and perspective on his own personal experience would think that Lyndon Johnson played by the rules or was ruled by the speeech writing command-ments. Now that I think of it, one of my greatest continuing experiences

was to know that I could pick up the phone or go into the President's office at any hour of any day with a five thousand word speech and if I could make the case for it, he'd deliver it. That happened to me on two different occasions. Once I presented him with a memo at eleven o'clock in the morning, asking permission to write--and I spelled it out--a very long, a very thoughtful and very tough speech for a group of young men with whom he was meeting in the East Room at four p.m. He simply told Marvin Watson to give me the go-ahead. He got that speech at ten minutes to four, he read it, looked at me, and said: "It is long. Will they listen?" I forgot what I answered, but he stood up and gave a hell of a speech. They listened.

Here again, and I laugh, he added another twenty minutes to that speech. So that means that he gave almost a fifty-minute speech to a group of, at the most, sixty young men and women in the State Dining Room. And that's a gross disservice to the President by some very important measurements of the presidency. So we tried to keep these occasions to a minimum.

Of course one external operating principle that you're going by is the inherent relationship between any speaker and any audience. Short speeches are usually the best speeches, but not always. Adlai Stevenson and Winston Churchill, Jack Kennedy, you can think of hundreds of public speakers if you really put your mind to it--and think of their audience's reactions. People do not measure speeches in terms of length, not finally. The press does, because the press quite often has got nothing else to pick at. It's much easier to hold a stopwatch against a man and write a piece of copy about it than to think

about what the man said, because the thought is harder than simply watching your damned watch.

So these stories about long speeches would appear in the press, the President would react to them, and thereupon another wave would crest and for the next month we would all be most diligent about writing short speeches.

Mc: Was it in his planning that he would probably remark on his own some ten or fifteen minutes? I know that this would depend of upon his own feeling for his audience.

M: I never heard him discuss it, and I never heard it discussed with him. It was certainly an assumption of the Valentis, the Moyers, the McPhersons, and myself. Jack Valenti and Harry McPherson would attach considerable importance to it. And of course one of the most critical continuing functions of Valenti, McPherson, and myself was editing. We were, in the first instance, editing for length. I never met a writer in the White House yet whose speech I couldn't cut in half. But I happen,objectively, to be a good editor. Jack Valenti was an excellent editor.

In the second instance, you would edit for thought, for content, for point of view, for headlines. This is a normal function of the editor, so there is nothing very surprising in that. In fact, one could say that that is why a Lyndon Johnson could have inserted a Jack Valenti into the speech writing process, simply to edit for length--exclusive from the much more important assignments that he gave Jack.

Is that clear?

Mc: Yes.

M: It is also true, in my case, that I could literally have sat in my office, or offices, for the normal working day of every day of every week and do nothing but edit speeches. You have to flip that coin, of course. There were times when we speech editors added to a speech. I can remember many of those occasions in my own experience, and I believe I can recall quite a few in Jack Valenti's experience. Harry McPherson was an excellent editor in terms of editing for length. I think that he sinned much less than either Jack or myself by inflating the copy instead of truncating it.

But the editing job had those two dimensions to it. I mean, literally in spatial terms you could add or subtract.

Mc: Mr. Maguire, in terms of content, were there some things you knew to avoid or include? And I'm not speaking in terms of the commandments that you've mentioned, this would be more or less within the realm of his style.

M: Yes, but they're terribly simplistic, which meant they were automatic. The President wanted simplicity of language, simplicity of thought combined with elegance of thought but fitting the station of the man who was making the speech. He wanted substance in speeches, which may have been the greatest common denominator both of presidential complaint and the writer's striving. It is difficult, particularly in the case of Rose Garden speeches, to give a substantive speech to a group of young children; to some collection of ladies clubs; to a group of visiting teachers from Ireland. Yet there, too, is the excitement and the drama and the purpose of writing for the President.

If you're smart enough to think of something meaningful to say to these people, the President will say it. And in some instances, if you were fortunate in terms of presidential time and interest, Lyndon Johnson would suggest to you what he could say that would be of substance.

For example, you must have heard in talking to the writers of the terrible beating that the State Department always takes on their drafts. I'm ex-Foreign Service. I have many friends in State, I went out of my way in private meetings with Dean Rusk and Ben Read of the Secretariat, and many other important people down around Nick Katzenbach's level to try to break this problem. We all agreed that State Department drafts were lousy--not bad, lousy! We all agreed that one of the fundamentals of entrance to the Foreign Service as proven by examination and career advancement was facility with the English language. Ipso facto, we said. In the State Department there must be more and better writers than in any other agency or department in town. Where the hell were they! Now if the Secretary of State in the middle of the Vietnam war gives his personal attention to this problem,you know how serious it was. The President got quite testy about this problem. Reflecting his own testiness and my own temperament, I made it my business to break the log jam, but we never quite did. I honestly can recall only one draft received from State Department, and there were hundreds in these years, where I felt happily obliged to call up the man and congratulate him. This is something I commonly did. If you got a good draft, for instance from Justic Depart-

ment, who quite regularly sent over good drafts, it made good sense to call them up, get right to the man who did the writing--not the man above him and the man above that and the man above that, but get the man who sat down to the typewriter and tell him, "The President read this and he liked it." And you've won a friend for life. Staffers don't believe that Presidents read their drafts. But the State Department knew that the President was reading their drafts, and they also knew that he was hurling them on the carpet and calling them some rather choice names and yet we couldn't do anything about it.

