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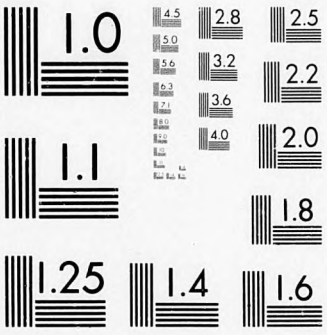

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NEW YORK TIMES ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION,
PART IV
(1-219)

Microfilming Corporation of America
Sanford, North Carolina
1979

NEW YORK TIMES ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

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No. 179

Arthur Schlesinger, Jr.

Adlai E. Stevenson Project

Microfilming Corporation of America
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October, 1979

Louis M. Starr
Director

ADLAI STEVENSON PROJECT

Arthur Schlesinger, Jr.

Oral History Research Office

Columbia University

1978

PREFACE

This memoir is the result of a tape-recorded interview conducted for the Oral History Research Office by Kenneth Davis with Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. for the Adlai Stevenson Project on October 17, 1967.

Mr. Schlesinger has seen a copy of the transcript, but has made no corrections or emendations. The reader is asked to bear in mind, therefore, that s/he is reading a transcript of the spoken rather than the written word.

Interview with Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr. by Kenneth Davis
New York City October 17, 1967

Q: We decided we'd begin with 1952, your political contacts with Adlai Stevenson.

Schlesinger: particularly on the night after Truman's decision at the Jefferson-Jackson Day dinner not to run. I was in Washington that night and was with Stevenson and Wilson Wyatt after the thing. It's my impression that Stevenson and Harriman and I went out and had a drink afterward. Harriman put it to Stevenson very strongly: "You must run for the presidency."

Q: Harriman himself was very much in the running.

Schlesinger: That was later, because Harriman entered the thing when Stevenson appeardd to take himself out. But it was before then, I guess, that Jim Loeb Lowe, who was then working in the White House and later became ambassador to Peru and to New Guinea (?) in the Kennedy Administration, and he had been before he went to the White House executive director ofADA, called me--perhaps in December of '51 or January of 1952 and said that he knew that I knew Stevenson and that he and Charlie Murphy were looking around in case the President should not run again, and they wanted to meet him and wanted to bring him on to Washington, and how could this best be done. So I put Jim Loeb in touch with George

Ball. That was when George Ball got Adlai to come on to Washington and I think had a meeting with Truman. This all sort of preceded, I believe, Truman's decision not to run.

That night Harriman very strongly Stevenson usual diffiddnce

Q: This was before the famous Blair House incident when Truman actually offered him the nomination.

Schlesinger: I can't remember. What was the date of that? Do you remember?

Q: It was early '52.

Schlesinger: Truman pulled himself out, as I recall, in February. I forget whether Truman's talk with Stevenson took place after or before.

Q: I think it was before.

Schlesinger: In any case, Stevenson said he preferred to stay in Illinois; he hadn't finished his work there, and all that. In the next few weeks, however, the pressure on him increased. A lot of people went to Springfield to see him and all that. Oddly enough, Jimmy Wechsler reminded me the other day that he had at this point talked with Stevenson and Stevenson had said, "Oh, no, I don't want to be President of the United States. The one job I'd really like to have is the American ambassador to the United Nations." By the time he got it, he did not want it. He did not want it all that much.

Then finally in April he prepared a statement appearing to take himself out of it. It was then that-- I remember that, and I remember calling Harriman at that point and saying, "If Stevenson is really out of it, you have to go in." It was then that Harriman went in.

That was the background of my friendship with Stevenson. I was out at the 1952 convention. By that time Harriman was a declared candidate. I was for Harriman, but it soon became apparent--particularly after Stevenson's welcoming address--that he was the figure in the convention, and it seemed to me very important-- I still had the vague fear that Kefauver and Harriman might divide the vote and make way for the nomination of Russell. I regarded my main job at the convention to try to bring Harriman and Stevenson together, just as did other, telling Averell that he ought to come out for Stevenson or at least ought to meet with him.

Late one night at the stockyards, Averell finally turned tome and said, "Okay, arrange a meeting with Stevenson."

I started calling Bill Blair's house on Astor Place. I hardly knew Blair. I never met Blair or McGowan until the convention. I called and called and the line was forever busy. There was only one line in the house. So finally Jim Loeb and I got together. Jim Loeb by this time was also working for the Harriman candidacy. take a taxi o'clock in the morning. took the taxi. (pause in recording)

At three o'clock in the morning, having been frustrated because the telephone lines were busy, we soon found ourselves in even greater frustration because the taxi broke down somewhere between the stockyards and the lake miles from anywhere, no other taxi. So Loeb and I were here with this brokendown taxi trying desperately to save the world by bringing Harriman and Stevenson together. We didn't know Chicago. We got out and walked, and finally got to a phone booth and called Blair. This time I woke him up--it was now about 4:30 in the morning--and explained it to him. I didn't even know him. So he listened and didn't seem terrifically interested, so I thought that nothing was going to happen. I did not know Bill's manner, which is very laconic and offhand. I should have known. As you know, Bill's a man of great effieiency.

That morning I finally got to bed in the Congress Hotel around 7:30. Then the phone rang waking me up, and this was Bill. And Bill said, "Could you get hold of Mr. Harriman and bring him to a meeting at nine o'clock with Governor Stevenson?" and he gave me an apartment where the meeting was going to be held so that the press would not know about it. So I called Harriman, and then Harriman and I went over, and met with Stevenson and Blair. Harriman at that point said that he was going to tell his delegates to go for Stevenson.

Q: What did Stevenson say at this point? Was he still holding out?

Schlesinger: No, he was not still holding out. He was accepting the inevitable. I remember there was nothing said about-- There was no deal of any sort, and Stevenson did not say, "If you give me your delegates, I'll make you Secretary of State," or anything like that. But they were two gentlemen together, and Harriman said it was his intention to get a liberal candidate and Stevenson was obviously the strongest and he therefore was for Stevenson.

Then the convention concluded, and I went with my wife to her sister's place up somewhere in Wisconsin where my children were during the convention. I was there a couple of days and got a call from Bill Blair saying that Governor Stevenson wanted me to join his campaign staff and could I come to Springfield. A couple of days later we drove down to Springfield, and I for the first time met Carl McGowan. I may have met him briefly in Chicago. Stevenson asked me whether I would join his staff, and I said I would and went back to Cambridge and got organized and took leave.

Q: You more or less headed the speech writers, didn't you? I know it was loosely organized, but you headed it, didn't you?

Schlesinger: Well, yes. It was somewhat chaotic, the situation there. A lot of writers appeared at one time or another in Springfield. The serious group, the group that did most of the work, consisted of David Bell, Robert Tufts, John Barkham to some degree, although not so much as in '56; and myself. I've

undoubtedly left someone out. Galbraith would come occasionally and be very helpful when he came. Then there were a lot of other writers who didn't work out very much as speechwriters--David Cone, Eric Hodgins, Jack Fisher and so on, Bill Redding. They were the people who produced reliably.

Q: Did McGowan do any speech writing?

Schlesinger: McGowandid very little speech writing, but he was a superb editor, and McGowan played the role in '52 that Bill Wirtz played in '56. But where Bill Wirtz was an incurable meddler and rewriter,in the view of most of the writers wrecked every speech that he tried to revise, McGowan was a very good editor and was very sensible. His judgment was excellent. I think next to Stevenson himself, McGowan was responsible for the brilliance of the '52 campaign.

Q: I must be confused, but I thought you didn't like Carl too well at first. You thought he was sort of a gloomy guy.

Schlesinger: I don't remember that, because when I came back to Springfield I stayed with him. His wife and children were away, so he asked me to join him. My memory is that I liked him from the start. You know, he's a very witty and amusing man.

Q: And a very honest man.

Schlesinger: I am and have been for years a tremendous fan. If

I ever had any such feelings as that, they must have been very transient.

