

CHAPTER VIII

THE SPECIAL ASSISTANT

“Most of us looked back at our White House experience...(as) the most splendid time of one’s life.” Arthur Schlesinger Jr.¹

As the Kennedys and their followers moved gracefully into power in January 1961, the age of professors in government seemed to be at hand. At last, the nation had a President who would consider the voices of learning and reason. Arthur Schlesinger’s appointment exemplified the interrelation of the worlds of ideas and action. As Richard Rovere wrote when Schlesinger’s appointment was announced:

Beginning next week, (Kennedy) will have close at hand the noted Harvard historian and belletrist Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., whose principle service, according to those already on active duty there, will be to see to it that Mr. Kennedy does not become so caught up in the grubby details of running the country from day to day that he gives insufficient time and thought to the larger things...(Schlesinger’s effect would be) forcing the President to have some care for the morrow after the morrow, and for eternal, or at least enduring, verities...(there was) no precedent in American history...The court philosopher went out of fashion with the royal courts.²

But Rovere also wrote, “There was not a reformer among them (the White House staff) as far as anyone could tell. Pragmatism--often of the grubbiest kind—was rampant.”³

Of Kennedy’s use of intellectuals, Schlesinger would later recall:

In a sense, I think it was novel. Obviously, other Presidents, particularly F.D.R., had drawn on academics and intellectuals. But F.D.R. used them mostly for advice; he rarely gave them administrative responsibility, or if they held government jobs, these were not particularly connected with their intellectual experience...Kennedy went farther than any preceding President in systematically giving intellectuals positions of power.

He was responding to a situation that is going to have increasing force. Even President Nixon has drawn on the academic community. Kennedy happened to like intellectuals and enjoy their company. Nixon, I imagine, does not. But the circumstances of the Presidency in an age of high technology--the complex nature of the problems he faces, and the solutions he must seek--will require political authority to draw increasingly from the intellectual community. Kennedy anticipated this, encouraged it, enjoyed it.⁴

The job of Special Assistant to the President was a loosely-defined one; for like Franklin Roosevelt, Kennedy preferred informal administrative methods. Not once in his term did the President feel the need to hold a meeting of the entire official White House staff.⁵

¹ Arthur Schlesinger Jr., *The Imperial Presidency* (New York, 1974), 263.

² Richard Rovere, “Letter from Washington,” *The New Yorker* (Feb. 4, 1961), 109-110.

³ Anderson, *President’s Men*, 199.

⁴ John A. Garraty, *Interpreting American History: Conversations with Historians* (Toronto 1970), 272.

⁵ Sorenson, *Kennedy*, 262.

Special Assistants functioned as generalists, ready to tackle any problem. They had easy access to the President, usually through the President's secretary, Evelyn Lincoln. According to Schlesinger, "The Special Assistants were not to get between the President and the operating chiefs of agencies, but they were to make sure that the departmental and agency recommendations took full account of the presidential and national interests...At the start, we all felt free to 'meddle' when we thought that we had a good idea, or someone else a poor one. But as the ice began forming over the government, free-wheeling became increasingly difficult and dangerous."⁶ Thus, despite the ire roused in the State Department, Schlesinger knew that prodding the bureaucracy was one of the most important parts of his job. Bureaucracy-fighting for John Kennedy must have been inspiring work, as Schlesinger usually put in eleven or twelve hour days.⁷

Arthur Schlesinger remembers White House staff relations as

really very friendly, particularly when you compare them with what's happened in administrations since. There were always arguments, but there was never any feuding, and no one ever *dreamed* of wire-tapping anyone's telephone. So I think it was, as White House staffs so, despite inevitable arguments, and some resentments...an unusually friendly one.⁸

Schlesinger's memory is of a more amicable White House than some others saw. Patrick Anderson wrote that the President "knew that some of his aides viewed Arthur Schlesinger with ill-concealed disdain, and (Kennedy) often went out of his way to bolster Schlesinger's bruised feelings."⁹

Whatever the realities in the White House, the press believed that Schlesinger and his fellow intellectuals played a decisive role in the administration. Special Assistants had an easier time getting media attention than did senior Senators.¹⁰ David Halberstam wrote:

Talented, highly visible academics, who might never have worked for a congressman--except one with Presidential ambitions--came to work for the Kennedy White House. It helped give the office even more of an aura of intellectual and historical legitimacy and of being above politics; a generation of Washington reporters found their old professors working at the White House, dazzling them, manipulating them, and, on some occasions, lying to them.¹¹

Not only the Establishment media followed Schlesinger with interest. According to Ted Sorenson, one of the reasons Schlesinger had been appointed was to act as "a lightning rod, to draw Republican attacks away from the rest of us."¹² He fulfilled that function admirably. In *A Thousand Days*, Schlesinger explained how detractors of President Kennedy, especially ones from the business, community, could not attack the President directly because of his personal popularity. Instead, they

⁶ Schlesinger, *A Thousand Days*, 627, 630-632.

⁷ *ibid*, 195. He was assisted by his secretary Gretchen Stewart, who works for him now at CUNY. Whatever critics may say about Schlesinger, no one can deny that Miss Stewart is a pleasant person.

⁸ Interview, 1/14/82.

⁹ Anderson, *President's Men*, 214.

¹⁰ Halberstam, *The Powers that Be*, 540.

¹¹ *ibid*, 695.

¹² Sorenson, *Kennedy*, 296.

aimed their fire at the President's advisors. Serving as a scapegoat for the Right, Schlesinger put himself in the front line in the battle against the special interests.