Now this is all to the point of substance in speeches, which is the most important point. What the President was looking for from the Department of State, a collection of experts sitting in Foggy Bottom, was substance, not this terrible twaddle which is the particular bane of the diplomatic experience; not this gilded, stilted, baroque nonsense. A man like Joe Sisco could always give you substauce; Sol Linowitz could always give you substance; Nick Katzenbach could. But the problem was always how can we get them to sit down at the typewriter, because Joe and Nick and everyone else of any worth at State Department unfortunately had better things to do than write speeches.

Outsiders might wonder at that statement. After all, they are writing for the President of the country. But it's true. In fact speech writing has a secondary importance, secondary if it's lucky.

The same preoccupation was generally true of the White House in terms of my relationships with our in-house writers, and also of the writers in terms of their relationship with the departments.

For instance, when I assigned a speech or Valenti did or McPherson, a writer would be advised by us, or act on his own, to call up and check with one of the experts in the departments. It was very rare that you ever sat down and wrote a speech out of your own head. It happened, but perhaps if it happened too often you would have been in trouble. So the search for substance, as a red thread of significance running through this whole White House operation would result in such things as a checklist on my bulletin board above my desk of what I called "the network." There were two men in every department and important agency in the government on whom I felt I could rely. It was understood between all of us that when I needed to rely on them it was usually going to be after midnight on a Saturday. It was a fine system. They were a great bunch of men. They were not writers, not all of them, but they knew where to get the writers. And they had the clout in their own department if I called them at midnight or in any kind of a crunch to deliver me the expert I needed in ten minutes or else. Now that system was not even dreamed of when I came in as a White House Fellow, which is not to say anything about my own role, but it just shows you the way important systems within systems can be missing and can be developed. I regard the weekly writers' meeting as an essential, perhaps even a pivot of our operation. But, of course, other men who had the job before me got along without it. I don't really understand how they got along without their own "network," except one could think for instance of Bill Moyers. Bill had his network, but he didn't need to put it up on his bulletin board. One of Bill's great strengths, as is now publicly recognized, was his access

to this chosen group of purportedly bright young men throughout the government. Friends are awfully important. I learned from both Bill and Harry the names of maybe an additional twenty or thirty men and women--additional to my formal network--whom I could call on with some assurance of profitable results. At least I was always certain of a friendly reception, and this is not always the result of an urgent call from the White House.

The search for substance would include such occasions, and very importantly, as the visits of foreign heads of state. McPherson and I had our own network within a network in the foreign policy community. We had invaluable, and let me repeat invaluable, men in the NSC like Ed Hamilton, who is a marvelous writing, but who has no business writing. It isn't his job, and his job was a terribly important one. We had men like Spurgeon Keeney, Larry Eagleburger and Marshall Wright in the NSC. In the continuum of the years there were always in these critical NSC slots three or four men whom we could call, thrust a speech assignment upon, and have them produce. And some of these speeches the President gave with perhaps a one or two word change by myself or McPherson.

I think, even with a longer perspective, that this is probably the subsystem that McPherson and I established within the White House operating structure without really knowing it.

The President came to know these men as speech writers. He did so because we always called his attention to the fact that this foreign policy draft was written by Mr. X of NSC and given minor polish or editing by Maguire or McPherson. So I noticed in the last year on

several occasions the President would single out the Ed Hamiltons and other young men from NSC and designate them as--

Tape 2 of 2

Mc: Mr. Maguire, while I was changing the tape, we were discussing the problem, back again with the State Department, and you were telling me in effect what was substance in a speech.

M: We were talking about the difference in viewpoint between what a President considers to be substance and what the State Department considers to be substance. Now State has its right, its departmental viewpoint, which is not necessarily that of the President. But in our experience we found that the President was receptive to a State Department viewpoint, but it was simply not expressed. It was trappings of language, it was the most dreadful homilies about a foreign monarch coming here, and the opening paragraph of the State Department draft would inevitably equate the plateaus of his African land with the prairies of Texas. It was that kind of bull.

Mc: But you talked about specific people really being able to digest material, to use your phrase.

M: I was making the point that one specific problem, or one specific facet of the problem that I addressed myself to with the help of Secretary Rusk and Walt Rostow, was to eliminate the eleven names on the bottom of every State Department draft. It is simply not within the realm of human possibility to get any worthwhile page that has to be signed off by eleven people.