So McGowan sort of went over the speeches, mostly with Stevenson. Stevenson himself was a writer and had been a speech writer for Knox in the past, and I think he very much disliked the thought that other people were writing speeches for him and therefore didn't like to be reminded of it. I think during the whole campaign he had only one or two meetings with the speech writers. Most of this worked through McGowan. There was a certain tension between the nonwriters and the people whose speeches weren't used and the more professional group because the nonwriters included various eminent writers. The knack of writing speeches, which I think is a rather low knack, is something which I think some people have and others don't.

Q: There are certainly speeches which made Stevenson quite famous during the campaign. I know one of them was the Grouchy Old Party speech. Wasn't that yours?

Schlesinger: Yes, I particularly did what we used to call "rally speeches," and I think the line about being dragged kicking and screaming into the 20th century was my line. I think Herbert Agar did the Salt Lake City speech.

Q: That was very high-level.

Schlesinger: It was a very high-level speech, and the rest of us regarded it as a lot of hot air. Archie MacLeish provided the draft which was used in the American Legion speech. I added the

jokes in that, but the quite lovely language about patriotism and Americanism was MacLeish's.

Q: Did Stevenson contribute anything much of his own?

Schlesinger: Well, he was a very good editor, and he would work very hard, you know, on his speeches and make inserts and really a good deal of the time would change it sufficiently so as to give it his own personal imprint. Like most people in politics he was highly lacking in a sense of structure, so the notion of a speech having a beginning, a middle and an end and some form of consecutive argument was alien to him.

Q: Even when he got through with your speeches, they would have no order.

Schlesinger: Yes, because he would put things around, inserts in an irrelevant way. This seems to be fairly congenital among politicians. Even Kennedy, who had a much more disciplined mind, logical and consecutive mind, than Stevenson had no particular sense of structure.

Q: I thought it was of Stevenson.

Schlesinger: Stevenson was one of the worst cases. But though he had no sense of structure, he had a marvelous sense of language and could by editing tease something from a rather boring formulation to a very pungent one. And of course his wit was extraordinary;

Again, like most politicians, Roosevelt used to redictate speeches. Kennedy would edit a good deal in the Stevenson way but more often would improvise on the occasion with the draft before him. I think his Senatorial experience gave him a capacity for ad-libbing. So even as President, he would often take a draft and have it before him and then go off on his own from time to time.

Q: Stevenson never improvised much, did he?

Schlesinger: He never improvised except for jokes. But he stuck to his scripts. And he also hated repeating himself. He forgot that on whistle stops you had a new audience every time. All he could look at were the few newspapermen who heard everything, and he was afraid to bore them. This created a great problem, getting variety into the whistle stops. You know, if you're making 12 whistle stops, you're not going to have 12 different speches. This was finally solved toward the end of the campaign when George Ball brought on Bob Manning from Time magazine--he's now editor of the Atlantic Monthly. Manning was an immense help in bringing in variety.

Q: You say that Stevenson rather resented the fact that somebody else was putting words in his mouth. Did he sort of resent you personally sometimes?

Schlesinger: I didn't feel that. I had the advantage of having been a friend of his before all this. And though it was sort of

a mixture of irritation that he couldn't do all this himself with a certain appreciation that it was being done for him by others, I think he was also embarrassed by all the publicity which ascribed it all to his own genius--all these things which anyone who thought about it must have known that one man couldn't do. One man who is doing everything else a presidential candidate has to do can't possibly write all his speeches. But, as I say, I think he worked the speeches over sufficiently in all the important cases so that he's earned the right to be considered the author.

Q: What did you think of his chances in '52 at the time?

Schlesinger: I thought he was going to win. In '52 there was something known as Frithhey's law. Clayton Fritchey said, "Any Democrat can beat anyRepublican for the presidency." That was in our memory, especially after 1948. It was not until I returned to Cambridge on election day to vote, that I realized he might not win. I remember running into Max Lerner in LaGuardia airport, and he said, "Eisenhower is going to carry New York by a large margin." When I got to Massachusetts and asked my wife, who had been working in the Citizens for Stevenson, whatever it was called, she said, "Well, Eisenhower is going to carry Massachusetts." It then became evident to me that Eisenhower might win, but up to that point I really had believed that Stevenson would win. What Stevenson believed I've never been sure. On Saturday night in Chicago after the Chicago rally--I believe it was then--said to me, "I've been thinking about what

I should say if I lose." And then he mentioned the Lincoln story about "it hurts too much to laugh and I'm to old to cry."

Q: Bill Blair claims he really thought he was winning.

Schlesinger: I had the impression he thought he was winning. I mean he said that, but that was a kind of typical protective thing. But I believe he thought he was winning.

Q: They had a pool.

Schlesinger: That's right. There was a pool.

Q: And he predicted an overwhelming electoral college vote.

Well, between '52 and '56 then when he was obviously going to run--he decided quite early he was going to run; by '55 anyway he had--

Schlesinger: Yes, he had. I think the great decision was whether or not he was going to go into the primaries. We all, perhaps mistakenly, urged him to go into the primaries.

Q: I thought that he wouldn't have had to if it hadn't been for Eisenhower's heart attack. He was practically the unanimous choice of the party. He wouldn't have had to go into the primaries.

Schlesinger: Well, Kefauver was going into the primaries anyway.

Q: He was anyway?

Schlesinger: Yes--as I recall. And there was some feeling that Stevenson wasn't a fighter, and if Stevenson went into the primaries it would show he was a fighter. And he did go into the primaries and he did show he was a fighter. He also so exhausted himself physicially and intellectually that he was better in the primaries than he was eventually in the campaign. He felt this, I know.

Q: Were you involved in the primary campaign?

Schlesinger: I was not involved in the primarycampaign.

Q: You did not do any of the writing for that?

Schlesinger: I may have written drafts, but if so, I did them at Cambridge. As I recall, John Barkham did most of the writing in the campaign.

The most interesting thing in the period between '52 and '56 was the invention of the Finletter group, with Tom Finletter and Ken Galbraith and I. We thought that Stevenson required education on issues, particularly domestic issues. In foreign policy his knowledge was great and his touch was sure,but on domestic policy he really, as you know, was quite conservative.

Q: Even on civil rights he was.

Schlesinger: Oh, particularly on civil rights and particularly on economic matters. This was sort of disguised in the '52 campaign. I can remember my first talk with Stevenson about issues in that campaign. It seemed to me he took positions indistinguishable from Eisenhower. I remember going around and saying

to Carl McGowan, "God, if this is his view of matters, there's no place for me in this campaign." McGowan said in effect, "Don't be a fool. You've hung around Stevenson long enough to know that his intelligence is a good deal better than his instincts. He always comes out that way partly because he comes from a conservative background and partly because he wants to find out what the arguments on the other side are. Give him time. He's very intelligent, and you'll find he'll come to the position you want him to take."

Q: Is this what you concluded yourself?

Schlesinger: This was the experience of the campaign--partly that, partly argument, partly political necessity which required him to take positions which were more liberal than he really believed. We all felt that if he were going to run again, that he ought to be thinking in the meantime more seriously about these matters.

Q: How did this group operate, your group, the Finletter--?

Schlesinger: Finletter was the chairman, and we had meetings--sometimes in New York, sometimes in Chicago, sometimes in Cambridge.

Q: How often?

Schlesinger: I think probably once every six weeks or so by 1955, and position papers would be prepared. We were never sure

whether Stevenson ever read them, but at least he would come.

Q: He had a horrible time reading, didn't he?

Schlesinger: Yes, he was not a great reader.

Q: He practically moved his lips. He was the slowest reader I ever saw.

Schlesinger: Yes. It was very odd. At some time during his life he must have read a good deal because he had a well stocked mind.

Q: Or a good black notebook.

Schlesinger: But he was not at all a reader in the sense that Kennedy was. He loved reading and always had books around. I doubt very much whether Stevenson read a half a dozen books in those eight years. That may be unfair, but, you know, he was not a book reader.

