INTERVIEWEE: Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr.

INTERVIEWER: Joe B. Frantz

November 4, 1971

F: This is an interview with Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr. in his office in New York City on November 4, 1971. The interviewer is Joe B. Frantz. Arthur, I suppose the place to pick this up with you would be in 1960. Had you any particular acquaintance with Johnson prior to that time?

S: I had known Johnson when he was Majority Leader, I'd known far better very close friends and supporters of his, especially Jim Rowe and Phil Graham. At Jim Rowe's urging I'd seen Johnson two or three times, and I had one long talk with him in '57, described in A Thousand Days* We had a perfectly affable acquaintance, though I am sure that Johnson regarded me with a certain detachment, as some kind of Eastern intellectual associated with Adlai Stevenson, for whom he did not have a high regard.

F: Yeah. Did Jim Rowe or Phil Graham ever talk to you about his Presidential ambitions or their ambitions for him outside of what you've already said?

S: Well, I remember Jim Rowe talking to me, I believe in 1959, when he had decided to support Humphrey, and saying that Johnson was his preference but that Johnson had made it clear to him that he was not a candidate.

F: In '59.

* A Thousand Days, pp. 10-11

S: Now I was never quite clear on that. Jim Rowe is a very honest man but Lyndon Johnson is a very complicated man. He might have said to Jim Rowe, "I'm not planning to do it," and at the same time have said to himself that it would be highly useful to have Jim Rowe working for Humphrey in case the Humphrey thing collapsed.

F: I picked up here and there the allegation that Joe Kennedy, Sr. had at one time suggested that Johnson would make a good leader with Kennedy running second on the ticket, and sought to bring his boy along to place them in line. Did you ever pick up anything like that?

S: No, I've seen in President Johnson's memoirs a recollection of a phone call from Joe Kennedy in 1955, to the effect that the Kennedys thought he ought to be President. I never heard either John Kennedy or Robert Kennedy say anything like this. John Kennedy on the other hand had a high regard for Lyndon Johnson and a certain affection for him.

F: I think the men understood each other as two pros.

S: Kennedy, I think, not only had great regard for the power of Johnson's personality and his parliamentary skills but was also fascinated by him as an authentic American personality. He used to speak of him as a "riverboat gambler." He had many misgivings about and differences with Johnson, but I think he retained considerable regard for him. This does not mean, though, that I think he wished him ever to be President or to succeed him as President.

F: Going back to this team around Stevenson in '59 and '60, one of them was Walt Rostow and did Walt show any evidence in those days of developing into what we've come to call a hard-liner?

S: You mean around Kennedy?

F: Yes, well, first I think, no, you're right. Rostow. It was after you'd left Stevenson and gone over to Kennedy.

S: Well, Stevenson constantly told everyone publicly and privately he was not a candidate. I had what later seemed misguided scruples about coming out for Kennedy so long as Hubert Humphrey was in the contest because of our long association with ADA. Ken Galbraith, who was much more trenchant about it, was not stopped by this scruple. Therefore, I did not come out for Kennedy until after West Virginia.

F: In this '60 campaign I don't suppose there's anything really for you to add at Los Angeles that you haven't already told and that's a negative way of putting it.

S: I can add here because I did not say this in A Thousand Days, that the account I give of the choice of Vice President was personally told to me by Robert Kennedy and I think that it's the authentic account at least so far as Robert Kennedy is concerned.

F: Were there any real feelings that the threatened revolt would be a real revolt?

S: Well, there was for a moment. You know the chaos and fatigue in the last days of the convention. The important point is that the Kennedy brothers were astounded when Johnson accepted it, but then John Kennedy felt that as soon as Lyndon Johnson--

F: It wasn't a token offering; it was a sincere offering?

S: Well, it was a sincere offering that no one supposed would be accepted. Once he showed an interest in it, John Kennedy felt an obligation to follow through on it and talked to Sam Rayburn and so on. As it developed and as the liberal revolt began to spread, Robert Kennedy particularly thought that it was a great mistake.

F: Well now Mr. Sam didn't think that he ought to take it?

S: Originally, and then--

F: And it's always been of some interest to me why he did. I can give you some explanations, but I mean they are--

S: Well, I later talked to Rayburn about it. As I recall, he said that the notion of Nixon becoming President was intolerable to him, and he thought that if Johnson could make the difference he should do it. Or perhaps Vice President Johnson told me that. In any case I think that I have really nothing new to add to the account in A Thousand Days except to explain the sources.

F: Was there much worry in the Kennedy end of the camp during the campaign about Johnson's campaigning style and tactics and the fact that he might go off on his own sort of little --

S: I don't recall any. I was not on the Kennedy campaign staff. I was off speaking in other parts of the country, but I would say both then and later that John Kennedy's feeling was that Lyndon Johnson was a loyal and scrupulous Vice President.

F: He took the second violin.

S: I think Johnson did this at great psychic cost for a man of his overpowering temperament; but he submitted himself to exacting self-discipline, which President Kennedy fully appreciated.

F: Was this ever spelled out by President Kennedy or was it just tacit that this is sort of Vice Presidential behavior?

S: No, I think Kennedy appreciated it. There was one curious episode at the start, which Dick Neustadt can tell you about in more detail. Some effort was made on Johnson's behalf and with his consent to allocate to him through executive order a grant of powers. This astonished Kennedy and Johnson, once it was ignored, did not press. After that I think that Johnson was a loyal and effacing Vice President. He never did leak to the press. He was obviously frustrated in all sorts of ways.

F: As you know, there is criticism of him as Vice President in the early days on the charge that he wanted to continue as a sort of Senate Majority Leader.

S: Well, the Senate took care of that.

F: Yes.

S: I mean what he did offended the Senate.

F: But there's no problem to the Kennedy Administration.