When Nick Katzenbach went in as under secretary, we thought we got

a great break. Nick was aware of this presidential problem. Furthermore, he took with him from the White House National Security Council staff young Larry Eagleburger. Larry had been one of my trusty dependables in the NSC complex. He was a young man who, for example, were the President of Zambia coming on a state visit, would stay behind in his White House office of a night and read quickly three or four books on Zambia, make a couple of calls to important friends in the foreign service, check it out with his wife, give it a glossing over while brushing his teeth in the morning, and come back with four hundred words that at least would have an angle. They would have a peg on which a hat could be hung without equating a fez with a Stetson, which is about all State was ever able to do. Or the Eagleburgers would never dare to talk about the revolutions of rising expectations. They went down looking for the nitty-gritty. There were many times when we could not find it, but at least we looked, and when you look it shows in the draft.

The anecdotal search, for instance, was quite important. I found it absolutely 100 percent impossible to ever find in a State Department briefing paper or draft any human anecdote, reference, conjunction, circumstance or setting that we could use to give some human dimensions to a dinner toast. And yet there, for Lyndon Johnson, and certainly for me, was the essence of the toast and of the welcoming arrival statement on the South Lawn. These things by nature, welcoming statements and toasts, walk along the brink of banality. And the opportunity we saw was quite the reverse. The first impression made upon a foreign visitor, no matter how experienced he is in the affairs of state, is a very important impression. And then think of the after-dinner toast literally being the last expression. It comes at the end of a one or two day meeting, and it becomes enormously

important.

But let's not be too hard on the State Department. As I also made the point--and I often did with the President, mildly--there really was no reason why any man or woman in State Department, Agriculture, Justice, Commerce, and all the rest should have the ability to write for the President. They did not know his style, they did not have the intensity of involvement and closeness to him that we of the staff did. Neither, of course, did they have any excuse for the true banality of the vast bulk of their efforts. I suspect the truth is, as usual, somewhere in between and I would be inclined to give State Department and the other drafting departments some small measure of the doubt.

Mc: Mr. Maguire, what about outside people? By outside, I mean outside of government. Or those who were in government, say at a Cabinet level, who were personal friends or had influence with the President. Did he often ask them to critique a speech he was about to give, or did he ask them for possible suggestions or drafts, and who were these people?

M: Something can be said of that aspect of the operation. I'm still not yet sure of where the bounds of presidential properties are.

First of all, let me say that, going back to the days of Valenti and all through my own days in the catbird seat, and Harry McPherson's, that we did make sporadic efforts to go outside to experts, both for drafts and critiques. We did this, first of all, at a pre-presidential level. In some instances the President did not even know that we were undertaking these efforts. That's not to say we were trying to hide it from him, it's just that it was much more a part of our business than it was his. I personally, I suppose, was one of the most ardent advocates of this

method, so let me say that in my own judgment it was a flawed effort from the first and we failed to make it yield a contribution of any great significance.

I still don't understand the reason why we failed. In the early days of my experience it was quite common to look up from your desk and see Barbara Ward, Norman Cousins, John Steinbeck, John Kenneth Galbraith--and let's get that name in the record, John Kenneth Galbraith--waving a Vietnam speech draft. Persons of such high expertise visited with Jack Valenti to prepare or critique presidential drafts. I don't believe this traffic existed in any White House office after the spring or summer of 1966. That part of it at least is explicable. Frankly, our outside manpower pool was severely curtailed by the Vietnam war. We were not popular on the campuses, we were not popular on the campuses, we were not popular in the think tanks, we simply did not have the depth and breadth of access that one might think any President should have. Compare our situation with that of Jack Kennedy, and we were simply bringing up the rear end. We had fine intermediaries in the White House, among them Douglass Cater, John Roche, Harry McPherson, Bill Moyers, Valenti himself, and in my own small way I could make phone calls and bring in outside experts.

I can recall our great preoccupation with the thematic subject of violence in America. Harry McPherson and I discussed outside help on several occasions, asking such a man as James Q. Wilson to do a first draft for the President. We had a similar challenge in the case of drugs. We needed outside experts there, even though there was a study being conducted within the government.

It also has to be said that we wanted very much to use these outside experts. There was an obvious dual, or perhaps even triple, advantage to such use. We not only thought to serve the President better by getting

him the best advice and, hopefully, the good prose of specialists in urban affairs, education, youth, poverty, etc. We also thought of the advantages of involving these people in the presidential process. And frankly we also thought of the advantages of having this connection known through calculated leaks to the press. But, as I said, in my own years the effort did not come to much.

Looking back to the fall of 1965, in other words the Valenti days, the flow of outside experts always peaked at the State of the Union time. It was quite routine to have as many as a dozen outside experts contribute full drafts of the State of the Union address or segments reflecting their own specialties or areas of special concern. I do not believe that happened after the State of the Union of 1966. I may be wrong, but I think we did State of the Union messages from January '66 on exclusively as a White House operation, at least in the initial conceptual and writing phase.

I make that distinction to answer your second point as to critiques of speeches, which are quite different from writing speeches. The President, as is fairly well known now, did have his own board of editors. These were such parties as Clark Clifford, Abe Fortas, Horace Busby. On given occasions, these editorial advisers might also include friends of the President such as Arthur Krim, Max Friedman, William S. White, and others.