Anyway, he would come and then we would discuss these things, and he would ask very searching questions and would listen very intently. We'd get economists like Galbraith and Seymour Harris and Paul , and that kind of thing. I think it did move him a good deal on economics matters and also on welfare things. He began to understand the need of federal aid to education.

Q: Did you discuss the Negro problem much?

Schlesinger: Well, the Negro problem we discussed in connection with

federal aid to education. There was then the question of , as to whether states that were segregated should receive federal aid to education. It came up in that form. And Stevenson was always very conservative on civil rights.

Q: He was opposed to denying federal aid to schools that refused to integrate.

Schlesinger: Yes. You could make an argument on that on the ground that if there are any states that needs education, it's Mississippi; and in the long run it would help civil rights if Mississippi schools were better. But he really identified when it came to the Negroes with the liberal white Southerner; that was the segregationist. But certainly not with the Negro. He saw that it was a problem and obviously it was wrong. There was no question in his mind about the injustice, but the folk ways were very well-established, and change would have to take place very gradually.

Q: He used that term, "gradualism."

Schlesinger: The main emphasis of the Finletter group was on economic and social questions--welfare and so on. But Finletter and I were both personally much stronger on civil rights and felt much more keenly about it. And perhaps in reaction to that, Stevenson exaggerated his position. But he would come up with sort of wild suggestions like, "Don't you think we should have a year's moratorium on civil rights agitation?" and things like that.

But he was responsive nonetheless to the political necessities of the situation, so that he managed to conceal from the public the really quite conservative views he held on civil rights.

Where he was great in these years were on civil liberties. On this, it was something he had absolutely no doubt, no hesitation.

Q: And this was during the McCarthy period.

Schlesinger: He was the first national figure to challenge McCarthy in that speech in Miami, which I wrote, and was put in very strong language, and which, as I recall, he strengthened even more. And he had absolutely no hesitation. He felt very strongly. He understood the issue of civil liberties as he never understood the issue of civil rights and was absolutely courageous and plain and forthright. And this was at a time when in the United States Senate great liberal leaders like Humphrey and Kennedy and Douglas--

Q: Where were they? Yes.

Schlesinger: They were all very silent. And I believe that Stevenson believes great credit for this position then.

Q: Do you think that Stevenson actually reduced the potency of McCarthyism?

Schlesinger: I think he made it easier for other people to speak out, and he also upheld the honor of the country when it appeared that everyone had been frightened into silence in that period.

Q: After the primary campaign you came in, as you had in '52, into the actual--

Schlesinger: After the convention. In fact, I guess before the convention, I came out. Bill Wirtz had more or less taken McGowan's place. I should have mentioned Wirtz as among the fun tioning writers in

Q: Elks Club.

Schlesinger: Yes, the Elks Club. He was a very good producer. He was less successful as an editor than McGowan, for reasons I mentioned before.

Q: What were your impressions of Wirtz as a man? Did you sort of feel he was all tensed-up a lot of the time and unsure of his position with Stevenson?

Schlesinger: Yes, he was very tense and insecure and therefore much more competitive with other people than McGowan had been. With McGowan, for example: McGowan never blocked anybody's access to Stevenson.

Q: And Wirtz would, huh?

Schlesinger: And Wirtz would. Wirtz liked to make sure that everything was channeled through him, and this caused a certain amount of irritation. I think John Martin became particularly irritated.

Q: I happen to know there was quite a little bit of tension between Wirtz and Harry Ashmore.

Schlesinger: Yes, well, Ashmore had been pretty well eased out by the time that I had come. I think Harry hadn't worked out for other reasons.

Q: Stevenson said he was not quick enough; he couldn't produce.

Schlesinger: No, he couldn't produce. He liked to sit around and talk. And while Stevenson loved hearing him talk, he had a million things to do and couldn't sit around and hear Harry tell Arkansas stories. You know, these were very hard-working times, and Harry's work habits didn't fit in.

At one point in the campaign, I think Martin and Tufts and I, who did most of the writing, were so concerned about it that we went to McGowan, who was then practicing law in Chicago, and pled with him to come back; but Carl just felt that if he were to come, the pressure on Bill Wirtz would be too great. So he unfortuntely stayed out of the campaign. I have a very high regard for Bill Wirtz, and I'm personally very fond of him, but he is a man of extreme tension and a kind of moral feeling which under check is admirable but can become a sort of self-righteousness.

Q: We were talking about the '56 campaign. The big issues during during that campaign were Suez and the H Bomb, as I recall--

Schlesinger: Well, I think there were two points in the campaign in which Stevenson went out ahead--one was the stopping of nuclear testing; the other was the abolition of the draft. I think on both issues he was right, but I think both were ~~political mistakes. It t~~

political mistakes. It taught me one thing, and that is that a campaign is not the place to open up a new issue--that issues have to have much more preparation in public opinion and argument than they had. So though Stevenson had thought a lot about these things, particularly about the test ben, and though he was clearly right on the test ban and I still believe right on the preference for a professional army over draft, nonetheless this gave a flavor of sort of opportunism and did not help him politically.

Q: Were there arguments about this?

Schlesinger: The test ban was originally suggested to me by an English scientist, Will Hawthorne of Cambridge. I talked it over with Weisner and Zacharias and some of the MIT people and put it into a speech that Stevenson gave at Philadelphia in the spring at the American Society for Newspaper Editors. I got a lot of supporting memoranda, which, as I recall, I sent to Stevenson. He was in strong agreement with it. The draft thing Galbraith was particularly strong about, and I think Stevenson agreed with that. And I don't think there was opposition on substance to either of those, but there was considerable opposition on political grounds, and I think that the opposition in this respect was right and that we were wrong in urging him to go ahead on it.

Q: There was a developing crisis in the Middle East all during that period. After it was over, the election complained about not having talked about this in terms of foreign policy.

Schlesinger: Well, this again, having gone through the whole Finletter effort, we thought that the strength of the Democratic party lay in its being the party of the people and the party of social welfare and all that. So we argued very strongly that this should be the burden of his campaign. Actually, the speeches in the '56 campaign were far more substantial speeches than in the '52 campaign. I mean they dealt much more thoughtfully with issues, and they were much more substantive. They lacked, however, the rhetorical glitter, and people were disappointed.

Also, Stevenson's own instincts were that he should talk about foreign policy. He wanted to talk about foreign policy, and we kept trying to steer him away from it. And then the Suez crisis broke, and I think in retrospect he was right--not that it would have made any great difference in the outcome, but I think if he had talked on foreign policy as he wished, then the Suez thing would have come in a kind of context, which would have turned it more to our advantage than we were able to do.

Q: He gave a great speech only a week before the election.

Schlesinger: Yes, that was a speech, I believe, in Cincinnatti. Bob Tufts wrote it. Or Louisville--some place like that. So he did get into foreign policy toward the end, but he'd been straining to get into it at a much earlier point, but allowed himself to be dissuaded by Wirtz and John Martin and me, I

believe wrongly.

Another thing I learned from that was that the instincts of people in politics are better than the instincts of their advisers, which is why Stevenson was a candidate and the rest of us only advisers. So by the time I became involved with Kennedy, I'd come to the conclusion that if the principal really feels strongly something should be done that way, he's probably right, because his experience has proved that he's generally right on this sort of thing or he wouldn't be where he is.

Q: That opens up this question of Kennedy. A lot of people thought that you betrayed the Stevenson cause by switching to Kennedy quite early.

Schlesinger: Well, after '56, Stevenson said, I believe quite genuinely, that he was never going to run again.

Q: That was in December of '56.

Schlesinger: And this was the assumption under which people operated. And as we got close to 1960, other candidates began to emerge, most notably Kennedy and Humphrey. Kennedy was an old friend of mine. He'd been Congressman from the city in which I lived, later Senator from the state.

