

CHAPTER VI

THE NEW MOOD IN POLITICS

*“Kennedy himself is a bookish man... He is not precisely an intellectual himself, but, like FDR, he can enjoy the company of intellectuals with perfect confidence in his capacity to hold his own. From an early point in his political career he turned to academic resources of the nation in order to check and clarify his thinking or public policy.”*¹

To spite the memory of Franklin Roosevelt, the Republicans had passed a two-term Constitutional limitation on a President’s stay in office. Thankful the popular Eisenhower would have to step down, the Democrats began planning to return to power.

Arthur Schlesinger and John Kennedy had been political allies for years. From the start, Kennedy knew that Schlesinger’s advice was of variable quality; Kennedy had wisely disregarded Schlesinger’s 1949 suggestion to run for Mayor of Boston.² The Senator had solicited Schlesinger’s guidance, for *Profiles in Courage*.³ But once the book was out, Kennedy made sure that Schlesinger’s favorable review did not appear on the back cover, for the Senator did not want to tie himself or the book too closely to the ADA.⁴

Throughout the 1950’s, Kennedy had avoided close identification with liberals. Even when Kennedy became a national figure, he still shied away from the ADA. In a 1953 interview with *The Saturday Evening Post*, he said he had “never joined the Americans for Democratic Action or the American Veterans Committee. I’m not comfortable with those people.”⁵

As Kennedy began to see issues from a more progressive perspective, his conservative past came back to haunt him. In November 1950, Harvard Professor Arthur Holcombe had given a seminar at which Representative John F. Kennedy appeared. Speaking off-the-record, the Congressman stated that the United States should not be in Korea, that sooner or later, we would, “have to get all those foreigners off our backs.” He supported the McCarran Act, which outlawed the Communist Party, and said that it “did not go far enough.” He expressed pleasure that Richard Nixon had defeated Helen Gahagan Douglas for the Senate seat from California. On Senator McCarthy he commented, “I know Joe pretty well, and he may have something.” Needless to say, Kennedy was more than a little chagrined when an article written by John Mallan, a participant at the seminar, appeared two years later in *The New Republic* and revealed what Kennedy had said.⁶

After Senator Kennedy’s alter-ego, Ted Sorenson, formed the Academic Advisory Committee in December 1958, Schlesinger and Galbraith helped recruit their academic

¹ From *Kennedy or Nixon: Does It Make Any Difference?* (New York, 1960), 22.

² *ibid*, 91.

³ Parmet, *Jack*, 306.

⁴ *ibid*, 329.

⁵ *ibid*, 329.

⁶ Parmet, *Jack*, 211-214.

colleagues for the Kennedy think-tank.⁷ Schlesinger introduced Kennedy to Harvard Dean of Faculty McGeorge Bundy, whom many saw as the apotheosis of the rationality and intelligence which Kennedy valued so highly.⁸

Schlesinger and Galbraith themselves avoided close identification with Kennedy, since they did not want to make it seem that the only thinkers Kennedy could find were Stevenson retreats. As Schlesinger and Kennedy saw more of each other in 1959, their political friendship grew into a personal one.⁹

Kennedy--because of his father, his image as a machine politician, and his refusal to repudiate his association with McCarthyism--was running into resistance from the idealistic liberal wing of the Democratic party. Schlesinger spoke to Governor Gaylord Nelson of Wisconsin, a possible favorite son in a primary Kennedy hoped to win. They discussed the Mallon article, for which Schlesinger could offer no refutation except to say that the article was a violation of a confidence. Talking with select individuals around the country would be the best way to deal with the article, Schlesinger told Kennedy; a public comment would only give the article more publicity.¹⁰

One of the most important liberal groups was the reform Democrats of New York, who harbored suspicions about the Massachusetts Senator. At the 1959 Harvard commencement, Schlesinger arranged a meeting that evening between Kennedy and reform leader Tom Finletter.¹¹ And after much prodding, Schlesinger finally convinced Kennedy to speak at the Lexington Club's dinner for Eleanor Roosevelt.¹²

Adlai Stevenson and Schlesinger were still good friends. After meeting with Stevenson in the fall of 1959, Schlesinger surmised that Stevenson was interested in the nomination, but unwilling to make concrete moves. If asked about 1960, Stevenson told his friends to go work for the candidate of their choice.¹³ When Stevenson and Schlesinger saw each other again in December, Stevenson emphasized the importance of starting a brain trust for whoever the nominee would be and inquired whether Schlesinger would be free to go to Washington if a Democrat won.¹⁴

At least one candidate found less need for Schlesinger's help. Senate Majority Leader Lyndon Johnson stated, "We don't want the support of oddballs of the left or right...ADA or KKK."¹⁵ But at other times, Johnson had taken care to court what he perceived to be the far left of the party; in 1956 he had invited Schlesinger to Washington to ask why liberals mistrusted the Majority leader.¹⁶ When Johnson and Schlesinger ran into each other in Washington in January 1960, Johnson told Schlesinger that Kennedy's radical image could cost the Democrats the election: "Have a revolution all right, but don't say anything about it until you are entrenched in office. That's the way Roosevelt did

⁷ Sorenson, *Kennedy*, 118; Schlesinger, *A Thousand Days*, 22-23.

⁸ David Halberstam, *The Best and The Brightest* (New York, 1972), 57, 75.

⁹ Schlesinger, *A Thousand Days*, 25-26.

¹⁰ Parment, *Jack*, 466.

¹¹ Schlesinger, *A Thousand Days*, 25-26.