Mc: Mrs. Johnson?

M: Lord knows, I should be clear on Mrs. Johnson's role in the speech writing process. If anybody should know about it, I should. I suppose it's really as simple, in the middle of all the complexities I can think of, as what I have said of the fundamentals of the President's

part and involvement in the speech process. It can be accepted that Mrs. Johnson saw every important speech and probably a good many inconsequential speeches. More importantly, Mrs. Johnson was unfailingly in the audience, and Mrs. Johnson unfailingly in her own special and magical way would make appropriate comments about the drafts. She is a fine writer herself, she is a very sensitive audience of one, and of course she knows her husband better than anybody in the world. She is not bashful about telling him what he does poorly on the speaker's platform. I personally always found her comments most insightful, quite often incisive and very helpful. And if that sounds like a testimonial, it is. She's a very good judge of Lyndon Johnson the speaker, as well as Lyndon Johnson the man.

The converse, or the only caution that I would erect is that which assumes Lady Bird had a formal or regularized place in the writing process. She did not. In fact, I think her most important contributions were her post facto comments. There are some marked exceptions, the largest being the President's farewell speech of March 31, 1968. There she had a very important role from probably first to last, but that's another story.

Mc: We'll get to that.

M: I was afraid you might.

Mc: That's a rather important one. Before we leave these outside advisers, were you ever on any occasion aware of a Clifford or a Fortas actually being asked by the President to give him suggestions on a particular topic or theme?

M: As apart from a particular speech?

Mc: As apart from being, as you said, sort of an editorial review.

M: Oh yes, I suppose those things were quite routine. You must recognize and consider that this may not have been a response to a specific presidential request. These advisers were of a caliber and of a closeness to the President where they would feel quite free to offer these suggestions. I find it quite within the bounds of possibility, in fact extremely likely, that gentlemen of this intimacy would indeed suggest to the President that he might give a speech on "subject X" within the next few weeks. In fact I know that this is one of the values that President Johnson found in such a group. That's why they qualified as his advisers. They could take initiatives. They had the intelligence and the other qualities to know of which they spoke, and the President simply invited them to do their speaking in one way or another.

This was routinized to the extent that penultimate outside editing and/or advice never came as a surprise to any White House writer. There is an edge of sarcasm to that, but it should not have ever come as a surprise. After all, we were dealing with words of enormous consequence and it would be a very foolhardy President indeed who did not avail himself of every human and even mechanical resource to check every one of those words very carefully. Just look back on the Kennedy experience. Look up to Hyannis Port today. Presidents are increasingly vacuum pumps. They can inhale the thoughts, the brilliance, the strengths of many men and women, and it's all part of the system. And analyzing that component of presidential conduct from the viewpoint of the speech operation, I certainly always considered it one of our great resources. That's precisely my point. That's why I think we failed, the writing team failed to emulate, if not duplicate, the President's personal powers of persuasiveness--his abilities to get the best thinking of the best men

and then put them into his own best words.

Of course it may be doing an injustice to some people who actually served somewhere within the executive family to ignore them in this process. Bob McNamara could qualify as a speech adviser while serving as Secretary of Defense; Dean Rusk was a very important speech analyst and editor; Leonard Marks had his moments. I know I'm forgetting a small but select handful of other men who shared in this process of review.

Mc: Let me take you back a minute to your remarks on ideas and substance of speeches, and a word that comes to mind is "phrase making" and the importance of it in a speech by the President. Are these purposeful attempts?

M: Yes, it's a fascinating subject. A quick reaction is that "phrase making" is important in direct proportion to the importance the press pays it, and that is a very great importance indeed. I think, to personalize it for a moment, that it was one of the great bonds that Valenti and I found. We both had an intuitive sense of what would make a headline, of where the press would leap, of what the lead should be, and you put that magic phrase "the lead" in quotes.

I think we also might have hoisted ourselves by our own petard because I noticed after a year or so that the President began asking me in very crisp phrases "What's the lead?" So we educated him. And of course sometimes there wasn't a lead.

Now that's a very commercial, or even crass, answer to your question, but it is the first one that comes to my mind.

A much more important aspect of phrase making is that in the days when presidential style has become words of unfathomable importance,

when style is a mystique that in turn leads to the mysteries of charisma, in that context a well-turned phrase can be worth a treaty, a political deal, a hundred thousand, or maybe even a million, votes. At least so I believe. Some of us paid a ferocious amount of attention to phrase making. We had a very calculated goal. "Make the Quotation of The Day in tomorrow's New York Times."

As we were leaving the White House in the final week, two or three of us tried at the last minute to give the President a special gift from his writing staff. It would have been a compilation of all the New York Times Quotations of The Day, and I for one was surprised to find how many of them there were. I think there were over one hundred and eighty.

Now that of course is a flawed measurement like a great many of the other measurements I have given here, but it is significant because it was significant to the writers and it was significant to the President. Lyndon Johnson appreciated a well-turned phrase. He had the well-turned phrases of Dick Goodwin, Jack Valenti, Harry McPherson was a beautiful phrase maker, all of this to call upon. And yet from the short perspective of a recent expellee from the White House, one does wonder what it all means.