Q: Humphrey was also a friend.

Schlesinger: Humphrey was also a friend, with whom I associated politically. Either Humphrey or Kennedy seemed to me an excellent candidate. In fact, though I really became by

1959 closer to Kennedy than to Humphrey--I had more of a personally relationship to Kennedy than Humphrey--, I did not come out for Kennedy until after the West Virginia primary and Humphrey's withdrawal. I felt the obligation of the whole liberal movement to Humphrey was such that one couldn't.

Q: This A Thousand Days, but didn't you feel that Stevenson really wanted the--?

Schlesinger: I felt toward the end that Stevenson did want it. He wouldn't say it; he never said it. But he couldn't help wanting it. Anyone who had run twice, who had been that close--I'm sure he wanted it in the same way that Nelson Rockefeller wants it today. I think in addition he was enormously touched by the outpouring of sentiment. I think he liked Humphrey but didn't really feel he was up to it, and I think he mistrusted Kennedy. He never quite got Kennedy straight. He thought Kennedy was a tough, ambitious, not very principled figure.

Q: Did he talk to you about Kennedy in the spring?

Schlesinger: Yes. I tried to persuade him to come out for Kennedy for some time, and he always said that he had assured Symington and Johnson and everybody that he would be neutral, and if he would come out for anybody he would violate it. Then he would sometimes say, "Well, if my support is necessary to save the party from a conservative candidate--"

Q: You had that in your book.

Schlesinger: He was somewhat contradictory. He was troubled, but I think by this time he really began to glimpse, after the U-2 incident, the possibility of some resurgence in the draft and of his getting through himself. And I think this became more and more the issue.

Q: Have you ever talked to Carl McGowan about this?

Schlesinger: Yes, I have.

Q: Carl thinks he was making a deliberate gamble. The only way to get it would be a draft.

Schlesinger: Yes, and I think Carl is right.

You asked about Bill Wirtz. In that period when I did come out for Kennedy, the only unpleasantness I had was from Bill Wirtz, and of course Bill Blair and Newton were both for Kennedy. Stevenson knew that. And other people like Tom Finletter and George Ball and Jim Doyle ~~were~~ regretted that I had done this, but they all called me within 24 hours and said that they understood why I had.

Q: Wirtz thought it was actually treason.

Schlesinger: Wirtz thought it was treason. He wrote me an hysterical letter, but it was a temporary emotional explosion. When I saw him at Los Angeles he was very sweet. Bill is that way. He's filled with this kind of righteous wrath, and then it plays out. When I last saw him he came up to me in a very stern way and said, "What are you doing, attacking the President on Vietnam?"

~~or something~~

He now is mad at me for that reason. But it doesn't interfere in any fundamental way, I don't think.

Q: It makes you wonder about Wirtz if he was ever in a top executive position in the White House.

Schlesinger: Yes, although I think he's been an excellent Secretary of Labor. Stevenson himself was clearly hurt when by Galbraith and me but never--

Q: Is this when you put on your statement?

Schlesinger: Yes. And as I wrote in A Thousand Days, there was reason for resentment because the statement came out about a month before it was supposed to come out. The statement didn't come out, but the fact that a statement was underway was leaked, so it came out in the paper just a couple of days after he had spent a week-end with me in Cambridge.

Q: He probably thought you should have mentioned it.

Schlesinger: I'm sure he must have, but he never said this, and he never reproached me in the slightest. Never was there any visible change in our relationship. I felt very badly about it, but I think he must have been hurt but never mentioned it.

Q: Is there anything more you can add to what you've already put on the record in A Thousand Days about Stevenson's relationship to Kennedy prior to his appointment as UN ambassador?

Schlesinger: Stevenson later told me he fully expected to be made Secretary of State.

Q: Even after the--

Schlesinger: Even after the convention. He told me this in 1964, I remember on night in his apartment at the Waldorf. He said, "I fully expected to be. It never occurred to me I wouldn't become Secretary of State." I think this was quite unrealistic.

Q: He had actually been offered a deal which he had turned down.

Schlesinger: Well, at least tacitly. I mean had he come out for Kennedy at the convention or nominated him, he could have had anything he wanted.

Q: But Stevenson knew this because Newt Minow reported it to him. But he still thought he would be.

Schlesinger: I think he thought he was the best-qualified person and the man who had run twice for the presidency and made his life foreign affairs.

Q: How did he think Kennedy was going to permit a man of his stature to be it?

Schlesinger: I don't know. He must have just assumed this was going to happen. Consequently, he was, I think, quite chagrined

and hurt when he got the ambassadorship to the UN and hesitated, though not really; he knew that he was going to take it. I think his resentment of Kennedy was very deep. Kennedy in effect denied him the two things he wanted most, he felt--the presidency and the Secretaryship of State. I never in the period when he was at the UN heard him make any generous remark about Kennedy. He knew that actually he and Kennedy were much closer together on issues than either of them were to Rusk. He knew that Kennedy was a constant ally of the United Nations and bringing the United Nations in on things, and he came to admire Kennedy and have considerable respect for his intelligence and judgment, but he could never say anything nice about him.

Q: Do you think it was jealousy perhaps?

Schlesinger: Well, I think it was partly an age thing--this younger fellow. Why didn't he wait his turn? Kennedy, on the other hand, was really quite understanding of Stevenson. Stevenson Kennedy. One of my jobs was liaison between them. I sat through meeting after meeting with them. Stevenson, who could be so gay and funny and uninhibited and informal, would somehow freeze up and become stuffy and rather pompous. He was at his worst with Kennedy. But Kennedy was always sympathetic, and every once in a while he'd say, "I know that Adlai is complaining all the time. I just wish to hell he wouldn't complain to Arthur Krock," you know, that sort of thing.

Q: Or Max all the time.

Schlesinger: But Kennedy was ~~perfectly~~ perfectly willing to bear with this because he thought that Stevenson was unique and irreplaceable to him at the UN.

I remember once--I think I put it in A Thousand Days; I'm not sure I did--when someone was criticizing Stevenson on the grounds of irresolution and indecision, Kennedy said, "Look, Stevenson had the two most shattering blows anyone could have had. He was twice defeated for the President." I think someone said, "Thank God he was never President." And Kennedy said, "No one knows what kind of a President he would have made. If he'd been elected the first time, he would have been a different man."

Q: Did you hear that or You did from another interview. I remember your saying that.

On the Bay of Pigs, which was one of the reasons Stevenson had--and I think a very good reason--to doubt Kennedy's judgment and his honesty, do you have anything to add to what's come out about this?

Stevenson: No, except if there was a fault, it was not Kennedy's in filling Stevenson in on what was going on. It was not Kennedy's. It was Tracy Barnes's and mine. Kennedy told us to go and brief him and we did, and we must not have left the impression of either the size of this venture or when it was going to come off. I mean we did it early in April. The date wasn't set. But Stevenson had the impression, as I think I wrote, that it was going to come after a certain debate in the UN.

Q: The Cuban resolution.

Schlesinger: Yes. In fact, it came just the week-end of that debate. But I think Stevenson was right in feeling that he should have been told much more about the character of the thing, about the States (?)planes and all that sort of business. But Kennedy did charge Barnes and me to go and tell him, and we didn't tell him in enough detail.

Q: Now, in the missile crisis there was this statement in the Saturday Evening Post, which attacked Stevenson for attending another meeting . Who leaked that story? Was that really a deliberate White House ploy?

Schlesinger: My belief is it was not. As I think I tell in A Thousand Days, Clayton Fritchey first called me about the story. I called Kennedy promptly. Kennedy exhibited great concern and

Q: He didn't come out very strongly.