¹² Parment, *Jack*, 563.

¹³ Martin, *Stevenson and the World*, 461, 464.

¹⁴ *ibid*, 468-469.

¹⁵ M. Stanton Evans, *The Liberal Establishment* (New York, 1963), 69.

¹⁶ Martin, *Stevenson and the World*, 28.

it.”¹⁷ Senator Kennedy felt the same way about Humphrey. The day that Kennedy announced his candidacy, he told Schlesinger, “Hubert is too intense for the present mood of the people.”¹⁸

As jockeying for the Democratic nomination began, Schlesinger and Galbraith saw three acceptable liberal candidates: Stevenson, Kennedy, and Humphrey. Stevenson refused to declare himself, and left the liberals with a choice of Kennedy or Humphrey. Schlesinger decided that he preferred his Senator and friend John Kennedy, but in deference to the many years of work on the ADA with Humphrey, remained neutral. He told Kennedy and Humphrey that whoever won in West Virginia would earn undivided liberal support.¹⁹

At the Jackson Day dinner in Detroit in the Spring of 1960, Schlesinger spoke on “New Frontiers in American liberalism.”²⁰ After the speech, he talked with John Kennedy, who, knowing that Schlesinger would be seeing Humphrey the next day, told Schlesinger that he (Kennedy) expected he could win a fight in the West Virginia primary, but wanted to avoid a contest. If Humphrey withdrew before West Virginia, he would be the logical choice for Vice-President. Kennedy went on to imply that if Stevenson endorsed Kennedy before West Virginia, Stevenson would be Kennedy’s Secretary of State, and if Kennedy lost in West Virginia, he would endorse Stevenson. Although Schlesinger did not mention Kennedy’s name during the meeting the day after with Humphrey, Humphrey understood the message clearly. The next day, he told Kennedy, “I talked with Arthur about West Virginia. It’s no use--I’m going to have to go through with it.”²¹

The campaign in West Virginia grew acrimonious, and Schlesinger wrote both candidates asking them to the “spectacle of two liberal candidates swinging angrily at each other and trying to knock each other out of the ring while the conservatives... egg them on.” Cooler heads prevailed and the two liberal Senators ended the campaign on a note of public harmony at a debate.²²

Kennedy defeated Humphrey in West Virginia on May 7th. A week later, Kennedy called Schlesinger and reminded him about his commitment to the West Virginia winner. Kennedy went on to emphasize to Schlesinger that Stevenson’s support was crucial. “He is the essential ingredient in my combination. I don’t want to go hat in hand to all those Southerners. But I’ll have to if I can’t get votes from the North.... I want to be nominated by the liberals.”²³

The next day Schlesinger telephoned Stevenson, who remained obdurate, and thought that the nomination was still up for grabs. He reasoned to Schlesinger, “Everybody would say, ‘There’s the deal we told you about’... I don’t believe that Jack

¹⁷ Schlesinger, *A Thousand Days*, 27

¹⁸ *ibid*, 27-28.

¹⁹ Martin, *Stevenson and the World*, 462.

²⁰ Schlesinger, *A Thousand Days*, 28. The speech was not the origin of Kennedy’s use of the phrase “New Frontier.”

²¹ Martin, *Stevenson and the World*, 487-488.

²² Lasky, *J.F.K.*, 346.

²³ Schlesinger, *A Thousand Days*, 31.

would choose his secretary of State on the basis of political aid rendered before the convention.”²⁴ Later that month, Schlesinger helped arrange a Kennedy-Stevenson conference; he had expected the two to be “natural allies,” but the meeting went poorly.²⁵ Kennedy told Schlesinger that Stevenson had probably been “snowed” by Johnson. Speaking with Stevenson earlier, Johnson had promised that if he dropped out, he would support Stevenson.²⁶

As Stevenson knew, his neutrality--by splitting the liberal vote--was contributing to the stop-Kennedy movement. A few months before Johnson’s friend Philip Graham, the publisher of the *Washington Post*, had told Schlesinger that Johnson planned to win the nomination by first stopping Kennedy. The choice would then narrow to Johnson and Stevenson; and the Northern bosses, who disliked Stevenson, would swing the nomination to Johnson.²⁷

Schlesinger was thinking about the choice between Stevenson and Kennedy. His journal contains the entry:

This, I suppose, is the real irony. I have come, I think, to the private conclusion that I would rather have K as President than S. S is a much richer, more thoughtful, more creative person; but he has been away from power too long; he gives me an odd sense of unreality... I find it hard to define this feeling- a certain frivolity, distractedness, over-interest in words and phrases? I don’t know; but in contrast K gives a sense of cool, measured, intelligent concern with action and power. I feel that his administration would be less encumbered than S’s with commitments to past ideas or sentimentalities; that he would be more radical; and, though he is less creative personally, he might be more so politically. But I cannot mention this feeling to anyone.²⁸

Schlesinger described himself as “nostalgically for Stevenson, ideologically for Humphrey, and realistically for Kennedy, (but willing to support) any two-legged liberal mammal who might beat Nixon.”²⁹

Led by John Saltonstall, a group of Cambridge liberals, including Schlesinger and Galbraith were planning to endorse Kennedy. Stevenson visited Schlesinger’s home in early June. Reasoning that the endorsement would not be released for long time, and that there would be ample time to tell Stevenson beforehand, Schlesinger mentioned nothing. But the *Chicago Daily News* broke the story a few days later. Schlesinger remembers, “I felt sick about it.”³⁰ His journal noted, “My greatest debt is to (Stevenson); if he were a declared candidate I would of course, despite all my misgivings, be for him.,, Schlesinger wrote Stevenson a long letter explaining the situation, and received a curt reply.³¹

²⁴ Martin, *Stevenson and the World*, 496.