Phrase-making is a technical skill. What you do is to sit down at your typewriter and think of your audience--a husband and a wife, two people from that audience--getting into a taxi cab after leaving the presidential banquet or dinner or whatever it was. And you try to give them a phrase to take home with them. You hope that if you give them a phrase, they in turn will give it to another couple the next morning and another couple and another couple, etc. Some of the more romantic of us writers would always uphold Churchill as the master of that art. Jack

Kennedy and Franklin Roosevelt, certainly Lincoln, some of Wilson, all of these men lived in the rooms of the White House with you. You were always thumbing through their works, and as people who devoted a good part of your day to speech making you would have to be remarkably insensitive or horribly out of place not to respond to other presidential language. You wanted your man to be as good as they were.

We also, I think, were living in a time in White House history where the phrase had become something of uncommon importance, and that of course was the legacy of Jack Kennedy. No speech writer could ever forget President Kennedy's inaugural address, and if he were a thorough professional he could never forget the reception of it and what that meant in terms of the launching of John Kennedy's presidency.

And then down deep at the botton where writers live and work, phrase making is very satisfying. Speeches come easy to some, come hard to others, but a phrase, a sentence, a short paragraph that has both substance and style gives you a handle for your pride, a concrete target to measure your next speech against, and it gives you the very human but very important opportunity to have the President pick our that sentence and ask who wrote it. And that too is what writing is all about.

Let me go into this for a minute. There are great dangers to phrase making, and their common denominator is that the phrase must fit the man. There is absolutely no sense in putting the words of Plato into the mouth of Lyndon Johnson, and yet writers did try. It took me a while to learn that Montaigne and some of the finest literary minds newly lifted to public prominence by President Kennedy had no place in the lexicon of the Johnson writers. Sometimes, for reasons of circumstance, phrases from other men and other times and other vocations were put in Lyndon Johnson's

mouth. He delivered them. And then the kickback would come in the press. Sometimes I have even personally heard it come in the audience where someone would remark upon the pretentiousness of Lyndon Johnson "pretending to know who Camus was." These traps kept on opening up and I think our awareness of them grew, but you did always feel that you were denied a basic resource.

The same general rule applies to phrases that were not borrowed but constructed firsthand for Lyndon Johnson. They had to fit the man. Just as importantly, they had to fit his hour--his hour now, not the hours of his past, of Texas, of the Hill country, even of the Congress, and certainly never should they smack, as Harry McPherson always used to say, of "the age of courthouse politics." This too was a danger of which we were well aware as a writing team, but we did stumble sometimes, forgetting the kind of man and the kind of times ours were.

Mc: Let me ask you if there are some specifics of the well-turned phrase that come to mind, and who produced them or created them.

M: Specifics in a larger sense would of course have to include such things as the President's Howard University speech; the speech in the great rotunda of the Congress on civil rights was a considerable highlight to me.

Mc: The one on the Selma, Alabama question early?

M: No, that was before my time. There are to my mind innumerable passages of great eloquence and great meaning, great significance, in the presidential messages which, of course, get low visibility compared to those speeches he personally delivers. I should think that a book of the President's dinner toasts would be quite a surprise in what it says of speaking grace and content. I don't mean to duck the literal meaning of your word "specific," but my problem is that having confessed to an

appreciation of the phrase-making process. I don't really believe that some of them should be singled out. For example, presidential humor is a commodity that is seriously underestimated in the pleasure it can give to a reader. President Johnson is an extremely funny man, and he gave the writers full rein on humor from the beginning of '66 onward. Before that I understand there was some hesitancy on his part as to his ability to handle that medium within a medium.

I should think that Lyndon Johnson's State of the Union messages would hold up in comparison to those of any modern President. If there is some doubt as to the values and priorities of speeches given in the Rose Garden, one can get a clear indication of their worth from reading the speeches Lyndon Johnson gave therein. Some of his foreign policy speeches on his trips abroad elicited responses given directly to me by members of foreign governments that were most complimentary, and I think genuinely offered. I can think of the night at the Lincoln Monument where the President went to mark the occasion of Carl Sandburg's death, where he gave a most moving speech. It was somewhat of an unusual speech for Lyndon Johnson, and yet it just fitted him like a Stetson. And that was another occasion where he did not ask for a speech. We did not even know until the last moment whether he would go to the ceremony. But I have personal associations with Sandburg, and I had John Roche on the staff whose interest in that man and his metier was equally strong, so John and I collaborated. And I believe that was one of Lyndon Johnson's finest hours, at least in the small area of speech making.