Schlesinger: Well, the first statement he made, the statement that Stevenson and Fritchey both approved and thought was fine, the press then decided wasn't good enough. ~~and quickly persuaded~~ John Steele, I think, of Time magazine, quickly persuaded Stevenson it wasn't good enough and he ought to get something more, and Kennedy didn't take the matter nearly as seriously as Stevenson did. That was one problem. The other problem was that Stevenson was a little disingenuous, because he had taken a position which

struck the people involved as being much more interested in, much more prepared to accept this than (?) pay a large price for getting out than the others wanted to take. I think Roger Hilton's book throws some light on this. And though he did accept the strategy which Kennedy finally decided--

Q: I thought he took the stand after the decision had been made. They were talking about negotiating--

Schlesinger: There was a big thing on Saturday afternoon before the decision had finally been made to go ahead on the quarantine.

Q: I thought all the negotiating business was after they already decided that, and ?

Schlesinger: That's right, but it was not the negotiating decision that caused so much trouble. It was his statement on Saturday afternoon, which was a very strong and deeply felt one. Kennedy didn't mind. Kennedy felt that Stevenson had his constituents at the UN and that Kennedy wanted to hear all views, and he thought, given the temper of the meeting, that Stevenson displayed a good deal of courage speaking out the way he had. But some of the others in the meeting were much concerned. Robert Kennedy was very much concerned.

Q: Who leaked the story?

Schlesinger: I do not know. I always believed it was someone in the Defense Department. I thought it was Paul , but I

I have no reason to believe this. I don't know whether it's so. I did when I was working on A Thousand Days ask Stewart Alsop whether or not with all the and fury he wanted smoke/say anything about it, and he said he thought he would save it for his memoirs.

Q: It was a deliberate hatchet job from reading the article.

Schlesinger: Except that the article itself was the pictures and the play kind of thing.

Q: Yes, but read the words. It was really against Stevenson.

Schlesinger: Yes. But it served no purpose for Kennedy. When Stevenson asked me to say to Kennedy if he wanted his resignation, exploded and said, "Why the hell would I want him? First, I can't possibly get a better man. Second, what good would it do me to have Stevenson outside the government? It's much better from my political viewpoint to have him in the government. For both those reasons this is ridiculous."

Q: It was under Kennedy that the Vietnam involvement really became stepped up in the sense that permanent commitments were made which Johnson escalated on. Where did Stevenson stand?

Schlesinger: Well, Vietnam wasn't much of an issue in the Kennedy years. It was a very marginal thing. It didn't really become a big issue until '65. If you'll look into the Johnson

State of the Union messages of '64 and '65, there was nothing about Vietnam in '64 and about a hundred words in '65.

Q: Insofar as it was a concrete issue it was in the campaign against Goldwater.

Schlesinger: It was in '64, yes. And at that point, of course, Johnson was opposing the escalation policy.

Stevenson had a lot of concern about Vietnam from a very early point and was constantly coming up with ideas on what could be done. Kennedy was so involved in Berlin and Cuba and one thing or another that it wasn't until the Buddhist riot of the spring of '63 that he really began to pay attention. Up to that point he let McNamara run it and sort of acquiesced, as I later believe he came to understand was a mistaken acquiescence. He acquiesced in a military approach to the war. But Stevenson was always arguing for more of a political solution.

Q: Chester Bowles made a proposal when he was Under Secretary which I wonder if Stevenson had anything to do with.

Schlesinger: Not to my knowledge. I imagine Stevenson would have been sympathetic to it, but I don't know of his being involved in that or commenting on it.

Q: After Kennedy died, what was Stevenson's relationship with Johnson as far as you know?

Schlesinger: I think Stevenson thought that he was all set, that

life would be better for him. On the Monday after the murder of Kennedy, Johnson called Stevenson and Stevenson came to my office afterwards to tell me about it in a state of elation. He said, "Adlai, I'm sitting in the chair that you ought to be sitting in. If you had gone along with Kennedy in 1960, you would have been Vice-President, and you would be President now. And I want you to know that you ought to be sitting in this chair, and I want you to know that I understand that." Stevenson believed that he was going to be in on things that he hadn't before, that his own generation was coming back, and Johnson was an old friend. He'd forgotten his with Johnson in '50 (?).

Q: Yes, I remember that.

Schlesinger: And for a time he thought he was going to come into his own. That didn't last very long. In due course I think he came to feel that he had even less to do with making policy with Johnson than he did with Kennedy. But for a time he really believed that he would be where he wanted to be and where he ought to have been, at the center of policy-making in foreign affairs.

Q: Did you have the impression of Stevenson from 1960 on that he was becoming more compulsive and more wound-up?

Schlesinger: Yes, he was always wound-up and always off on trips and social engagements. He complained, "I never have any time for reflection; I never have any time to think about anything."

He never let himself have any time.

Q: I think he didn't want it. afraid to face something

Schlesinger: It may be. I don't know. He was certainly wound-up. On the other hand, he had an immense capacity to rise to the occasion, and though people at the U.S. mission feel that Arthur Goldberg runs the mission much better in that he knows what everybody is doing and sort of brings them together and under Stevenson everybody would be off on his own committee and there would never be much exchange or central guidance--nevertheless when Stevenson had something to handle, like the missile crisis, the most spectacular case, he would do it brilliantly and very effectively. But there was a certain lack of serenity in his life in those years.

Q: Off the record in discussing Stevenson's relationships with women, you mentioned Jane Dick. I had the feeling , but there were so many involved. Do you know anything about what his relationship was

Schlesinger: I don't know, but obviously he was very fond of Marietta Tree. He had for a time a great friendship with Mary Lasker, but she that became rather bitter toward the end.

Q: She actually pursued him .

Schlesinger: Yes. Well, I don't know, but I think she supposed for a time he was going to marry her. Then it became evident that he wasn't, and I think he (?) became rather fed-up with it all and somewhat, I believe, turned against it (?). Barbara Ward was deeply devoted to him.

Q: In a romantic way?

Schlesinger: Potentially so. It could have become that if he had wanted it. She once said to me that it was a great shame that we couldn't have the custom that prevailed in the African tribes with which she was familiar of a woman having two husbands.

Q: I remember being not able to understand these women had husbands. Alicia Patterson had a husband; Marietta Tree had a husband. Eddie Dick maybe you would know what was the husband's role in

Schlesinger: I don't know. I don't know whether they thought it was all harmless, whether in a way they were rather pleased that such a distinguished man should like their wives or what. But it was very baffling. Whatever happened in any of these cases; whether anything happened, I do not know. I think this added another touch of frenzy to his life toward the end.

Q: why he needed so much feminine adoration?

Schlesinger: Oh, I don't know. It's very comforting.

Q: (laughs) Most of us manage to get along with less.

Schlesinger: He was a lonely man, I think. Also, in a large part, it was their pursuing him strongly. They would invite him for week-ends, invite him for dinner, invite him to stay with them in the country and all that sort of thing. That was pleasant for him.

Q: What kind of a President do you think he would have made if he had won in '52 or '56?

Schlesinger: I think given the atmosphere of the time he would have been a frustrated President, because I think the atmosphere was against the sort of things that in the end I believe he would have wished to do. On the other hand, I think he would have carried forward to the nation what he did in the Democratic party. I've argued in A Thousand Days that Kennedy was in a sense the heir and executor of Stevenson. Stevenson reshaped the Democratic party philosophically. I think that even if he hadn't been able to carry out all his measures, he would have done a great deal to change the national mood, as indeed Kennedy did. Kennedy didn't get all his programs through either, but he sort of gave a new definition to American purpose, a new sense of idealism and so on. I think Stevenson could have done the same thing.

On the question of indecision, you know, he was not notably indecisive as governor, nor do I believe he would have been as President. The hardest things for him to do were to decide whether or not to run for this or that, whether or not to accept

this or even whether or not to leave at 5 or 5:15.

Q: Which car to take.

Schlesinger: Which car to take--that kind of detail that he could fuss endlessly over. But on issues he was different. I think given executive responsibility, he would have been perfectly good.

Q: When did you last see him?

Schlesinger: I last saw him in I believe June of 1965.

Q: This was before he'd gone to San Francisco?