²⁵ Martin, *Stevenson and the World*, 506.

²⁶ *ibid*, 509.

²⁷ *ibid*, 468.

²⁸ Schlesinger, *Robert Kennedy*, 219.

²⁹ Lasky, *J.F.K.*, 230.

³⁰ Martin, *Stevenson and the World*, 515.

³¹ *ibid*, 515.

Later, in July, when Schlesinger and Galbraith saw Stevenson at the Ambassador Hotel in Los Angeles during the Democratic convention, Stevenson displayed no bitterness.³² As Schlesinger put it, “There was a largeness about him. He could be small and mean, but not when it mattered. This was why we loved him.”³³

The American liberal community was less forgiving of Schlesinger than was Stevenson. Angry telegrams poured into Schlesinger’s office. One read “TO OUR ADA CHAPTER YOU AND THE REST OF THE TURNCOAT OPPORTUNISTS YOUR ACTIVITIES ARE THE MOST IGNOBLE ACTS IN HISTORY”³⁴ Most liberals felt that political calculation should not enter into a liberal’s thinking; the true liberal should support only the purest and most progressive candidate, regardless of that candidate’s chances of winning. The liberal affection for Stevenson would haunt Kennedy for the rest of his career.

One other group of liberals remained unconvinced by Schlesinger’s endorsement of Kennedy: Arthur’s family. After the newspaper story came out, Marian announced that she was still for Stevenson. A note from Robert Kennedy to Schlesinger included the postscript, “Can’t you control your wife- or are you like me?”³⁵

Having retired from teaching in 1953, Arthur Schlesinger Sr. had been spending some of his free time as a Humphrey volunteer.³⁶ And Elizabeth Bancroft Schlesinger, a Stevenson supporter, announced, “If Kennedy is nominated and elected, he’ll certainly need Arthur’s brilliance at the white House.”³⁷

John Kennedy went on to sweep the primaries. Arthur Schlesinger Jr. and Kenneth Galbraith met with him in Hyannis Port on June 12th. The three could find no issues on which they disagreed. The columnist Joe Alsop had told Schlesinger that Kennedy would appoint Dean Acheson Secretary of State. Much to Schlesinger’s relief, Kennedy said that Alsop was indulging in wishful thinking.³⁸ Kennedy told the two professors that at the moment, he preferred Humphrey for Vice-President.³⁹ Kennedy asked Schlesinger and Galbraith to help on the campaign, but they replied that Kennedy should build his own staff, and not give the impression of relying on former Stevenson people.⁴⁰

When the convention opened in early July, Kennedy was still a few delegates short of a first-ballot majority. Johnson and Stevenson partisans hoped that Kennedy could be stopped. But as John Kenneth Galbraith explained:

Kennedy was so far ahead in delegates that it was quixotic to imagine Adlai Stevenson could overtake him. In 1960 the nature of the conventions was still not understood. They had by that time become minor festivals for

³² Galbraith, *A Life in Cur Times*, 380.

³³ Martin, *Stevenson and the World*, 517.

³⁴ Schlesinger, *A Thousand Days*, 36.

³⁵ *Ibid*, 35.

³⁶ Schlesinger Sr., *In Retrospect*, 190.

³⁷ *Time*, “Combative Chronicler,” 58.

³⁸ Martin, *Stevenson and the World*, 516.

³⁹ Schlesinger, *Robert Kennedy*, 222.

⁴⁰ Schlesinger, *A Thousand Days*, 37.

ratifying what had happened in the primaries, but there was still the assumption that somebody could capture a convention. Neither Schlesinger nor I agreed with that. I'm sure we argued with our old Stevenson friends to that effect.⁴¹

Schlesinger and Galbraith ran into some residual hostility from their endorsement of Kennedy. One lady told Galbraith that Schlesinger and he were guilty of the “worst personal betrayal in American history.”⁴²

Schlesinger must have felt some guilt, for according to one friend, “Arthur’s attitude toward Stevenson seemed to be similar to a man who has left his wife and run off with a new woman; later he encounters his wife and is suddenly afflicted with all sorts of memories and doubts. There was no mistaking Arthur’s turmoil.”⁴³

Asked by Senator Kennedy’s close aide Kenneth O’Donnell to speak to caucuses on behalf of Kennedy, Schlesinger replied that he would speak to delegates individually, but that he did not want to appear to be part of an anti-Stevenson effort. When Schlesinger went to the Minnesota delegation to speak to some delegates privately, he found them resentful of his association with Kennedy. Listening to Adlai Stevenson address the Minnesota delegation, Schlesinger himself felt stirred by the old passion and cried.⁴⁴

Thanks to round-the-clock work (and partly to multiple offers of the Vice-Presidency) John Kennedy captured the nomination. Schlesinger had written him an acceptance speech, but Kennedy rejected it “because it was written for Stevenson. My cadence and timing are entirely different. It was a beautiful speech though. I guess Arthur was a little sore.”⁴⁵

Schlesinger had more to be sore about than the speech. On Monday, the opening day of the convention, Schlesinger had suggested that Kennedy name Humphrey Vice-President as a way of attracting Stevenson supporters. That possibility had ended on Tuesday, when Humphrey backed out of his planned endorsement of Kennedy.⁴⁶ But no one had expected Lyndon Johnson. Schlesinger had told his friend James Weschler, the liberal columnist from the *New York Post*, that Johnson was not even under consideration.⁴⁷ And Johnson had not been. But Philip Graham had talked Kennedy into offering the Vice-Presidency to Lyndon Johnson as a conciliatory gesture. Surprising everyone, except perhaps Graham, Johnson accepted. “I’m sick,” was Schlesinger’s reaction when he heard the news on television.⁴⁸

On the way to Kennedy headquarters, he ran into Graham, who explained the logic of the choice. Reasoning that Johnson might help the South feel less besieged, and thereby accept civil rights more readily, Schlesinger reconciled himself to the conservative

⁴¹ Interview 12/8/81.