S: I don't think President Kennedy felt that it was necessary for him to overrule the Democrats in the Senate on this count. Also he was unwilling to confide his legislative program to the Vice President, which is quite right. Johnson would never as President have given veto power over his legislative program to the Vice President. Johnson somewhat resented all this, and he said to me, and I'm sure he said it much more

to a lot of other people, that he didn't feel that his knowledge and contacts on the Hill were being used. But Kennedy quite rightly wanted his own man to control this; someone he could give orders to, O'Brien rather than Johnson. As I recollect, when Johnson was from time to time called up on the Hill, he wasn't all that effective actually.

F: His role had changed.

S: The Vice President isn't that effective. There were a lot of resentments. I mean a lot of people had been pushed around earlier were not prepared necessarily to --

F: Back to the campaign for a moment, did any of the Kennedy group talk to you about what they considered was Johnson's particular contribution to the campaign?

S: Every campaign begins with the theory that the President and Vice Presidential candidacies should be synchronized. They never are. There's no orchestration.

F: You don't really have a good traffic manager in there, do you?

S: No, they have a sort of schedule so that they won't be speaking at the same time on the same night, and they have a sort of general agreement of a broad sort on issues. But both candidates are presumably intelligent men, and when the Vice Presidential candidate reads the Presidential candidates speeches, he knows the line. I think it was felt that Johnson did verywell in the campaign, and was enormously helpful. However, I've never believed the theory that had Johnson not been on the ticket, Kennedy would not have won. I think that he would not have carried Texas without Johnson, but he could have lost Texas and still

won comfortably. But Johnson certainly helped.

F: Did, as far as you know, did the President start sending Johnson on these foreign trips in a sense to give a normally hyperactive man something to do or did he really feel that this was necessary and he couldn't devote the time to it himself?

S: Well, I think it's some of both, I think the one case where he really felt that it was important for Johnson to go, when he couldn't go, was the trip to Berlin in '61. Johnson was not very enthusiastic about going, and really great pressure had to be brought on him to go. That particularly sticks in my mind as an occasion where Kennedy felt that if he couldn't go, the Vice President had to go.

F: Any particular reason why?

S: There was a great crisis, and he wanted to send the Vice President to show the American commitment to West Berlin.

F: Was he satisfied with the result?

S: Well, the whole trip was symbolic. Johnson didn't have to do anything except go there and be there, and as I said Johnson resisted going.

F: Why do you think he resisted?

S: I've never been clear why he resisted.

F: We'd have to ask him, and he probably doesn't know.

S: I'm sure he doesn't remember it, but you ought to ask someone; he did resist going. The trip to Southeast Asia in '61 was really, I think, because the Vice Presidency, Joe, as you know, is not a job, and when you have a man of great energy and restlessness -- the two things that he had were

the space agency and the equal employment thing, and neither of them fulfilled him -- foreign travel was a great outlet. But the Berlin thing was something which Kennedy regarded as absolutely essential.

F: And then there were all the jokes that made the cocktail parties and made the press and so forth on Lyndon to an effect that he'd been shunted into hiding. Were these currency around the White House, or was this something that was dreamed up after hours?

S: Well, I understand that President Johnson feels that there was a great feeling of disdain or exclusion on the part of the Kennedy staff, though not on the part of President Kennedy, against him. I did not see this or feel it. Kennedy himself was very scrupulous in the first place to include Johnson in everything, and in the second place to prevent any kind of belittling remarks.

F: He himself was never patronizing?

S: He himself never was. I mean he knew that they disagreed on things. He knew that Johnson disagreed on the policy toward Diem; Johnson was much more in favor of Diem. He knew that in the Cuban missile crisis that Johnson was very gloomy about the policy that Kennedy wisely adopted. He knew that Johnson was unhappy about the sale of wheat to the Soviet Union. But he respected Johnson's loyalty. He liked Johnson personally and would not have tolerated any criticism of Johnson. But you know Johnson wasn't the issue. Everyone was working very hard at things and with Johnson as Vice President we saw a lot of George Reedy who were fully liked and fully accepted and worked with the Kennedy

staff. I think that Johnson's persecution feeling on that was quite odd.

F: Interviewer's note: a short interruption for him to take a phone call.

F: We were talking, of course, about the use of Johnson in the Johnson joke, or Johnson as a joke.

S: This was simply not the case so far as my experience goes. Johnson was ignored only as all Vice Presidents are ignored. Johnson himself became increasingly subdued. When I mentioned the psychic cost of this self-effacement, I remember that by 1963, he would come to meetings and sit there silently and very gloomily and respond only to direct questions.

F: I was going to ask: in things like the NSC meetings, did he sort of have an equal voice with the other people that were there to offer whatever advice they could, or did he tend to speak only when spoken to?

S: Well, in meetings that I was in he spoke on the whole only when the President brought him into the thing. Then he would speak mostly not to the substance of the thing but to the politics of it, and particularly the question of congressional management. But I got the sense of an increasingly frustrated and gloomy man, so his presence became almost spectral by 1963. On the other hand he was continuously loyal to the President. He probably would say he made some kind of internal decision that he was going to be loyal and self-effacing, but I hardly ever remember him speaking up in meetings on the substance of policy.

F: Was there a feeling at this time that he and Bobby weren't meant for each other?

S: In restrospect that condition existed.

F: It wasn't anything you had to tiptoe around?

S: No, the chemistry was wrong. I think Johnson never forgave, at least he never forgot, that Robert Kennedy tried to pull him out of the Vice Presidential thing. They came into very sharp conflict in the Committee for Equal Employment Opportunities.