Just to flick back for a moment to humor, it is a very cloudy area of White House operations, at least as far as authorship goes. That of course is even more generally so of who writes any speech for any President,

and you've only got to read the memoirs of former presidential assistants to know the continuity of that problem. But in terms of how the President can handle humor in its simplest sense, all one has to do is to listen to the tape of his appearance at the Alfred E. Smith dinner in the Waldorf-Astoria in the middle of the presidential campaign. Lyndon Johnson made up his mind to go to that dinner, which was at eight p.m. in New York, at about six thirty p.m. that evening. He only made it up after I personally had beseeched him on the phone and McPherson, at my absolute insistence, had also called him. And it was just a great night. It must have been great because he got five whole minutes on Huntley-Brinkley. And the point of that broadcast was that Lyndon Johnson stole the show from Dick Nixon, Hubert Humphrey, Cardinal Cooke, Tom Dewey, Nelson Rockefeller, John Lindsay, and at least another dozen dignitaries on the dais. He was a wonderfully easy man to write humor for.

I would point to another speech of some political significance which was an unusually good combination of substance, style, and humor. That was the dinner toast for the last visit of Prime Minister Wilson of Great Britain. I know about it because it was a solo effort of mine. I'm a Britisher at heart. Great Britain was in great trouble. I have a circle of English journalist friends whose brains I picked for two weeks. I wrote a massive speech, worked two days on the accompanying memo, and the President's first call was to ask me was I out of my mind. Well, to cut a long story short, it wound up with him accepting the speech at its length of some seventeen hundred-eight hundred words after he had called in five outside advisers--Dean Rusk, Nick Katzenbach, George Ball, Max Friedman, William W. White. He also had me meet with our ambassador to Great Britain in my office, and I think it worked out very indeed, at least that was the reception

in the British press. We had called the headlines right. They simply said "LBJ backs Great Britain all the way."

Now where were we?

Mc: You were still giving me specifics. Let me ask you some specific questions. What was your reaction to such famous LBJ-isms as the "Nervous Nellies" and the "cussers and the doubters" when those came out?

M: Well, I suppose my feelings were human. All I can say is they wore off rather quickly. Any man's entitled to an occasional ad lib, including Presidents. I don't really remember any more about it than that.

Mc: What about the report that there quite often were duplicate assignments unbeknown to the people involved, of such things as speeches or messages? Did you do any direction of that?

M: Some of it was inevitable, I don't think there was any great secret. Nor do I believe that the duplicity which your question must imply ever actually obtained. It was understood, at least among the circle in which I moved in the White House, that President Johnson had a certain operating style and within that style was the habit of checking one question with ten advisers and using multiple sources, let us say, of borrowed strength.

Going down the ladder in importance, I don't think there was ever any calculated duplication of speech writing at the intermediary level. Now if you take a State of the Union speech, of course, there were five or six writers working on it at all times. In fact, there were five or six nonwriters working on it at all times But let me clarify this in another direction. I never consciously gave duplicate assignments in speeches. I <u>did</u> take it upon myself from time to time to do my own version of a draft that I knew another writer was working on. If the writer, for instance, was Harry Middleton, Harry would know this because

I would tell him, and then we would simply match draft against draft and maybe put them both together. There were,of course,some writers you wouldn't dare do this with; or some occasions I would do it, hoping that you might force them to quit, because you could never fire them.

There was another area, which I would call "slippage," and it had perhaps two dimensions to it. The first would be sheer accident, a snafu. I remember once that I wrote a speech and Harry McPherson wrote a speech, and they both went to the President, which was disaster. Incidentally, that's sin number one on his book, as it should be. He hates to get two speeches and to be asked to decide. Now many men of humbler and yet exalted commercial position that I know method. We also know, at least from some versions of the record of FDR, that he liked it. He would get one in-house draft and one draft from the outside. But Lyndon Johnson made it very clear that he did not wish that to occur.

I don't know of an occasion, and I suppose this is the important answer to your question, when the President would have any involvement in any of that nonsense at all. But I am saying that by the nature of White House operations, for better or for worse, it could happen, and I know of a few occasions when it did happen.

Mc: Who were the specific members of your group of speech writers that would be in-house?

M: As I said, we began with Sparks, Hardesty, and Maguire. We added Jack McNulty, Bill Shawn stayed a short time, Peter Benchley. Hardesty added two writers of his own--he was spun off into a subdepartment of his own--and they were Leo Janos and Bob Klein. I hope to heavens I'm not omitting anybody at this level.

Around this nexus or core, there revolved satellite but important figures like Whitney Shoemaker who could be called upon to draft more than letters upon occasion. There was Eliska Hasek, who contributed presidential greetings and written messages to groups, of which a great number inundated the White House daily. We had a young man named Walter Coyne on loan from HEW for a period of six months, I suppose, and he turned out a couple of good speeches. Side by side,but of course above that, there was the level of the Caters and the McPhersons who did their own writing in their own fields. Shot through all this of course is Bill Moyers, who wrote very heavily for about a year or so. I would think that between the time that Valenti left and the time of Moyers leaving, Bill was the number one writer and also the general editor. There was young Ervin Duggan who frankly did most of the drafting for Douglass Cater, and he was on my list. He was by presidential edict available 100 percent of the time as a writer. I did put in Harry Middleton, didn't I?

Mc: Not in this group at this time, you've mentioned him several times.