Schlesinger: No, it was after San Francisco. He called me from Toronto where he'd gone to receive an honorary degree. There was a succession of calls, and when the calls came I was out of the office, and when I called back he was off somewhere. So he made several efforts over a period of about 24 hours and we he finally called. He'd gone to get an honorary degree I believe at the University of Toronto.

Q: You were in Washington.

Schlesinger: I was in Washington, picketed ~~picked~~/or some thing like that, made speeches our Vietnam policy. So he finally made contact. He said, "I've been trying to call you for two days now on a matter of great moment. I'm coming to Washington tomorrow. I have to do Aaron Copeland's 'Lincoln

Portrait' at the National Symphony." Now, why the hell he should that, God knows. He said, "I have to see you about something of the highest importance, and that's what I've been trying to call you about."

I said, "Sure, any time."

He said, "My plane gets in at such-and-such a time. Could you meet me at 3 o'clock with two other people at the most convenient tennis court?"

So I got a couple of other people, and we went over to Phil Stern's tennis court and played in the hot sun--played tennis a couple of hours. He was awfully fat but played with great agility. He loved playing tennis. And then we sat by the pool and talked, and we talked about the Dominican Republic, which had upset him a good deal.

Q: He did not like the way Johnson handled that?

Schlesinger: He did not like the handling of the Dominican Republic. I think as a consequence of Johnson's handling of the Dominican Republic he began to strengthen the doubts he had already had about the way he was handling Vietnam. Then after a time he went off to get dressed for the concert. That was the last I saw him.

A few weeks later I was sitting in my office and I got a call from Dick Goodwin. He was at the White House then. He told me that Stevenson had died.

Q: Had you any inkling that Stevenson had a heart condition?

Schlesinger: No actually died of. There's never been an autopsy.

Q: It was very obviously a heart attack.

Schlesinger: Well, it might have been a cerebral hemmorhage. I called Carl.

Q: Eric Sevareid did a broadcast and also wrote an article for Look about Stevenson's having set up with U Thant a negotiating team at the ambassadorial level.

Schlesinger: Yes. I'd like to say something about that Eric Sevareid article. Eric Sevareid describes the last night, I believe, before Stevenson died.

Q: That was Monday night.

Schlesinger: It was Monday night, but he died on Wednesday. And how he was drinking with Stevenson and kept feeling he should go but Stevenson wouldn't let him go and Sevareid felt that Stevenson didn't want him to go because he wanted to talk to an old friend and say all these things, that it was a kind of a confessional situation.

What actually happened was as follows: Stevenson was staying at the Bruces', at the American embassy in Regents Park. Also staying there was Katherine Graham, publisher of the Washington

Post. Stevenson was very fond of Katherine Graham. They went to separate dinner parties. Stevenson said, "Kay, we haven't had a chance to talk. Let's try to get back early and then we can have a drink and talk." So Stevenson brought Sevareid back and they talked for a while. Kay Grant in due course came in. She stood outside saw it was Eric Sevareid, and she regarded Eric Sevareid as a great bore, and so she thought: "I'd love to have seen Adlai, but I don't want to talk toEric Sevareid." So she quietly went upstairs and went to bed. Stevenson was waiting for Mrs. Graham, so every time Sevareid wanted to go, since Stevenson/~~didn't want to~~ hated being alone, he'd say, "No, no." This wasn't any great desire to talk to Eric Sevareid. It was because he expected that Kay Graham would be along at any moment.

So the next morning he saw Kay at breakfast and he reproached her. He said, "I waited up for you last night, had a long talk with Eric Sevareid. Where were you?"

Of course, I guess Severeid hadn't seen Stevenson for years. And all this business about --you know the way Stevenson talked all the time about him. So I have no doubt that Stevenson did say everything that Eric Sevareid reports, but he wasn't importuning Sevareid to stay in order to tell him all these things.

Q: Yes. Well, the article did give the impression that Sevareid was a particularly close friend.

Schlesinger: Which .

But that's the background.

As for the U Thant thing, there is no question that Stevenson and U Thant got something into motion, which reached the point of even arranging for a hotel in Rangoon where our ambassador was going to talk to the North Vietnam representatives, and then the beginning of the bombing of the north in February, 1965, killed that.

Jimmy Wechsler was living in New York... You ought to do him, by the way, because he saw a good deal of Stevenson when he was here, and Stevenson talked to him very confidentially. Stevenson trusted him. Occasionally Stevenson would use him to get points of view out. A lot of the stuff Stevenson told Wechsler, Jimmy never wrote.

Q: Do you see him at all?

Schlesinger: Wechsler? Yes. I'll tell him. He'd be glad to do it.

As I say, the thing was set up and then the escalation of the bombing killed it. Wechsler knows a lot of that story.

Q: Why did Johnson negotiation ?

Schlesinger: I think that they figured out in the State Department that given the present military balance negotiations could not yield to them enough which would really be defensible in 1968, and they figured if they pounded North Vietnam some months longer, then Hanoi would be so much more eager to get out of the war that then negotiations might yield a better result.

Q: But back in '65--

Schlesinger: They thought they could win a military victory.

Q: You were telling me another time we were talking about the reaction of Buffie Ives, Stevenson's sister, to what she called your--

Schlesinger: Treason.

Q: --treason to Stevenson when you came out for Kennedy in that statement.

Schlesinger: She was very bitter. I mean I don't blame her at all, because she was wholly devoted to her brother. She couldn't understand how anyone who had worked as closely with her brother and had benefitted so much from that could have come out for anyone else. I don't blame her in the slightest, and she cut me dead. What I did resent was her saying such things in a hysterical way to my son, Stephen, who was then 18 years old and was working as a page in the Massachusetts delegation. She sort of screamed at him.

Q: What did she say?

Schlesinger: I can't remember exactly. I remember she said to my wife she couldn't understand how she could stay married to anyone who had done this. Well, Marion had come out publicly for

Stevenson after I had come out for Kennedy.

Q: I remember this.

Schlesinger: At which point I got a letter from Robert Kennedy saying, "I see you can't control your wife anymore than I can control mine."

For years, I . After Stevenson's death his body was brought back to Washington and then was flown to Springfield, and I flew out to Springfield with Mrs. Ives on the plane. She asked me to come and sit with her, which I did. She said, "I've wanted to say that I felt I behaved very badly toward you in Los Angeles in 1960. Adlai told me that I had. Adlai was very furious with me for what I had done. This has been on my conscience for a long time, and I wanted to tell you."

Q: She told me that.

Schlesinger: Apparently Adlai was furious. That was part of the loveliness of Adlai. Another thing I wanted to say: I've noticed that people who worked very closely with Stevenson, when they talk about him, as we have talked today, tend to come out with a somewhat devalued picture of him. There's a tendency to remember the fussiness and ambiguity and equivocation and compulsiveness--these qualities. I notice that when I talk with Carl McGowan or John Martin or Tom Finletter and we reminisce about these days, Stevenson somehow does not emerge as quite the

man in fact he was. Because apart from all these things, he was a man of most extraordinary courage and a great capacity for friendship and a great ability to lift people, to stimulate them, to make them reconsider their own clichés and assumptions. His mind was not a systematic mind but a very penetrating one.

Q: Intuitive, too.

Schlesinger: Yes. Any picture should include an impression of his extraordinary sweetness, his flashes of great brilliance and the courage with which he endured a good deal of life and a good deal of tragedy and disappointment and his extraordinary personal decency--all these things, and these are far more important than that other side which tends to come out in an interview. (pause in recording)

It might be interesting for Finletter and me to do it together or for Wechsler and me to do it together.

Q: That would be interesting. I'm seeing Marietta Tree Thursday with Clayton Fritchey. We're doing one of these things. And I think this would be very valuable. This then concludes my first interview with Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. Thanks a lot.

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RICHARD HOFSTADTER PROJECT

Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr.