⁴² Schlesinger, *A Thousand Days*, 39.

⁴³ Lasky, 305.

⁴⁴ *ibid.*, 40-43.

⁴⁵ *Time*, “Combative Chronicler,” 59.

⁴⁶ Schlesinger, *Robert Kennedy*, 223.

⁴⁷ Lasky, *Myth and the Man*, 145.

⁴⁸ Lasky, *J.F.K.*, 401.

whom the liberals had hated so intensely the day before. A few days later, Schlesinger talked with his old friend Reinhold Niebuhr, who thought Johnson a good Vice-Presidential candidate.⁴⁹

Schlesinger recognized the importance of bringing Stevenson supporters into the Kennedy camp. The night John Kennedy won the nomination, Schlesinger asked Bobby if a conciliatory gesture could be made. Bobby snapped, “Arthur, human nature requires that you allow us forty-eight hours. Adlai has given us a rough time over the last three days. In forty-eight hours I will do anything you want, but right now I don’t want to hear anything about the Stevensonians. You must allow for human nature.”⁵⁰ Although the Kennedys were in a more forgiving mood forty-eight hours later, the Stevensonians were not.

Stevenson himself was a little angry. After the convention, he spent the day with the Kennedys and the Schlesingers and Hyannis Port. Stevenson wrote to his friend Marietta Tree, “I could detect no contrition in (Schlesinger) who now seems tentatively persuaded that it is ‘a strong ticket,’ that Kennedy will be ‘good on issues,’ tho he has been ‘a little disappointing’ in handling people. I would say that his anguish is about over and that he is ‘growing’ rapidly. The words liberal or liberalism were never mentioned--obviously a sign of maturity!”⁵¹

The problem with liberals grew worse in the late summer when, in order to embarrass the Democrats, Republicans in Congress introduced civil rights bills. Trying to keep the Democrats unified, Kennedy and the party’s Congressional leadership announced they would press for non-race-related progressive legislation. Schlesinger informed Kennedy aide Archibald Cox that Democratic inaction on civil rights was making conversion of the holdout liberals even more difficult.⁵² Many liberals remained on the sidelines of the Presidential contest. Only a few ADA chapters voted even grudging endorsements of the national Democratic ticket, and those votes came more out of hatred for Nixon than enthusiasm for Kennedy.

John Kenneth Galbraith explained the lingering resentment of the Stevensonians:

overwhelmingly, there was a sense of *deep* affection, a sense of great commitment, deep affection for Adlai Stevenson... And this was then supported by the feeling that there were various issues, including Joe McCarthy (on) which Kennedy compromised himself. He was much more given to the image of machine politics of Massachusetts. Stevenson was in some sense a purer figure. These were secondary to the personal affection that was felt for Adlai Stevenson.⁵³

Schlesinger reported the problem to Kennedy personally.⁵⁴ And in September, Schlesinger, Eugene McCarthy, and James Doyle were dispatched to Southern California,

⁴⁹ Schlesinger, *A Thousand Days*, 61-62.

⁵⁰ *ibid*, 45.

⁵¹ Martin, *Stevenson and the World*, 531.

⁵² Carl M. Brauer, *John F. Kennedy and the Second Reconstruction* (NY, 1977), 40.

⁵³ interview 12/8/81.

⁵⁴ Schlesinger, *A Thousand Days*, 68-69.

a Stevenson stronghold, to rally the Democrats to the new leader.⁵⁵ Arthur Schlesinger believed what many Stevensonians would not accept for several years: that John Kennedy have become the “heir and executor of the Stevenson revolution.”⁵⁶

Ugly rumors were commonplace in the 1960 campaign. At the Democratic convention, Johnson had spread the word that Kennedy had Addison’s disease, and the Joe Kennedy had been pro-Nazi.⁵⁷ In 1959, Schlesinger had asked Kennedy about the Addison’s disease stories and been convinced by Kennedy’s denials.⁵⁸ Reinhold Niebuhr and Adlai Stevenson questioned Schlesinger about the rumors pertaining to Kennedy’s philandering. Schlesinger replied that most of them dated from the early 1950’s--a time when Kennedy thought he had only a few years to live; the back operations in 1955 and 1956 and brought Kennedy close to death and back and given him a new sense of purpose. His sexual habits did not affect his capacity to govern, and “even if (the stories were) true and contemporary--which they are not--could hardly seem crucial when the alternative is Richard M. Nixon.”⁵⁹

It became apparent that Kennedy was having image problems. Eric Severaid wrote a column that called both Kennedy and Nixon, the “apotheosis of the Organization Man.” Many tagged the two candidates, “The Gold Dust Twins.” With Kennedy’s encouragement, Schlesinger wrote a campaign book contrasting Kennedy and Nixon. *Kennedy or Nixon, Does It Make Any Difference?* appeared on September 26th, the day of the first debate.⁶⁰