M: Harry Middleton was hired toward the end, I suppose he put over a year in the White House and, again for this private record, he is the most thoroughly professional writer I've ever met, and in the writers' world perhaps the greatest servant of the President. You can't do any better than Middleton.

There was another area which I would find very difficult to designate as "writers," but it spun around the shadow world of Joe Califano. Larry Levinson worked closely with Harry Middleton on many speeches, statements, and messages. Matt Nimetz, I think, was a good draftsman. And at different times there were one or two other people in that orbit who would turn in various drafts for various purposes.

Come to think of it, I want to back up and take back something of what I said to that question of yours about duplication. It was quite possible that duplication was contrived and effected in Califano's office. I believe I do remember, now that I pause upon it, that by the nature of their operation,which was always in some conflict with some other operation, they would initiate a draft or they would play it this way: They would,on their own,go to a writer and club him with the words "the President told me" and then ask him to do a draft. Some of the writers were stupid enough to go ahead on the basis of this and undertake a draft. At the same time a similar draft and, in your terms, a duplicating draft could be in the works through other mediums. So if anybody has got any complaints coming, that's probably what they're talking about.

I do recall there was a period of several months where we had to get that ironed out. Frankly, I've always given all the credit to Middleton because I know that I didn't succeed in smoothing those problems with Mr. Califano and his boys, and yet somehow and quite suddenly they smoothed out and it was coincident with Middleton's arrival. I think he performed a very, very important staff function there, perhaps without him knowing it or even me knowing it. All I know is when Harry arrived a lot of problems disappeared. That's a great thing to be able to say about a writer.

Mc: Mr. Maguire, did the President always have prepared remarks or some sort of briefing notes when he addressed a group? I'm thinking of all levels--well, let's exclude the obvious.

M: It was the President's habit to expect either a draft or some form of briefing paper, what we would call talking points for speaking occasions.

Mc: This would include his Cabinet meetings, the Tuesday lunches even?

M: Not the Tuesday lunches, not the Cabinet meetings of the last two years. Valenti and I in '65 and early '66 did prepare statements for the President to read at Cabinet meetings. These were in no way hortatory or stylistic. They were more commonly one-page summations of highly technical programs, capsulizations, compressions of points that the President wanted to get across. The matching habit of the President in terms both of these Cabinet prepared papers, the talking point, cards, and also many of his regular speeches, was to simply use them as a departure point.

In fact, at one time for a period of certainly six months and perhaps even a year the writing group operated on another dynamic. It was that presidential speeches should be measured as to their success in terms of how little the President used the written text. This was a source of great disquiet to one or two of the writers, and I think understandably so. These two had come into the White House as professional, and I repeat professional, speech writers from the private sector. They earned their living as speech writers, a very good living. None of the rest of us had any of this formality of expertise. But these two men felt, and again I say, with some justice, that this measurement was curious at best and probably destructive at worst, that a speech writer's effectiveness was to be measured by how little the President used him as an instrument.

Mc: Who were these two men?

M: Jack McNulty and Bill Shawn. Jack was a professional speech writer for John D. Rockefeller and Bill Shawn was a professional speech writer for Henry Ford.

I don't recall the justification or the underpinnings for this fleeting but important philosophy of speech writing. It did however exist.

I think it must have been at a time when we were pretty soggy as a group, and there was such a time. Morale was down as a group, there was no visible or forceful or explicable manager of the speech unit, and I tend to think that must have been a good part of our attitude, that maybe it was best that we just serve the President as sets of crutches. In other words, that we gave him a manuscript to lean on while hoping that he wouldn't use it. Because, looking back on it, it is a crazy postulate.

Mc: Did within your group of writers specialties evolve? Could you sort of pin them on the man concerned?

M: Well, some men brought their own specialties obviously. If you start at the top, Harry McPherson had great expertise in cultural affairs, having served as Assistant Secretary of State in that office. Douglass Cater had a built-in expertise, as I mentioned, in health, education, and welfare. The expertise of course flowed from the fact that they were the daily policy men in these fields, and there is no greater expertise. This also, now that I come upon it from this perspective, is what bothered the writers most about non-association with the President. I think what they were really getting at, as I sometimes had to grapple with, is the question "How on earth am I to write a meaningful, substantive, stylish, presidential speech if I don't know the policy?" It's a huge and aggravating question. It is doubly and triply vexing when a writer, particularly sitting in the Executive Office Building, gets an assignment from someone called Valenti or Maguire, then sits down and writes it, tapping whatever limited sources of expertise he has within or without the White House, putting in phone calls to <u>the</u> policy office in the White House that handles the theme of the speech, and having those phone calls <u>refused</u>; then sending his draft over to the Valentis or

the Maguires and seeing it chopped up and torn apart by the insertion of policy material. This is a labyrinth. There is perhaps no more complicated or torturous road you could pursue to the point of answering the important questions about the writing system, and yet I don't know of it ever really being any different under any other President. There were always insiders, the Sam Rosenmans, the Ted Sorensens, the Rexford Tugwells, who wrote the real stuff. And on the fringers there were others who were writing the froth, only sometimes the froth could boil up or become by some perversion or accident substance.