F: Well, there used to be a story I guess second or third hand, that was a certain jockeying between the two of them to see who could gain the most credit for getting on with the Civil Rights activities, was this noticeable or --

S: Well, I was only aware of it at the time through Arthur Goldberg and Bill Wirtz. They can give you a more specific story. In essence, Johnson wanted to attain compliance as much as possible through voluntary efforts. Robert Kennedy came increasingly to feel that this approach was not working, and that Johnson and a man named Hobart Taylor, whom Kennedy regarded as a sort of Uncle Tom, were misrepresenting or exaggerating the results of voluntary compliance. This wasn't a personal thing, since the great advocate of the voluntary approach was Bobby Troutman of Atlanta, who was a close friend of Robert Kennedy's. But Robert Kennedy felt increasingly that the Commission was not doing what it was supposed to do and it couldn't do it under this theory and that Troutman and Taylor were not getting anywhere and that Johnson was wrong both in supporting them and then overclaiming for the results. The issue was quite serious and substantive. Johnson was offended

by the intensity with which Robert Kennedy questioned the results of the voluntary approach. Goldberg and then Wirtz supported Kennedy. It was not a matter of competing for public credit, because the whole operation was practically unknown to the public. Robert Kennedy simply felt very strongly that both for the sake of justice and for the record of the Administration, this had to be a hell of a lot better than it was doing, and that the methods which Johnson was advocating were inadequate to reach the result.

F: In your sequence of crisis, like at Oxford and Autherine Lucy at Alabama and so on, did Johnson put in his two bits worth as a semi-Southerner or did he pretty well let --

S: I do not remember him being involved at all in the actual decisions and policies on these things. I think that they were handled essentially in the Department of Justice and that, when they reached a crisis point, President Kennedy and Ted Sorensen would be involved. In 1963 there was a general effort through the government to get businessmen in the South involved. McNamara and Dillon and Clark Clifford and so on made calls to business leaders. I do not recall Johnson being brought into the actual decisions. On the other hand, a decision was made in the summer of '63 to hold a series of meetings at the White House with representative groups from the business community, ministers, lawyers and so on. The sessions were addressed by the President, the Attorney General, and the Vice President. Johnson was extremely effective at

those, and at the one or two I attended, I thought more effective than the President or Attorney General. He spoke with a kind of evangelical force which I think was very impressive to everybody. But for example, the Oxford, Mississippi thing, which was the one I was most intimately involved in, as far as I know, Johnson was not involved. On the other hand Kennedy may have, perhaps, called him quietly for suggestions.

F: What about his activities in heading up the space program for the President?

S: Well there I just don't know. Jerry Wiesner and other people would know. The impression I had that this was again sort of a nominal thing and that Jim Webb and Jerry Wiesner were much more active in it, but I really can't --

F: When we get down to that fateful November of 1963, did Johnson make a strong representation for Kennedy to go to Texas, since Texas is one of the question mark states as 1964 approaches. Or was this pretty much a decision arrived at on political reality at the White House level?

S: I just don't know the answer to that. My memory is that Kennedy was quite worried over the divisions in the Democratic Party in Texas and thought he ought to go down there for that reason. There is one comment I would make. The story is often printed that a Kennedy decision had been made to dump Johnson in '64 and that meetings were held to that end in November 1963. There were indeed White House meetings planning for the '64 campaign, and I don't think Johnson was at them. But so far as I know the story about dumping Johnson is absolutely untrue. Robert Kennedy, whom I asked about this, told me on a number of occasions that there was absolutely no intention of dumping Johnson in '64.

F: Unfortunately, Robert Kennedy was shot the week I started this project. He was absolutely unequivocal on the fact that this was not considered. He said. I'm not personally one of Lyndon Johnson's greatest admirers but we'd never and did not consider this."

F: Do you have anything to add to the assassination nightmare?

S: I was in New York. Ken Galbraith and I were lunching with the editors of Newsweek on that Friday. I think I was the first member of the Kennedy staff to resign. I felt strongly that the White House staff was a personal extension of the President and that every President deserved his own people, people whom he felt comfortable with and whose absolute loyalty was to him. So I resigned the day after Dallas. He called me in and made on eloquent plea to the effect that he needed me more than Kennedy had and so on, which I found rather impressive at the time. I later discovered that he said the same thing to everybody else. I did agree to stay on for the transition. I might say that during the Vice Presidency I saw the Vice President from time to time and I liked him and particularly liked Lady Bird, and on at least one occasion I was at his house for dinner, and our relations seemed perfectly amicable in that period. And I liked George Reedy and Walter Jenkins. The Kennedy White House staff may have ignored the Vice President, but they were not disdainful and there weren't jokes.

F: They just had their own concerns.

S: They had their own concerns. Mac Bundy, I think, took the particular effort to remember the fact that we had a Vice President. The thing that I was about to say was that I at least was quite impressed by the

quality of the people Johnson brought into the White House. Bill Moyers we all know and had a high regard for and also George Reedy. I'd never heard of Jack Valenti before. I first met him in the corridors of the White House perhaps on Saturday or Sunday after the assassination. His cheeks were stained with tears and he looked as distressed as if he'd been a member of the Kennedy staff. We later became good friends. I think one had a sense of a very high quality of people.

F: Jack told me one time, I asked him who he saw on the trip back, you know, from Dallas, because of course he was unprepared to come, and then they landed down on the White House lawn and went right on over to the Executive Office Building, and I asked him who he saw. He said, "Joe, frankly, this was my first time, and I didn't know butlers from VIP's. They all looked alike to me."

S: I think that the people that Johnson brought in with him were first class. The oddity was that, whereas the people that Kennedy brought in were still mostly with him three years later, most of Johnson's excellent first team was gone in a short while.

F: Johnson kept on a lot of Kennedy people, do you think that that sort of continuity helped, hindered or played any role at all?

S: I don't think that it played much of a role at all. Certainly he was absolutely justified in asking people to stay for the period of transition. After that he had a problem of not wishing to give the Kennedy wing of the party the sense that he was cutting the Kennedys out. That was a great argument for keeping O'Donnell and O'Brien. He kept O'Donnell and O'Brien, but very cleverly played one off against the other, so that

these two men, who had been very close, were used and manipulated by Johnson, and became enemies. Sorensen left very quickly, Bundy wasn't on the political side. That was a different thing, from Johnson's viewpoint, there is no reason why people who were so personally involved with Kennedy, as I was or as Sorensen was, should have been kept. Both of us felt very strongly that we should get out.