Oral History Research Office

Columbia University

1973

THE FOLLOWING MEMOIR IS ORIGINALLY PART OF THE RICHARD HOFSTADTER PROJECT. IT IS INCLUDED HERE BECAUSE SOME MATERIAL IS PERTINENT TO THE ADLAI STEVENSON PROJECT.

PREFACE

This memoir is the result of one tape-recorded interview conducted by Mr. William Keylor for the Oral History Office with Mr. Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr. in New York City on June 13, 1972.

Mr. Schlesinger has reviewed his memoir, and has made only minor corrections and emendations. The reader should bear this in mind as well as the fact that he is reading a transcript of the spoken, rather than the written word.

Interview with Mr. Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. by William Keylor

New York June 13, 1972

Richard Hofstadter Memoir

Q: Professor Schlesinger, do you recall when it was that you met Richard Hofstadter?

Mr. Schlesinger: Well, I've been trying to remember. I think it must have been after 1948, when I reviewed THE AMERICAN POLITICAL TRADITION for the AMERICAN HISTORICAL REVIEW. My guess is that it was in the early fifties, inthe summer at Wellfleet. Do you remember when he first went to Wellfleet?

Q: It was in the early fifties, I believe.

Mr. Schlesinger: I think we began going there also in the early fifties, and my acquantance with Dick Hofstadter was primarily a summer acquaintance. I'm sure it began in the early or middle fifties.

Q: Who were some of his friends at Wellfleet during that period, do you recall?

Mr. Schlesinger: Well, in the early years I think Alfred Kazin was

around, though Alfred vanished after the late fifties. I honestly don't know. Although we'd see each other two or three times a summer, we seemed to have somewhat different friendships. I think Dick's were primarily with other academics. Stuart Hughes, I think, he was with quite a bit. Mine were more with people like Edwin O'Conner, Edmund Wilson, Francis Biddle, Gilbert Seldes and other writers. So I really can't answer that question much more helpfully than that.

Q: Do you recall in those early days, in the early fifties, if you discussed history with Dick Hofstadter during the summer, or was he purely relaxing?

Schlesinger: I think we were both relaxing, although we were both working, but when we met it would be for a drink or a meal. We talked history somewhat, talked politics somewhat, talked writing somewhat. I don't recall any great set pieces of conversation.

Q: Do you recall his receiving an offer from Harvard University to teach later on?

Schlesinger: Yes. I was, if not instrumental, at least a very strong advocate of this. The Harvard ~~American~~ American history situation, then and now, had its problems. It seemed to me it would be great if we could get Dick to come to Harvard. Unfortunately the offer when it was finally made was a half-assed offer, involving as I recall half in the history department, half in the school of education. The rationale for that was that Dick was then writing on the history of American education. But it was not the kind of offer that should have been made. I'm not

sure whether in any case he would have wished to leave New York. He was so completely a citizen of this city and island. But it was not the kind of offer I should like to have had Harvard make him. I had a number of conversations with him about it, in which he expressed a certain interest in coming to Harvard, also a certain sense that his roots had now been put down in New York and in Columbia, and he could hardly envisage living in a different environment.

Q: Was there a strong sentiment in favor of bringing him to Harvard on the part of the Harvard faculty, would you say?

Schlesinger: I think on the part of the history department in general, yes. My memory is that the American historians may have been somewhat more lukewarm, not so much because of any specific reservations about Hofstadter as because of their general feeling that no American historian is worthy of a Harvard appointment. So I don't think it was an anti-Hofstadter thing as much as paralysis, induced partly by disagreement, partly by a sense that no one was good enough.

Q: Did you get any feeling of a general attitude on the part of the Harvard historians for his scholarship? Were they impressed with it or were they generally critical of it?

Schlesinger: It's hard to answer. Certainly I was a great admirer of

Hofstadter. I've had a number of historical disagreements with him, but he seemed to me to be a brilliant historian. Frank Freidel I know felt the same way. Frank came to Wellfleet in the 1960's. I imagine he saw quite a lot of Dick. Oscar Handlin tends to be less than enthusiastic about anybody.

Q: He's been described as a literary historian. Would you say that's a fair description of his scholarship?

Schlesinger: You mean Hofstadter? He wrote exceedingly well. "Literary historian" means to me an historian of literature, and of course he was not primarily that, but I think that one of his great qualities was his style and his capacity to fuse narrative and analysis, and his capacity also to absorb into the texture of historical narrative insights from social psychology, sociology, and so on.

Q: Where do you think he got this interest he had in social psychology or sociology, social history? Where there any influences that you recall?

Schlesinger: I don't know whether I don't have a great deal to add to the piece I wrote about Hofstadter in the Marcus Cunliffe-Robin Winks collection* but I think the seminar that is described in that piece, 1954-55, where social psychologists, sociologists and historians got together, must have been a great stimulus. But obviously he wouldn't have gotten into this seminar unless there was a prior predisposition. I imagine that Dick had that kind of speculative curiosity about motivation -- why people do things,

* Pastmasters: Some Essays on American Historians, Marcus Cunliffe and Robin Winks, eds., New York, 1969, pp. 278-315.

why they make things --that would make it quite natural for him to move in that direction.

Q: He was of course a close friend of C. Wright Mills while teaching at the University of Maryland, and later on. Did he ever describe his friendship with Mills to you?

Schlesinger: I'm sure we had some discussion about Mills. I was rather anti-Mills, particularly after the POWER ELITE, which seemed to me a much over-simplified book and rather an example of the paranoid interpretation of history which Hofstadter had been writing about, and I can recall explanatory defences by Hofstadter of Mills, in somewhat affectionate terms, though with a kind of, as I recall it, wistful feeling that Mills had floated away. Freidel was also at Maryland at that time. I think both Freidel and Hofstadter seemed to have an affection for Mills, whom I'd never met.

Q: I believe Kenneth Stampp was there at the same time. Was he a close frind of Hofstadter's, as you recall?

Schlesinger: I don't recall that. I don't recall him as a particular friend. He may well have been.

Q: You of course have combined an academic life with a life in active politics. Do you ever recall Richard Hofstadter evidencing an interest in politics? Would he have gone to Washington, if asked?

Schlesinger: No. He wouldn't have. He was very much interested in politics and contemporary affairs, and had a lot of curiosity and insight,

but I think he must have made some inner decision a long time before that he was not interested in a more active life. Whether this was some premonition of early death or just the way his life was set, he clearly felt temperamentally that he wanted to devote himself to teaching and writing, and to writing more than to teaching.

On the other hand he did not, like some people who have this temperament, rationalize it and say that what he was doing was pure and what others were doing was impure. I remember some time when I was in Washington, perhaps 1961-62, he had a review in THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR of a book by Loren Baritz. Apparently part of the argument of the book was the corruption of power and how intellectuals shouldn't get implicated in anything. Dick took strong issue with this in his review, and defended the association between intellectuals and power, and when he sent it to me, he sent a note along or scribbled on the margin, some humorous remark to the effect that he felt he was defending my position.

So he was entirely sympathetic with that, but I think it was clear that he felt that the role of observer was his role, not the role of participant. I never felt any sense on his part of wanting to be more involved than he was, because he could have been, had he shown any interest.

Q: Do you recall his taking a position in the Eisenhower-Stevenson campaign?

Schlesinger: Well, my impression would be --that he was strongly for Stevenson. In the forties he was in a rather radical phase, in the sense that he had a certain skepticism about major parties and so on. On the

other hand, this radicalism was tempered by strong anti-Stalinism. He was not tempted by Wallace in 1948. I would guess that he was for Stevenson.

Q: Would it be fair to say that he became more conservative as he grew older?

Schlesinger: On political issues, I don't know. Obviously on university issues, the situation at Columbia in 1968, brought out -- I don't think it changed his views so much as it redistributed the emphasis in his sense of how a university ought to be run.