With terms borrowed from the psychologist David Riesman, the major part of the book examined the candidates’ personalities, Nixon was an “other-directed” man who lacked a “solid sense of his own identity.”⁶¹ With neither strong convictions, nor a strong sense of himself, Nixon found it easy to land on whatever side of the issue was most convenient.⁶² Further, Nixon (as Kennedy had pointed out to Schlesinger) had neither taste nor dignity.⁶³ His acceptance speech, marked by such false personalizations as “Pat and I” typified his exploitative, manipulative, world-view.⁶⁴

Kennedy was Nixon’s opposite. Possessing the sense of history that Nixon did not, Kennedy put issues ahead of politics.⁶⁵ Kennedy’s style-- “rational, unemotional, unhistrionic”- reflected his inner confidence.⁶⁶ Kennedy was no trickster: “One finds in Kennedy none of Nixon’s almost morbid preoccupation with the techniques of personal projection. One finds none of the Nixon-like flood of self-conscious concern over the

⁵⁵ Schlesinger, *Robert Kennedy*, 228.

⁵⁶ Schlesinger, *A Thousand Days*, 30-31.

⁵⁷ Halberstam, *The Powers That Be*, 442.

⁵⁸ Schlesinger, *A Thousand Days*, 25-26.

⁵⁹ Martin, *Stevenson and the World*, 540.

⁶⁰ Schlesinger, *A Thousand Days*, 71.

⁶¹ Schlesinger, *Kennedy or Nixon*, 4, 17.

⁶² *ibid*, 13.

⁶³ *ibid*, 13; Schlesinger, *A Thousand Days*, 68.

⁶⁴ Schlesinger, *Kennedy or Nixon*, 12.

⁶⁵ *ibid*, 19.

⁶⁶ *ibid*, 27.

‘image’ he presents to the public.”⁶⁷ As Schlesinger would later write in *A Thousand Days*, “Even his faking had to stay within character.”⁶⁸

On the issues, Nixon, like the President he served, had no sense of direction.⁶⁹ But Kennedy saw a dangerous drift in America--a loss of historic purpose. “He understands that history is an intricate combination of fatality and fortuity on which the will of the leader can at times operate with decisive effect. He believes that, within limits, the intelligence of man can affect the course of events.”⁷⁰

Kennedy also better understood the proper connection between wealth and political power. Men who, like Nixon, had risen from poverty, could not comprehend why others did not ascend on their own, and therefore saw nothing wrong with letting the moneyed run the nation.⁷¹ But Kennedy, having been born rich, better understood the vagaries of luck, and knew that wealth did not confer the wisdom to govern.⁷² Kennedy believed that too much of America’s affluence was concentrated in the private sector. Rich in cars with tail-fins, America was poor in schools and submarines.⁷³

The final distinction between Kennedy and Nixon was the parties each represented. The Republicans had always been, except for a brief anti-slavery period, the single-interest, businessman’s party. Attempts by Theodore Roosevelt and Wendell Willkie to reform the Republicans had failed.⁷⁴ But the Democrats were a coalition party. Among the elements of the Democratic coalition were intellectuals, who made the Democrats the party of ideas. And a coalition party would be sure to govern more wisely than any single-interest party.⁷⁵

The 1960 election thus posed the choice between stagnation and progress. Schlesinger predicted that the “election of Kennedy, like that of Wilson in 1912, and Franklin Roosevelt in 1933, would plainly open vital options in our life.” America would renew the search for “a promise defined not by the glitter of our wealth, but by the splendor of our ideals.”⁷⁶

It was easy to take issue with *Kennedy or Nixon*. After all, Kennedy manipulated his family for political purposes far more effectively than did Nixon. And Kennedy, “the liberal hot-cold warrior, Catholic secularist, McCarthyite civil libertarian” had done his share of fence-straddling.⁷⁷ But the main point of the book was to highlight the contrast between Richard Nixon and John Kennedy. As Schlesinger stated years later: having seen each of the candidates from 1960 assume the Presidency, what American can still contend that the difference between Kennedy and Nixon was unimportant? As Kennedy himself

⁶⁷ Kennedy had told Galbraith and Schlesinger, “Nixon must always be thinking about who he is. That is a strain. I can be myself.” Galbraith, *A Life in Our Times*, 288.

⁶⁸ Schlesinger, *A Thousand Days*, 113.

⁶⁹ Schlesinger, *Kennedy or Nixon*, 35-36.

⁷⁰ *ibid*, 19.

⁷¹ *ibid*, 36.

⁷² *ibid*, 38.

⁷³ *ibid*, 39.

⁷⁴ *ibid*, 46-47.

⁷⁵ Even, Schlesinger admitted, a single-interest party of college professors. *ibid*, 44.

⁷⁶ *ibid*, 51.