F: Is Dick Goodwin's case of chemistry?

S: I think that Johnson liked Goodwin very much, and I think that Goodwin essentially left because of the Vietnam war. Johnson brought a lot of pressure to get him to stay. Johnson hates Goodwin now probably, but he did do his best to get him to stay. And Goodwin was the best speech writer he had.

F: He'll tell you that.

S: Johnson?

F: Yes.

S: Yeah.

F: That he could write rings around anybody.

S: Yeah. A great idea man and a very entertaining man, that's all.

F: Were you there in the White House long enough after Johnson came in to get a feeling that the Kennedy holdovers did, after they had disuaged their first deep grief, that there was going to be a continuation of the Kennedy dreams and that we were going to kind of get a new infusion of energy.

S: Well, I think among the Kennedy people there seemed to be, as I told Bill Manchester, a difference between the loyalists and the realists.

The loyalists were those who were there because of their association with Kennedy and who had other things to do, as I did. The realists were there who loved Kennedy but loved power, the opportunity to do things, more. They understood when Johnson said to the Kennedy people: I need you more than you needme. He needed them to keep the Kennedy wing of the party and also because of the skills that they had. Then there was a feeling that Johnson was caring for the Kennedy domestic program and doing it very effectively. Of course, after he elected nearly 50 new congressmen in 1964, he had what no liberal President had had since 1938: a practical majority in the House of Representatives. He was therefore able to get the domestic program through. And of course he was wholeheartedly involved in it.

F: Do you think that he traded unduly on the Kennedy tragedy to get the program through or do you think he used it just about as judiciously as he could?

S: I don't think he traded on it. It was a factor in the situation, and I never felt that he was exploiting it. I think Johnson behaved in that regard under great difficulties of a personal and political sort with grace and dignity.

F: There wasn't any kind of unseemly shuffling of duties and responsibilities and so forth?

S: Well, I never felt that, because I had so strongly the view that he ought to be his own President. There was some feeling that he moved into the Presidential Office with unseemly haste, telling Evelyn Lincoln on

9 o'clock Saturday morning that she had an hour to get out and that sort of thing; but so far as the White House staff was concerned, it seemed to me that he was right to handle that in a way that would serve his first purposes best. I didn't feel that he moved in a graceless or rough way to do it.

F: Walter Jenkins, or George Reedy, neither one never struck me as being particularly pushy types.

S: No. Walter Jenkins is a very admirable, sensitive man, it seems to me and George Reedy, a man of great intelligence and character. Both Reedy and Jenkins knew the Kennedy people well, I have to say that I've great fondness for Jack Valenti. Of course, Bill Moyers is great. The Kennedy people had no problems with any of these people.

F: Did --

S: Later, there were problems with people like Marvin Watson. That was first a very different situation, but the Johnson team seemed (inaudible)

F: Did you get a feeling from your sort of role now as an intimate outsider, because you know all the principals even though you left the White House, did the staff work go down after Walter left?

S: No, as I think Walter, with all his qualities, lacked interest in or command of issues. Bill Moyers and later Joe Califano, so far as staff work meant domination of issues, were probably superior to Jenkins.

F: Did you have a successor per se?

S: No, I should take this advantage of the opportunity to say that Eric Goldman was not my successor in any sense.

F: Did you recommend Eric?

S: No...

F: I've always wondered where they got him.

S: They got him quite accidentally. There was a fellow, Princeton student, named Richard Nelson, who'd been deeply moved by Eric Goldman as a professor at Princeton. I don't know whether he was working for the Vice President or what, but he urged Johnson tocall Goldman, who may have felt out of things in the Kennedy years, saw Johnson for a moment as a great populist leader who was outside the Eastern establishment.

F: Still dazzling anyhow to go in the White House.

S: Yeah, so Eric came in, and he was always a consultant. Moyers and Goodwin can tell the story much more in detail, but they both found him very unsatisfactory. He didn't fit into the way government operated, as for better or worse John Roche later did, John Roche really understood government. Eric Goldman was protective of himself, jealous about what he did and the ideas he was transmitting. I gather from Moyers that he really never saw Johnson very much.

F: He never joined the team really.

S: Yeah, and he certainly wasn't brought in on policy questions, and later became disenchanted. Are you going to interview him? I suppose that his book makes it unnecessary, but --

F: I've written him and told him that I wasn't going to make a special effort to see him, but if I was ever in Princeton, I would want to talk to him. He'd agreed with me that there's not enough left to justify the trip to see him, but if we can do it casually sometime, well, we'll

see where we are.

S: I might add one more thing. My last role in connection with the Johnson Administration came in the Dominican intervention. I left the White House in January, though I think my resignation , because of accumulated annual leave, did n't take effect until March. I was out lecturing, I think in Buffalo, New York. After the Dominican thing began I got a call from Bill Moyers asking whether I could come back to Washington right away, and I came back on a Friday. I went to the White House and talked to Bill, and to Mac Bundy and to Ray Cline, who was the head of the intelligence division of the CIA. We'd already, I think, sent the Marines in on a Thursday. The theory was that people who had been associated with the Alliance for Progress should explain to Latin America what we thought we were doing. I recall Harriman went to Colombia and Venezuela, and somebody else went somewhere else, and they wanted me to go to Central America. Since I didn't know what the hell was going on and therefore accepted the thesis, I said I would go. Then we tried to find, I remember, Oduber, who was then foreign minister of Costa Rica. Happily he was away for a weekend. Anyway it was certain that he was the key man to see, so my trip was delayed, and while it was delayed, I spent my time reading the cables.

F: Do you speak Spanish?

S: No.