I would think that in a certain sense, consensus history could be described as a more conservative form of history than the history he was writing in the 1960's. The introduction to the book on violence, for example, represented a less conservative view of history than the consensus view, though of course it must be understood that he was writing consensus history from a radical viewpoint rather than from a conservative viewpoint.

But I honestly -- I saw very little of him. I came to New York about 1966, and to my regret, saw very little of Dick Hofstadter. We lived in different parts of town, and I got up to Columbia very rarely.

Then his health began to fail, and he was protecting that. As I say, I was never an intimate of his. It was mostly a very amiable summer friendship.

Q: I do want to ask one further question regarding his political views.

Do you recall his attitude toward the Kennedy Administration and particularly his attitude toward Robert ~~H~~ Kennedy in his Senate race?

Schlesinger: Yes. I think his attitude toward the Kennedy Administration was one of detached friendliness. He was perfectly prepared to criticize it. I think he was friendly. He had a lot of friends in it. It's my impression ~~th~~ he was generally sympathetic. He had quite a touching piece about President Kennedy in THE NEW YORK REVIEW OF BOOKS, in which he said something to the effect, "We never know the quality of what we have had until it is gone," which I think expressed his own view. I never understood his opposition to Robert Kennedy in 1964. It was a reaction of New York intellectuals based on a misconception of what Kennedy was like and on a misconception of what his opponent was like. I never understood why Dick took that position, but I don't recall ever talking with him about it.

Q: You mention he had a somewhat radical youth. Did he suffer from that later on in the McCarthy period during the early fifties?

Schlesinger: No. He was never involved with the Communists. Alfred Kazin in him memoirs describes the general setting, and he was always an anti-Stalinist. So far as I know he was never under any harrassment.

Q: I'd like to turn now to his position as a professor of history at ~~C~~ Columbia. You mentioned his attitude toward the events of May '68. Could you elaborate any on his attitude toward that? Did he discuss it with you at all?

Schlesinger: In the early sixties, because I was working in Washington, I didn't spend very much time at Wellfleet. Then I stopped going there completely in 1964-1965. So I saw very little of him in the sixties. I did not see him in the summer after '64, and practically not at all in New York. I did not see him, I believe, after the Columbia riot so I have no testimony on that.

Q: In an article recently, before his death, you indicated that you believed he was the greatest historian of his generation, I think those were the terms?

Schlesinger: Well, not the greatest, rather the most distinguished.

Q: --most distinguished historian of this generation. And yet he had been criticized by many historians, both young and old, for not going to the sources, for not being a true monographic scholar. How would you respond to that?

Schlesinger: Well, I think there are many kinds of historians. I suppose the best historian is the one who reconstructs the past in the most interesting, stimulating way, and I think that this can be done through various ways. Immersion in the sources is the way most people go about it, but Dick had a sympathetic imagination and literary skill, and a capacity to ask the illuminating questions which seemed to me to make him a more interesting historian than many who might have spent more time digging.

I don't mean to denigrate those who use the original sources, because I do that myself, but Kix Dick wrote a different and no less valuable kind of history.

Q: He's also been criticized by some of the New Left historians, particularly with regard to his doctrine of consensus politics. What are your feelings about the criticism that has been directed at him by the New Left historians?

Schlesinger: I disagreed with Dick's emphasis on consensus history. I think in THE PROGRESSIVE HISTORIANS, he called THE AGE OF JACKSON one of the last works of Progressive History. During the fifties at the time when consensus history was in vogue, I was a dissenter and felt that the questions of conflict in American history were far more important than consensus history allowed. And as I recall, though I haven't looked at this, when I reviewed THE AMERICAN POLITICAL TRADITION, I said that the differences between Biddle and Jackson or Roosevelt and Hoover seemed to me greater than Hofstadter had conceded. So I was out of sympathy with that. I was particularly out of sympathy with some of the theses that seemed to be generated by the consensus school. THE NEW AMERICAN RIGHT seemed to me in general a very unconvincing book. The status explanation didn't seem to me to explain very much. In a society like the American, people are always rising and falling; it explained everything, and therefore it explained nothing. I felt it particularly

did not explain McCarthyism, because status anxiety, by which the authors of this book -- which came out of the Columbia seminar --explained McCarthyism, obviously existed before McCarthy and after McCarthy. It didn't explain why McCarthyism came at the time it did. What seemed to me the obvious explanation for the eruption of McCarthysism at the time it happened, which was the Korean War, went absolutely unmentioned in the book.

Certainly I thought that the view of Populism, McCarthyism as a continuation of Populism, was awfully glib and facile. I think Rogin's book some years later showed that. So I was quite intellectually out of sympathy with the consensus history business and its accompanying of reductionism, part of which got into the AGE OF REFORM.

Q: Did you get the impression that his emphasis on consensus history, particularly in the fifties, was a reaction to Beard and Parrington and the progressives?

Schlesinger: The writing of all historians is pervaded by the atmosphere of their times. In general, consensus history was an unconscious reflection of the Eisenhower years, the mood of those years. I also think Dick was, for convincing reasons, quite dissatisfied with what seemed to him the rather rigid simplifications of the school of Parrington and of Beard, and the fact that their schemes did not do justice to the complexities of

the period.

Q: To change the subject slightly, when they were considering him at Harvard I expect you looked into his performance as a teacher. What was the general feeling about Dick Hofstadter as a teacher?

Schlesinger: Well, my recollection was that he was felt to be a good teacher but not terribly interested in teaching, much preferring graduate students to undergraduates. Now, that's my recollection after 15 years or so, and obviously his colleagues at Columbia would have a much better judgment on it. He certainly had devoted graduate students.

Q: I don't know if you'll be able to answer this --this is a more impressionistic question about his personality. What was he like as a human being? Was he a hard working hard driving scholar? Did he spend all his time at Wellfleet in the books?

Schlesinger: He was under, I would say, quiet, rather effective self-discipline, and my recollection is he worked quite hard. But then he'd work a certain number of hours a day and stop. He was not compulsive, in terms of working all the time. He'd go off with his son or come down to the beach, something like that. He always gave the impression of being very amiable and relaxed. He was a most engaging man, extremely funny, had considerable capacity as a mimic and anecdotalist,

and so he never gave the sense of being driven. But lots of people are very driven and conceal that. I didn't know him well enough to know to what extent -- but his manner was always very relaxed.

Q: Did you get the impression he was a gregarious person? Did he have a lot of friends?

Schlesinger: I think he had a lot of friends, but in x retrospect I think he was protecting himself and hoarding his energies. Still he had many friends, all of whom adored him, and he had a great (I would think) gift for friendship.

Q: This is a very difficult question for you to answer, I'm sure, but I'll ask it anyway. If you were asked to name the five closest friends of Dick Hofstadter, whom would you name?

Schlesinger: I'd be very baffled with that. I know that he and Alfred Kazin were great friends for many years. To what extent that friendship endured, I don't know. Certainly in the last years the friendship resumed, and Alfred used to visit him in the hospital, and he would often tell me about Dick's condition.

And beyond that, I don't know. I'm not close to the Columbia situation. I don't know who his close friends are there. Vann Woodward I know was very fond of him, and Dick had a high regard for Vann and Vann spoke at his memorial service. How actually close they were in the sense of seeing each other and confiding in each other, I don't know. I really can't give a very useful answer to that.

Q: Another very general question: do you think it's fair to say that Richard Hofstadter's work will last, will be an important contribution to scholarship 20 or 30 years from now?

Schlesinger: They will last, I think primarily because they're so well written, and they will last as examples of interpretations, even when the interpretations themselves will in some cases have been discarded, as Dick himself in the course of his life felt quite free to reject or revise earlier of his own interpretations. But I would think that -- what did you say, 25 years? Well, 30 years ago was 1940, and of course no one reads Beard today. I don't know. I guess people will be looking at THE AMERICAN POLITICAL TRADITION and THE AGE OF REFORM for a long time. Historians don't tend to last, unless they're writers or have written books of such massive detail that no one else is prepared to re-do the job.

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