⁷⁷ Garry Wills, *Nixon Agonistes* (New York, 1971), 391.

noted one day to an aide, “I keep saying to myself, ‘Kennedy, you’re the only thing that stands between Nixon and the White House.’”⁷⁸

Schlesinger, by his own admission, was little involved in the inner workings of the campaign, but did do his share to help.⁷⁹ A member of the “Committee of Arts, Letters, and Sciences for Kennedy,” he addressed reform groups, university audiences, and New York state Jews, trying to reassure them about the Democratic nominee.⁸⁰

Before the third debate with Nixon, he met with Kennedy, Sorenson, and Galbraith at a luncheon to help Kennedy prepare.⁸¹ As the campaign drew to a close, Schlesinger joined the “Citizens for Kennedy” air cavalcade touring New England.⁸² Sometimes his enthusiasm for Kennedy was counter-productive. Debating Al Smith Jr. on the Barry Gray radio show, Schlesinger won the argument but alienated many of Smith’s supporters, including some Democratic party bosses.⁸³

Candidate Nixon was touring the South and calling the Democrats the party of “Schlesinger, Galbraith, and Bowles.... a far cry from the party of Jefferson, Jackson, and Wilson.”⁸⁴ Publicly Kennedy maintained some distance from Schlesinger. Afraid that news of Schlesinger drafts arriving at Kennedy headquarters would prompt rumors of the Kennedy team collapsing and turning to Stevenson aides, Kennedy suggested that Schlesinger send ideas through Jacqueline.⁸⁵

Kennedy of course went on to win the election. But the narrowness of his margin surprised him, and reminded him how small his mandate was. Cautioned by the election, he would often defer controversial action in his term till after 1964, when, presumably after defeating Barry Goldwater, he would have a stronger mandate.

The job of assembling a cabinet and staff began. Kennedy appointed Schlesinger, Galbraith, and Sargent Shriver to a committee to provide recommendations for economic posts.⁸⁶ Visiting the Kennedys at Hyannis Port in November to discuss appointments, Schlesinger thought, “What a wildly attractive young couple.”⁸⁷ Considering that Arthur Schlesinger was a few months younger than John Kennedy, one must wonder about how Schlesinger perceived the Kennedys.⁸⁸

The President-elect mentioned possible posts for Minnesota Governor Orville Freeman, Michigan Governor Mennen Williams, Frank Coffin, the defeated South Dakota Congressman George McGovern, Harvard Economics Professor Adolf Berle, and Thomas

⁷⁸ Galbraith, *A Life in Our Times*, 385.

⁷⁹ *ibid*, 68.

⁸⁰ *ibid*, 73-74. Galbraith, *A Life in Our Times*, 386.

⁸¹ *ibid*, 385.

⁸² Schlesinger, *A Thousand Days*, 77.

⁸³ Lasky, *The Myth and the Man*, 304.

⁸⁴ Wofford, *Of Kennedys and Kings*, 78. The line was a poor imitation of Franklin Roosevelt’s famous “Martin, Barton, and Fish.”

⁸⁵ Schlesinger, *A Thousand Days*, 73

⁸⁶ Galbraith, *A Life in Our Times*, 389-390.

⁸⁷ Schlesinger, *A Thousand Days*, 115.

⁸⁸ Ross, *Literary Politicians*, 96.

Finletter. Schlesinger realized, fall these names, of course, were well calculated to appeal to a liberal guest.”⁸⁹

Among Schlesinger’s recommendations during the transition period were Orville Freeman as Attorney General and Nelson Rockefeller’s advisor Henry Kissinger as a consultant on European, especially German, questions.⁹⁰ Walter Lippmann was Schlesinger’s choice for Ambassador to France, but both Kennedy and Schlesinger realized that Lippmann would be more valuable to the administration as a friendly columnist.⁹¹

Before and during the New Frontier, Schlesinger and Galbraith, to their later regret, would oppose the appointment of some conservatives. They feared that Edward R. Murrow, Kennedy’s choice to head the United States Information Agency, would be too conventional and commercial.⁹² Murrow proved to be a pleasant surprise, and rescinded the ban on Schlesinger, Galbraith, and Kennedy books at U.S.I.A. libraries.⁹³ After Allen Dulles resigned in mid-1961, Schlesinger and Galbraith considered his replacement, John McCone, a poor choice, for McCone “had the reputation of a rigid cold-warrior who viewed the world in moralistic stereotypes.” He turned out, in Schlesinger’s words, to be “fair-minded and cautious.”⁹⁴ Along with many other people, Schlesinger and Galbraith opposed the appointment of Eisenhower Undersecretary of State Douglas Dillon as Secretary of the Treasury. Arguing that the attempt to placate the financial community was unnecessary, Galbraith and Schlesinger preferred Averell Harriman, Tennessee Senator Albert Gore, Wisconsin Congressman Henry Reuss, and Missouri congressman Richard Bolling to Dillon.⁹⁵ Dillon too proved more liberal than expected, and supported the new administration’s expansionary monetary policy.

The crucial appointment was Secretary of State. Knowing that Stevenson had put himself out of the running, Schlesinger suggested Averell Harriman. John Kennedy dismissed the idea as “old hat.” “You sure you’re not just being sentimental?” Bobby asked Schlesinger.⁹⁶ Instead, Harriman was made a relatively low-level, roving ambassador. Accepting the position with characteristic grace, Harriman commented, “All these Presidents are the same. You start at the bottom and work your way up.”⁹⁷

Kennedy had asked Stevenson to be Ambassador to the United Nations. Unlike every other Kennedy appointee, Stevenson, instead of accepting with alacrity, had responded with a list of twelve pre-conditions.⁹⁸ Kennedy asked Schlesinger about

⁸⁹ Schlesinger, *A Thousand Days*, 116.

⁹⁰ Schlesinger, *Robert Kennedy*, 248. Halberstam, *The Best and the Brightest*, 80. Freeman became Secretary of Agriculture. Kissinger was called down from Harvard sometimes for consultation, but personality differences with McGeorge Bundy kept him away from Washington most of the time.