F: Not unless necessary.

S: No, but I had made several trips for Kennedy to Latin America.

F: I know.

S: So it was not implausible. But the more I read this stuff, the less sure I was of the thesis upon which our action was based. The thesis was that a revolution which had begun as an honest democratic revolution had been taken over by the Communists; and that the leaders of the honest democratic revolution, seeing that the Communists had taken it over, had fled to foreign embassies; and that there was a blood bath in the streets of Santo Domingo, and all this sort of thing. I began checking with Latin Americans around town, they said that Betancourt, the ex-President of Venezuela had arrived in Washington. So I said Johnson ought to see Betancourt, and I got Mac Bundy to call the President and say this. Johnson was obviously very sharp over the phone because he didn't want to see him. Then I tried to get Bundy and Moyers to see Betancourt, neither of them would, so I went to see him myself. Betancourt had strong reasons to care about what was happeningin the Dominican Republic. He'd been nearly killed in assassination attempt by a Trujillo agent in 1960. And he had very good sources. Venezuela had excellent intelligence sources there, so I went to see him. I had lunch with Dick Goodwin at the Occidental Restaurant and Dick showed me the draft of the speech that he had written for Johnson to give that night embodying the whole thesis. I saw Betancourt late that afternoon. As we talked, he said his information was absolutely different. And as he expounded the Venezuelan intelligence version, it became clear to me that what he was saying explained many more things than the CIA thesis. I think another problem was that McCone had left the CIA and I think would have been more sober in his interpretation of things. A new man, Admiral Raborn, was so anxious to prove he

was a gungho anti-Communist that he overinterpreted some very scrappy evidence. Then we had this hysteric as Ambassador down there, W. Tapley Bennett. As I listened to Betancourt, I suddenly perceived that we were operating on a completely wrong interpretation of the facts. When I left him, I called Goodwin at the White House and with great difficulty got through to him, and said, "We're absolutely wrong." And he said, "The speech has just been put on the teleprompter and the President is going on in ten minutes and there is nothing we can do about it now." At that point I got out of the Dominican thing, and I was never called back to the White House again.

F: Who was pushing Johnson on this, Raborn or a collection?

S: Raborn, I think it was Johnson's own thing on it, plus Tom Mann. You're asking about the break between the Kennedy people and Johnson. Within the White House staff the changes seemed to me at least and I think to most of the Kennedy people perfectly right. We had no complaint about the new people who were brought in. The one early conspicious break with Kennedy policies came when he brought back Tom Mann, making him the Assistant Secretary of State and head of the Alliance for Progress. Tom Mann had never believed in the Alliance for Progress and he'd never believed in the Kennedy thesis that the hope for Latin America was in progressive democratic leadership, and parties and government. Tom Mann thought that progressive democrats were either wishy-washy liberals or prcto-Communists and that the hope for Latin America lay in the businessman and the armies. That was the first

break. We made a kind of rear guard action to stop Johnson from doing it in December; that was very unavailing.

F: Would this have been done with the approval of Dean Rusk, over the opposition of Dean Rusk?

S: Dean Rusk in the first place was not greatly concerned about Latin America, and I'm sure --

F: It's just kind of a void on his map.

S: Yeah, but I'm sure that he didn't mind Tom Mann. I made an effort to get Hubert Humphrey in the Senate to do something about it, but Humphrey refused to oppose Tom Mann.

F: Do you think at this stage that Humphrey was dangling for the Vice Presidency?

S: I suppose it's hard for someone who had ambitions for an effective relationship with the new President to oppose his first major appointment.

F: Did you see Johnson when you left the White House?

S: Yes, a party was given for me in the White House Mess, to which he came. He sent me a splendid letter written by Bill Moyers, and our relations, as I say, were personally, so far as I was concerned, entirely affable.

F: You supported Bobby Kennedy that summer of '64 in the race for the New York Senate seat, did he get any real help from Johnson out of that, or do you think that Johnson wanted him to win?

S:? I think that Johnson was anxious to carry New York. It turns out that he carried New York by a larger margin than Kennedy did, but I think

he thought that Kennedy would be a strong Senatorial candidate. He came in and campaigned very effectively for Kennedy, and there's certainly no indication that he wanted Kennedy to lose or anything like that.

F: Was this his initiative or was it Kennedy's initiative, or did they just sort of coalesce?

S: My impression is that they sort of coalesced, and Johnson had to campaign in New York as a Presidential candidate anyway. When he came, it was inevitable that they campaign together.

F: In that late summer of '64 you gave an interview to U.S. News and World Report, in which among other things, with undue clairvoyance for a historian who's supposed to look the other direction, you warned against Johnson's winning with too great a majority and pointed out that this led to part of Roosevelt's troubles in '36. You had anything to add to that in hindsight, you're quite on target in foresight, but looking back on what happened, do you?

S: No, I don't that his troubles came from too large a majority. I think that in fact the kind of majority he had made it possible for him to have the marvelous legislative achievements in '65 and '66.

F: It probably was necessary for that program?

S: For that program. I think that his trouble did not come from success except in the indirect sense that the size of his victory made him feel that he could do what he wished in Indochina. Indochina was the disaster. We had that little flap about the White House Art Festival, which Mr. Goldman got seared on. Did you ever have any opinions on that? I know

you did surface once when Lowell refused, and somebody else refused an invitation to it, on the basis that you don't refuse a White House invitation--

S: Well, I'm trying to remember. Someone called me up from the White House -- it was probably Bill Moyers, and asked me to call Lowell and get him to reconsider. So I said I wasn't going to argue with Lowell about it, but I would call him and talk to him about it, since Lowell and I were old friends. And I did, and he explained his position. I said I wasn't confident enough of what was right and what was wrong in this to bring any pressure on him. And I wasn't invited to the thing myself, so, beyond calling Lowell because either Valenti or Moyers or someone asked me to, I had nothing on my own.