Mc: Were personal philosophies considered an assignment of speeches?

M: They were in an informal sense. Anybody who had a managerial function, whose essential purpose was to use the strengths and talents of a given number of writers, would naturally try to work to the strengths of each writer. The strengths did vary certainly, but not exclusively and perhaps maybe even not most importantly in the sense of the different specializations of different writers. Benchley, for instance, arrived as a totally apolitical creature, which was a great astonishment to many people, but Benchley was a very, very useful writer. He was extraordinarily facile. He's what we call a first copy man. He could sit down at a typewriter and bang it out. Will Sparks came from the Defense Department, Bob Hardesty came from Post Office, Jack McNulty had avowed interests in population control, and he also backed into the cultural scene. Ervin Duggan had definite likes and dislikes as regards speech assignments. He was a superb writer if he liked the theme. Middleton was the compleat professional. Middleton didn't give a damn about the assignment, he did care in the sense that he too of course had his favorites, but anything you gave Harry Middleton he would give you his best in return.

Some writers were supposedly more humorous than others. The difficulty there was that they were certainly more humorous than others in person. The problem was to get it down on paper. Some writers were by the nature of a writer more insightful about their own work than others. You could give a manuscript back to one-third of the writers with a terse instruction, "Cut by two hundred words," and it would come back cut by two hundred words. With other writers you would never dare, because you would spend the next six hours wrangling about it. Or the writer would sit down and spend six hours writing a memorandum justifying his text. So the best and easiest and the most effective thing to do was to simply cut it yourself or rewrite it yourself.

Some of us also at different times found it incumbent upon us to develop specialties. Somebody had to handle NASA. It's curious, in the euphoria of Apollo XI, to think how hard that was to handle. But for some strange reason we didn't have a space enthusiast, whereas you would think that we would, just by the nature of the human condition in the 1960's.

Harry McPherson was a great lawyer. He handled that kind of writing, among other kind of writings, much to our gratitude.

There were also large areas of expertise missing. That goes without saying, because in the course of one day you could be literally writing on three or four different subjects. But all in all, I think as a group we had a pretty broad range, and what holes existed by human nature or other circumstance, we also were capable of filling.

Mc: Mr. Maguire, I'd like to wind up this session. I see it's getting late for you and I'm really taking too much of your time. But this is something in a very light vein and I wanted to remember to ask you about it

because I've heard a very funny story in connection with it. It's regarding your office space in the White House.

M: That's a pretty broad question. What haveyou heard specifically?

Mc: Just the spatial efforts made.

M: I don't know what happened to me, but it's certainly true that the President thinks it's worth dwelling upon, usually humorously. He accuses me of holding the all-time record of the numbers of offices occupied and the amount of money spent on decorating same.

Very quickly, I began in the EOB and moved to Valenti's office, which was one-and-a-half away from the President; then moved downstairs outside Bob Kintner's office; then into Kintner's large office; then into the Ladies Room, which was converted for the purpose.

Mc: That's the one I had heard which was rather unusual.

M: And from the Ladies Room back to a very large corner office, and then inexplicably they tore out what I understood was the White House vault and made an office for myself and four secretaries. I haven't bothered to keep count, I don't know what that final number of offices comes to.

The Ladies Room incident, which has been well publicized, was fairly humorous, although I certainly didn't think so at the time. We obviously had a great space problem in the White House. It was compounded in my case by the fact that I wound up at one period with four secretaries, most commonly three. In addition I had on call four typists and/or secretaries from Correspondence, so at one time or another during the day there were usually four or five people in my office. These people, apart from the usual office routine, were also using three very large electric speech typewriters, all of which we assumed should be in the one general area. That,incidentally,is a problem that President Nixon's

people have been able to solve simply by divorcing the writers and the speech managers from the whole mechanical contrivances, and it sounds like a very good idea.

No one really knows yet, least of all me, whose idea it was to rip out the Ladies Room and install me in a stall, as they were saying, but it really wasn't that bad. I went out of my way with the White House decorator and made enough of an impression on a small enough budget that the President came down one night and pawed his feet around my orange carpet and looked at what he called my"LSD wallpaper"and said that he thought I'd done a fine job of decorating it and he would never have known it was a Ladies Room.

After I left the Ladies Room they installed the whole teleprompter operation therein. I was alone in it, and it was fairly small, but now they have four Signal Corps men in it.

I suppose I should also put down for the record the funniest thing that happened about that Ladies Room, and you can imagine how many funny or avowedly funny comments there were. I walked in the second morning and found sitting on my desk an actual toilet bowl made out of white plastic in which was inserted a large bunch of flowers. This, it turned out, was a gift from my secretaries under the prodding of Jeanie Thrift, who had ordered the item by mail catalog. But on my desk at home I still have the little plaque, the little brass plate saying, "Ladies Room," and I'll cherish it forever.

Mc: Okay, good.

[End of Tape 2 of 2 and Interview II]

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