⁹¹ Ronald Steele, *Walter Lippmann and the American Century* (Boston, 1980), 525.

⁹² Galbraith, *A Life in Our Times*, 413.

⁹³ Galbraith, *Ambassador’s Journal*, 109.

⁹⁴ Schlesinger, *A Thousand Days*, 397-398. McCone of course had attacked Stevenson’s test-ban proposal in 1956.

⁹⁵ Wofford, *Kennedys and Kings*, 76.

⁹⁶ Halberstam, *The Best and the Brightest*, 94.

⁹⁷ *ibid.*, 94. Among Harriman’s previous diplomatic posts was Ambassador to Moscow and Director of the Marshall Plan.

⁹⁸ Martin, *Stevenson and the World*, 563-564.

Stevenson's reluctance, but while Schlesinger was explaining, Kennedy interrupted to assert that the United States UN delegation would be far more autonomous than in the past.⁹⁹ In 1964, Stevenson confided to Schlesinger, "Of course I expected to be Secretary and it was a great blow."¹⁰⁰ The President-elect, after being talked out of his first choice, Arkansas Senator William Fulbright, because of the damaging effect Fulbright's segregationist Senate votes would have on Third World relations, selected almost everyone's second choice, Dean Rusk. "Liberals had lost the important job in the administration," David Halberstam later wrote, "although they could never admit this."¹⁰¹

Kennedy had appointed thirty-six members of the ADA, and almost all of the Elks Staff to positions in the executive branch, but liberals were dissatisfied because most of the cabinet-level jobs had gone to establishment figures.¹⁰² The new President kept around him men who could speak as respected members to various important constituencies in the nation, including both intellectuals and the Eastern Establishment. According to Halberstam, Kennedy acceded to the anti-Communist Establishment's dominance in foreign affairs.¹⁰³ Kennedy told Kenneth O'Donnell, "If I string along exclusively with Galbraith and Arthur Schlesinger and Seymour Harris and those other Harvard liberals, they'll fill Washington with wild-eyed ADA people. And if I listen to you and Powers and Bailey and Maguire, we'll have so many Irish Catholics that we'll have to organize a White House Knights of Columbus Council. I can use a few smart Republicans. Anyway, we need a Secretary of the Treasury who can call a few of those people on wall Street by their first names."¹⁰⁴

Robert A. Lovett, a leading establishment figure, often had Kennedy's ear during the transition period. "No doubt Lovett's urbane realism was a relief from the liberal idealists, like myself, who were assailing the President with virtuous opinions and nominations," reasoned Schlesinger.¹⁰⁵ When Schlesinger told the President that liberals felt that top positions were going to conservatives, Kennedy explained, "Yes, I know the liberals want visual reassurance like everybody else. But they shouldn't worry. What matters is the program... We'll have to go along for a year or so. Then I would like to bring in some new people.... I suppose it may be hard to get rid of these people once they are in."¹⁰⁶ Judging from Schlesinger's interpretation of Kennedy's words later, one must conclude that Schlesinger believed Kennedy meant what he said, and became even more sure as time went on.

Appointments for Galbraith and Schlesinger remained undecided. Kennedy asked Schlesinger if Galbraith would like to be Chairman of the President's Council of Economic

⁹⁹ Schlesinger, *A Thousand Days*, 135. In the end, Stevenson's requests for autonomy would go unheeded.

¹⁰⁰ Martin, *Stevenson and the World*, 563.

¹⁰¹ Halberstam, *Best and Brightest*, 48

¹⁰² Schlesinger, *A Thousand Days*, 427-428.

¹⁰³ After leaving the White House, Schlesinger would take a position on what he described as an Establishment "front organization"--the Council of Foreign Relations. Schlesinger, *A Thousand Days*, 124. Theodore White, *The Making of the President 1964* (New York, 1966), 88.

¹⁰⁴ Kenneth O'Donnell, David Powers, and Joe McCarthy, *Johnny We Hardly Knew Ye* (Boston, 1970), 235

¹⁰⁵ Schlesinger, *A Thousand Days*, 125.

¹⁰⁶ Schlesinger, *A Thousand Days*, 139.

Advisors. Much to Kennedy's relief, Schlesinger replied "no."¹⁰⁷ The President-elect then asked Schlesinger in strict confidence if Galbraith would like to be Ambassador to India. Two hours later, Galbraith got the happy news.¹⁰⁸ The new President told Galbraith he was being sent to India because he was too radical. "My policy is to be moderate and do much," Kennedy explained.¹⁰⁹ Although some liberals were eager to come to Washington, Galbraith, having administered national price controls during World War II, knew that he would never again have the same power, and gladly accepted a foreign assignment.¹¹⁰

Schlesinger was also consideration for a diplomatic post--an Ambassadorship or Undersecretary of State for Cultural Affairs.¹¹¹ Having decided that he would prefer to be a "floater" rather than a "cultural bureaucrat," he showed little interest in Kennedy's preliminary offers.¹¹² On December first, John Kennedy asked Schlesinger if he would like to be an ambassador, "I think an ambassadorship would be a great job. I'd like to be one myself. Are you sure you wouldn't want one?" When Robert Kennedy brought up an ambassadorship two weeks later, Schlesinger again demurred. Bobby then offered Schlesinger the position of White House Special Assistant. Schlesinger accepted.¹¹³