F: In your book, A Thousand Days, you of course raised your own little storm in the political circles over Kennedy-Rusk relations. Now then, you've got the fact that Johnson keeps Rusk on for the whole of his five years, but do you think -- I don't want to go back into the Kennedy part because it seems to me you've done that quite well -- do you think that there's any sort of a problem there that carries over in Rusk's relationship with the new President?

S: I think that Johnson and Rusk found a great deal in common. They were both Southerners. They were both rather liberal compared to most Southerners on domestic questions. They both felt persecuted, Rusk with much more justice than Johnson, by the Kennedy White House. They both felt out of sympathy with the Kennedy foreign policy.

F: Just basic out of sympathy or because of a difference in viewpoint or simply a case they didn't feel that they cut enough of a swad.

S: No, I think basically out of sympathy, a difference in viewpoint. I think that both Johnson and Rusk had their views formed in a period 1946 - 1954. They were children of the cold war. They did not recognize the extent to which the situation was changing as a result of the fragmentation of the Communist empire. They were unwilling, for example, to suppose that the split between Russia and China was very fundamental. They assumed that what was going on in Hanoi was part of some centralized Chinese Communist plan of aggression, and they were viewing everything in terms of 1950. This was not the view in the Kennedy White House. It certainly was not Kennedy's view, or Bundy's view. Therefore Rusk became almost completely uncommunicative in the Kennedy White House. He never expressed his views because I think he felt that it was justout of phase with what the White House believed. When Johnson came in, you had a different situation. Instead of a President with confidence in his own judgments in the international situation, you had a President who was relatively inexperienced. He was a man of great subtlety in his judgments and perceptions of domestic affairs. But he saw foreign affairs in an exceedingly simple-minded way. His simple-mindedness was reinforced by Rusk and given cosmic and historical justification by Rostow. So, I think Rusk was both personally and temperamentally happier with Johnson than he was with Kennedy, Ideologically their views were much closer.

F: Hubert Humphrey struck out at you for what you said about Rusk and Kennedy. Did that cause any little split between the two of you or was this just a reaction of the moment? Do you even remember?

S: Was Humphrey Vice President then?

F: Yeah.

S: I suppose he had no particular choice in it. No, my split with Humphrey came a couple of years later in 1967 when I spent the evening with him discussing the war in Viet Nam. And I thought he was so awful then, that our relationship decayed rapidly after that.

F: Did you get the feeling that Humphrey went to greater lengths to ingratiate himself with the President than Johnson did as Vice President to ingratiate himself with his President? Basically, is there any difference in the Vice Presidency?

S: Yes, there was, but it was a difference essentially in the temperaments of the four principals. In other words, it never would have occurred to Kennedy to make the demands on Johnson that Johnson made on Humphrey. Arthur Goldberg once said to me that one of the great differences between Kennedy and Johnson was that Kennedy was perfectly prepared to make a decision in spite of the fact that there was disagreement in the advice that he received. Goldberg - this was sometime perhaps in '66 or '67 - had some idea about Viet Nam which he discussed with McNamara, and George Ball and others in advance of Name which he discussed with McNamara and George Ball and others in advance of a National Security Council meeting and got them to agree to support it. Then McNamara had a conversation with the President, and Johnson was unalterably opposed to what Goldberg, with the support of McNamara and Ball, had wanted to do. So McNamara came to Goldberg and said, "Arthur, don't bring this up." He said, "The President isn't going to

and it makes him so unhappy not to have a sense of united support that I urge you not to bring it up." Goldberg says he brought it up anyway. There was a conspicious difference -- that Johnson appeared to need the sense that everyone agreed that he was doing the right thing. Kennedy didn't have this need. He believed the people might have different views. He was going to hear the best arguments. If some didn't agree, that was all right; he'd go ahead and do what he thought best. Kennedy did not bring his Vice President emotional pressure for agreement, so he was perfectly willing to have his Vice President disagree. Johnson brought that pressure on Humphrey. Johnson in many respects, with all his brilliant qualities, which I'm the first to concede, is a bully. He likes leaning on people, and Humphrey is a very weak man. He's a very intelligent man, has great mastery of a lot of issues, but he's a man who can't say no. He likes to please whatever the audience is. And when the audience was the President of the United States and he was Vice President, his desire to please became greater than ever, so that Johnson insisted on a degree of subservience from Humphrey which Kennedy would never have insisted on. And Humphrey behaved toward Johnson with a degree of servility which Johnson would never have given him when he was Vice President. So I think it's really a difference in the two equations.

F: Do you think that Johnson in a sense was mesmerized by Bob McNamara, and by Walt Rostow, or do you think that it just happened that in that one period in their lives that their views coincide with his?

S: I don't think that Johnson was mesmerized by anybody. As a generalization, I think the principal influences the advisors far more than the advisors influence the principal. That's why the principal is the principal and the

advisers only advisers. Johnson is a man of very powerful quality. Obviously, he wasn't hypnotized by McNamara because McNamara turned against the war essentially by the winter of '65-'66 when he persuaded Johnson against Johnson's will to have the bombing pause. Johnson never forgave McNamara when the bombing pause didn't produce the results that were hoped for. As the Pentagon Papers made clear, McNamara had really given up on the military solution by then. But Johnson did not give up on the military solution. Lyndon Johnson is a bully. Through all his life he has discovered that, if you leaned on people hard enough, you pounded them hard enough, their breaking point eventually came and they would do what you wanted them to do. This may have been true from time to time in his personal relations, but he transferred this notion to international relations and assumed there must be a breaking point therefore: just pound the bastards long enough. He was incapable of doing the kind of thing that Kennedy did so effectively, which was to ask himself: "Suppose you were a North Vietnamese, how would you feel? Would bombing make you make you fall on your knees and cry 'uncle' or would it make you feel more absolutely determined to see the thing through?" Johnson couldn't do that sort of thing. He was an intelligent man; he wasn't going to do it in an extravagant way and bring Russia and China into the war and all that sort of thing. But he just couldn't rid himself of the notion that we were the most powerful country in the world, and, if you pounded them long enough, the breaking point would come. Rostow had no influence on him except to reassure him and explain to him how that Lincoln was criticized too and that he was reenacting some great historical ordeal. Rostow was a mirror

of Johnson. He had no extra influence on Johnson. Rusk, I think, did, because Rusk was a man of great, though highly blinkered, intelligence and very rational and concise in his presentation of things. I think that he and Johnson reinforced each other.

F: I never saw him in action but evidently he did a good job when he'd lead out.

S: Absolutely, a great briefer of Presidents. Then Clifford and Fortas also counted heavily. Both Clifford and Fortas opposed McNamara during the bombing pause of '65-'66. He used to say afterwards how wrong McNamara had been and how right Abe and Clark had been. Then, of course,when Clifford came in and took a hard look at things, he changed.

F: This is hypothetical but it leads up to something that I was going to ask you, and was then McNamara went finally and --

S: McNamara was fired.

F: Yeah.

S: He did not know. I mean he had spoken vaguely about the World Bank, but he suddenly learned that Johnson had sent his name and was about to send his name over to the World Bank.

F: Without any prior consultation?

S: Without any prior immediate consultation, I think they had spoken about it in a general way some time before.

F: It didn't have the effect of clearing the air so that Clark Clifford could come in and even reverse himself, because he wasn't shewered on previous statements.

S: Clifford, in the first place, was not an ideologist. Rusk was. Clifford is a very able pragmatic man who makes his decisions on the merits.

In the second place -- and this, I think, goes to all who say that anyone

who disagreed with the Viet Nam policy should have resigned -- the great thing that made Clifford reversible was the fact that most of the civilians in the Pentagon who turned against the war had not resigned. When a new secretary came in, they felt he was their last hope. Nitze and Hoopes and the rest were still around and could present their case to Clifford. If all these people had resigned, it would have been much more difficult for Clifford to change the policy.

F: Does Johnson lean more heavily on his advisers than Kennedy did?

S: On foreign affairs very conspiciously, yes. I think Johnson had no particular confidence in his judgment in foreign affairs.

F: Did he have a problem of people getting information to him?

S: Of getting what?

F: Getting information to him. In other words, do they tend to feed him what they think he wants to hear rather than what is?

S: Well, I've been told -- I don't know it at first-hand -- that there was a marked difference between Bundy and Rostow. Bundy made more of an effort to try to get both views presented. Intelligent people in the State Department have told me that Walt would funnel in the stuff which sustained his own thesis. There was the further problem that Johnson's overwhelming pressure for results led to systematic falsification all down the chain of command, everyone trying to please the President by giving false impressions on the success of bombing or pacification or whatever.

F: Do you think he knew he was being fed that?

S: I fear he didn't. In domestic affairs he would have known right away, but he had no independent instinct for foreign affairs.

F: To go back, are you privileged to any particular information on Johnson ruling out Bobby Kennedy as Vice Presidential candidate in 1964?

S: No, except it seems to me mad that Robert Kennedy should ever have wished to be Vice President.

F: You never heard anything out of Bobby on that? Everything I'm picking up on Bobby along the way has to be second hand. What about Bobby's resignation as Attorney General, anything particular on that, other than you think he just wants to get himself another forum?

S: Actually, as Attorney General after Dallas, he did not see Johnson very often. He had no great wish to continue in the Administration, feeling that the kind of things he cared about he could pursue more effectively elsewhere.

F: Was Bobby's decision to run again Johnson in '68 pretty much a matter of the war?

S: I think it was completely a matter of the war. In fact, he would have gotten out if Johnson had changed on that war. You remember that rather odd proposal, originally Dick Daley's proposal, to have a council of elders? This would have provided a facade for a change in policy. Kennedy would have gotten out had there been a change in the war policy. One of the grounds for his hesitation was the feeling that people would suppose the real reason was not the war, but a personal feud or a sense that the Kennedys had a proprietary right to the White House. He was always haunted by the feeling that the voters would interpret his opposition to Johnson in personal terms. This made him hesitate so long before going in at all. He would not have gone in if it had not been for the war.

F: He had no clear idea that Johnson was going to make that March 31, 1968 speech?

S: No, I was with him that night.

F: Were you watching?

S: No, he was on an airplane.

F: Where did he get the word? When he landed?

S: He got the word when he landed in New York. I was supposed to meet him at his apartment that night. He couldn't have been more astonished.

F: What was his reaction?

S: He had to reconsider his whole strategy because he had been running against Johnson. With Johnson out , with a possible alteration of Viet Nam policy ahead, it wasn't so clear what his own issues would be.

F: Had he decided to take on Johnson previously on boththe domestic and the Viet Nam front or was he going to concentrate pretty much on the war?

S: Both. But the war was the primary issue, and the issue without which he would not have done it.

F: I would presume he thought he could take him.

S: Yes, he did. But the other issue was the whole domestic thing. He was very much disappointed,for example, in Johnson's reaction to the Kerner Report. He felt that the cities, that civil rights, poverty, the minorities had been neglected as a consequence of Johnson's obsession withthe war. But, of course, all that was derivative from the war.

F: Did he think he was using Gene McCarthy as a stalking horse? Or was Gene just one of those factors that wandered in?

S: No, Kennedy and McCarthy were not friends. McCarthy was almost urging

Kennedy to go in before McCarthy went in. But for various reasons he didn't.

F: To what extent was Johnson's Viet Nam policy a continuity with what you'd had with Kennedy and Eisenhower? That's always of course raised in apologies and charges and so forth, that they planted the seed back here, that Kennedy moved it up a step, and Johnson came along and took the big step.