Hearing nothing about the appointment for the next several weeks, Schlesinger was relieved when the President-elect asked Marian at a pre-inaugural party if the Schlesingers had picked out a place to live.¹¹⁴ On January ninth, John Kennedy visited Boston to address the legislature and meet with New England appointees at Schlesinger's home.¹¹⁵ Schlesinger remembers that Kennedy "said casually that Bobby had spoken to him and was I ready to come to the White House? I said, I am not sure what I would be doing as special assistant, but if you think I can help, I would very much like to come." He said that he didn't know what he would be doing as President either, but guessed there would be enough to keep us both busy." Kennedy continued, we can't say anything about this until Chester Bowles is confirmed.¹¹⁶ I don't want the Senate to think I am bringing down the whole ADA."¹¹⁷ Kennedy told Schlesinger to contact appointments coordinator Ralph Dungan in a few weeks about the job.¹¹⁸

When Schlesinger called Dungan three weeks later, he replied, "That's the first I ever heard of it." Dungan discovered that Schlesinger indeed did have a post slated for him, and on January 25th, after Bowles had been confirmed as number two man in the State Department, Schlesinger's appointment was announced. The White House stated

¹⁰⁷ Galbraith, *A Life in Our Times*, 389.

¹⁰⁸ Galbraith, *Ambassador's Journal*, 1.

¹⁰⁹ *ibid*, 26.

¹¹⁰ Galbraith, *A Life in Our Times*, 389.

¹¹¹ Schlesinger, *A Thousand Days*, 138.

¹¹² Patrick Anderson, *The President's Men* (Garden City 1968), 216.

¹¹³ Lasky, *J.F.K.*, 9; Schlesinger, *Robert Kennedy*, 245.

¹¹⁴ Schlesinger, *A Thousand Days*, 159. They ended up in Georgetown in an 18th century red brick house. *Time*, "Combative Chronicler," 59.

¹¹⁵ Sorenson, *Kennedy*, 243.

¹¹⁶ Bowles, a verbose and liberal congressman, had been candidate Kennedy's chief advisor on foreign policy.

¹¹⁷ Anderson, *President's Men*, 214.

¹¹⁸ Schlesinger, *Robert Kennedy*, 245-246

that Schlesinger would have “a variety of duties,” including speechwriting.¹¹⁹ Schlesinger took his oath of office on January 30th. The first days at the White House were “uncertain and confusing” for Schlesinger.¹²⁰ Galbraith, whose appointment would not be confirmed until March, found his friend a little apprehensive, and noted that Schlesinger had a “good address, but no clear function.”¹²¹

After years in the wilderness, the liberal intellectuals finally achieved power in 1960. “The pleasures of power, so long untasted, were now being happily devoured--the chauffer-driven limousines, the special telephones, the top secret documents, the personal aides, the meetings in the Cabinet Boom, the calls from the President,” wrote Schlesinger.¹²² Many thought that rational intelligence, epitomized by Harvard, had been crowned at last. McGeorge Bundy, presidential advisor and former Harvard Dean of Faculty, remembered, “Especially at Harvard there was a tendency to suppose that because a Harvard man was President, and a lot of professors down there with him, somehow the university was running the country.”¹²³ Galbraith wrote in his journal that “conversation (at the White House mess) is much like that at the Harvard Faculty club, perhaps because it involves the same people.”¹²⁴

Kennedy himself encouraged the academic atmosphere. When Yale economist James Tobin begged off a government appointment on the grounds “I’m an Ivory Tower economist,” Kennedy replied, “That’s all right- I’m something of an Ivory Tower President.”¹²⁵ Several years later, in *The New Industrial State*, Galbraith would explain what most Kennedy staffers instinctively felt: A new “technostructure” of huge bureaucracies was replacing the competitive capitalist firm. According to the Silks, Galbraith “called for a new intellectual class to impose its own superior values and goals on business and government.”¹²⁶

For a while, it seemed that the intellectuals would take command. At a reception for Presidential appointees, Schlesinger remembers, “We had all wandered around the East Room in an intoxication of pleasure and incredulity. one’s life seemed almost to pass in review as one encountered Harvard classmates, wartime associates, faces seen after the war in ADA conventions, workers in Stevenson campaigns, academic colleagues, all united in a surge of hope and possibility.”¹²⁷ Schlesinger nostalgically remembered the mood:

The year 1961 was a damn long time ago. For perhaps the last time in their history it was possible for Americans to feel as if all the world were young and all dreams within grasp. I exaggerate of course. But many of us who came to Washington with the Kennedys did suppose that reason could serve as an

¹¹⁹ Anderson, *President’s Men*, 213.

¹²⁰ Schlesinger, *A Thousand Days*, 160.

¹²¹ Galbraith, *Ambassador’s Journal*, 28.

¹²² Schlesinger, *A Thousand Days*, 201

¹²³ Silk and Silk, *The American Establishment*, 50.

¹²⁴ Galbraith, *Ambassador’s Journal*, 30.

¹²⁵ Sorenson, *Kennedy*, 256.

¹²⁶ Silk and Silk, *The American Establishment*, 52.

¹²⁷ Schlesinger, *A Thousand Days*, 194.

instrument for social change and that we were moving in the grain of history.... Euphoria crashed on the Cuban beachhead.¹²⁸

This is a chapter from David B. Kopel, *The Highbrow in American Politics: Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr. and the Role of the Intellectual in Politics*. Honors Thesis in History, Brown University, May 1982. Awarded Highest Honors, and the National Geographic Society Prize for best History thesis. Other chapters are available on-line at <http://www.davekopel.org/schlesinger/main.htm>.

¹²⁸ Schlesinger, *Robert Kennedy*, 629.