S: You can argue that, and you can argue -- back to Truman - that Truman by supporting the French war began the process of defining non-Communist South Vietnam as of vital interest to the United States, and everyone was imprisoned by it. But Presidents can refuse escalation. Truman refused escalation in the Bay of Pigs. He was under great pressure when the thing failed to save the prestige of the United States by sending in the Marines. He refused escalation in the Cuban missile crisis when Acheson and the Joint Chiefs and Johnson, though he wasn't so vocal about it, felt he should take the missiles out by surprise attack. The capacity to refuse escalation is necessary to cut your losses -- is an absolutely essential thing. The Americanization of the war took place in February and March of 1965. I do not think that the Johnson policy was made inevitable by anything that Truman, Eisenhower, and Kennedy did. But I certainly wouldn't regard the Kennedy Viet Nam policy as the finest hour in the Kennedy Administration.

F: The greatest thing he ever did? Did you ever have the opportunity to observe Johnson vis-a-vis J. Edgar Hoover?

Except that one heard that Johnson, like many Presidents, liked Hoover coming over and telling scandal; he liked reading FBI reports. But I know nothing about it directly.

F: They are worthwhile. Do you think it's impossible to be a consensus President?

S: I think consensus was a public relations tactic and not a serious thing. I don't think any past President could possibly be a consensus President. You can be a majority President, but that is a different matter. Johnson emotionally didn't like anyone being against him. Most Presidents assume that somebody's probably going to be against them. I think that Johnson, for whatever reasons, just could not bear people being opposed to his policies. Roosevelt and Kennedy were different. Any policy which could get 100 percent of the people must be so diluted a policy that I don't think a consensus presidency means very much.

F: Did Kennedy himself ever seriously consider retiring J. Edgar, I started to say "prematurely," and I guess that is a good word.

S: Kennedy, I think, was rather fatalistic about Hoover. He felt that the political outcry wasn't worth it in his first term. If he'd run against Goldwater in 1964 and won by a large margin, I think things would have been very different. Robert Kennedy was determined to retire J. Edgar Hoover.

F: Do you have any light to shed on why Arthur Goldberg left the Supreme Court?

S: I don't. What I know about it, I would agree with what Galbraith said the other day. I am sure that Arthur Goldberg regards this as the greatest mistake of his life.

F: I believe it is too. Did you, with your close association with Adlai Stevenson, get the feeling that Stevenson chafed as U.N. Ambassador under Johnson?

S: When Kennedy was killed, and Johnson came in, Stevenson thought that at last he, Stevenson, was coming into his own. And Johnson called him in and --

F: You mean he'd have more latitude.

S: Yes, and Johnson called him in -- because Stevenson came to my office and told me about this directly afterwards in a state of great elation, and Johnson said to him, "I'm sitting in this chair, but you ought to be sitting in this chair instead of me." and a lot of stuff like that. And all U.N. Ambassadors --

F: He never told me that.

S: What?

F: I said, "Johnson never told me that."

S: All U. N. Ambassadors feel frustrated. Stevenson felt frustrated, and he felt that he would have -- I mean he always had access to Kennedy -- but he felt that he would have influence on Johnson of a more considerable sort.

F: Could the man sit down and talk? Or was it a case of one talking and the other one listening?

S: I just don't know. I never saw them together. I've seen Johnson say very mean things in the past about Stevenson and give rather savage mimicries of him, but it was very important to Johnson to get the Stevenson people on board. And I think that he may again have felt that Stevenson,

like Rusk, because they'd been frustrated in the Kennedy years, might be allies. But Stevenson very soon discovered that his frustrations were institutional rather than personal. Then he was very unhappy about the Dominican intervention. The last time I saw him, which was a few weeks before he died, he said to me that up to this point he had supposed we were doing the right thing in Viet Nam. But when he saw the way decisions were made in the Dominican Republic, this led him to reconsider the whole Viet Nam policy. He was much less certain that we were doing the right thing in Viet Nam.

F: After Johnson went out, a poll was taken of two leading historians, of whom you were one, sort of doing an assay of Johnson, and he came out as a strong President. Were the questions loaded, or do you think this represented a fairly sincere feeling on the part of the historians?

S: It was a Newsweek poll, I think. I really don't remember it in great detail. My general feeling is that Johnson was very good in domestic policy and rather poor in foreign policy. The great irony is that he sacrificed what he was good at on the altar of what he was poor at.

GENERAL SERVICES ADMINISTRATION
NATIONAL ARCHIVES AND RECORDS SERVICE

Gift of Personal Statement

By Arthur Schlesinger, Jr.

to the

Lyndon Baines Johnson Library

In accordance with Section 507 of the Federal Property and Administrative Services Act of 1949, as amended (44 U.S.C. 397) and regulations issued thereunder (41 CFR 101-10), I, Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., hereinafter referred to as the donor, hereby give, donate, and convey to the United States of America for deposit in the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library, and for administration therein by the authorities thereof, a tape and a transcript of a personal statement approved by me and prepared for the purpose of deposit in the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library. The gift of this material is made subject to the following terms and conditions:

1. Title to the material transferred hereunder will pass to the United States as of the date of the delivery of this material into the physical custody of the Archivist of the United States.

2. It is the donor's wish to make the material donated to the United States of America by terms of this instrument available for research as soon as it has been deposited in the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library.

3. A revision of this stipulation governing access to the material for research may be entered into between the donor and the Archivist of the United States, or his designee, if it appears desirable.

4. The material donated to the United States pursuant to the foregoing shall be kept intact permanently in the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library.

5. The donor retains to himself during his lifetime all literary property rights in the material donated to the United States of America by the terms of this instrument. After the death of the donor, the aforesaid literary property rights will pass to the United States of America.

Signed Arthur Schlesinger, Jr.

Date 2 January 1976

Accepted Harry S. Middleton
Director, Lyndon Baines Johnson Library for Archivist of the United States

Date January 12, 1976