Why was Schlesinger a special target for conservatives? He hypothesized:

I think that it was probably because of a misspent life in speaking and writing I said so many things which were wrenched out of context and made more vulnerable. Sorenson and people like that had no public career. They'd just been working for Kennedy and hadn't written a great deal. I had written a great deal, and so was on the record on all sorts of issues.¹³

As Patrick Anderson said, "with his high forehead and oval face, his bow tie and pot belly, his horn-rimmed glasses and petulant, protruding lower lip--he seemed to some the very quintessence of an egghead."¹⁴

The *Wall Street Journal* drew less pleasure from Schlesinger's move to Washington than did Richard Rovere, and editorialized against the appointment of Schlesinger and other liberal thinkers. But the paper did find some signs for hope the President's own practical, conservative instincts.¹⁵

A few weeks into the opening of the New Frontier, Schlesinger debated William F. Buckley in Boston about the welfare state. Arriving twenty minutes late with a police escort, Schlesinger opened the debate by handing Buckley a bouquet of roses with the words "Mr. Buckley has a facility for rhetoric which I envy, as well as a wit that I seek vainly to emulate."¹⁶ The welfare state, proposed Schlesinger, was the best defense against Communism. Hearing of the remarks, South Carolina Senator Strom Thurmond replied that Communism and welfare statism "were in essence the same." Republican Thomas Pelly of Washington prayed "God save the President from his socialist friends."¹⁷

The Republican leadership found Schlesinger an appealing target. Barry Goldwater discovered Schlesinger's 1947 *Partisan Review* article "The Future of Socialism" and began warning the nation that Schlesinger had "a blueprint for Socialism." The charge was silly, for the article specifically rejected the traditional definition of socialism as government ownership of the means of production. What made the charge even more pointless was that Schlesinger had no involvement in economic policy-making.¹⁸ When Schlesinger pointed out that Goldwater had misread the article, the Senator dropped the accusation.¹⁹ But in 1962, Goldwater began calling for Kennedy to dismiss staff members who had been "wrong on Cuba," including Schlesinger, Stevenson, Goodwin, and Bowles²⁰ When Schlesinger became the first Harvard professor to resign a tenured position, House Republican Whip Arends begged, "Professor, go home."²¹

¹³ Interview, 1/14/82.

¹⁴ Anderson, *President's Men*, 227. *American Opinion*, a magazine of the far Right, featured Schlesinger's face on a cover with a "hidden puzzle." By racing an outline of Schlesinger's head, the reader drew a picture of a dairy product. (Oct. 1962).

¹⁵ Jim F. Heath, *JFK and the Business Community* (Chicago, 1969), 5

¹⁶ William F. Buckley, "The Violation of Arthur," *The National Review* (Apr. 9, 1963), 271.S

¹⁷ Heath, *Business Community*, 5-7. The debate caused Schlesinger more trouble two years later.

Buckley put Schlesinger's complimentary phrase on the back cover of his new book, *Rumblings Left and Right*. Annoyed, Schlesinger threatened to sue Buckley for invasion of privacy, but thought better of it. *National Review*, "Violation of Arthur," 271.

¹⁸ Sorenson, *Kennedy*, 462.

¹⁹ Schlesinger, *A Thousand Days*, 591.

²⁰ Lasky, *The Myth and the Man*, 302.

²¹ *New York Times*, (Jan. 17, 1962), 17:3; and (Jan. 23, 1962), 18:8

Conservatives out of power also latched on to Schlesinger as a symbol of “egghead socialists.” *The Thought Brigade*, by Roger Stuart, detailed the collectivist menace of government run by the “President’s Personal Professors.”²² M. Stanton Evans’ *The Liberal Establishment* called Schlesinger’s economic views “retail version of John Kenneth Galbraith’s, devoid of Galbraith’s wit or economic expertise.”²³ The thesis of the book was that liberals advocated total government control of national life. What Stanton considered to be the infringements on property rights, and the attempts at news management, presaged the destruction of rights unless the liberals were stopped.²⁴ Columnist Walter Winchell wrote that Schlesinger is haunted by intellectual snobbery, dominated by arrogance...as power-mad as he is venomous ... a threat to fundamental American concepts.”²⁵ Scripps-Howard columnist Henry Taylor picked Goldwater’s socialism charge and wrote an article entitled “Schlesinger Should Go.”²⁶

Another Taylor column “exposed” the fact that Schlesinger, in addition to holding down his White House duties, wrote articles for the *New York Times Magazine* and *The Saturday Evening Post*. Discussing the democratic socialism article on the phone with Taylor, Schlesinger quoted Winston Churchill, “I neither withdraw nor apologize.”²⁷ As the conversation deteriorated, Schlesinger told the columnist, “It is obvious to me that I write for people who have higher intellectual capabilities than you possess.” Growing exasperated at one point of debate, Schlesinger barked “if you believe that, you’re an idiot.” Taylor’s column the next day quoted Schlesinger as beginning the conversation, “You’re an idiot.” In defense of outside writing, Schlesinger explained that he did not write about the administration, and began giving the earnings to charity.²⁸

Robert Welch’s John Birch magazine, *American Opinion*, ran a story about Schlesinger. The article labeled *The Vital Center* the “*Mein Kampf* of the Non-Communist Left, for which he is both oracle and prophet.” The article continued, “Schlesinger’s text, like Hitler’s is confusing.”²⁹ In California, the Committee to Remove Schlesinger from Public Life sprang up.

But the most serious threat to Schlesinger sprang from an incident at Robert Kennedy’s house that, in the words of Patrick Anderson, threatened to make Schlesinger “the thinking man’s Fatty Arbuckle.”³⁰ In the summer of 1962, Schlesinger was among the guests attending Robert and Ethel Kennedy’s anniversary party. Catwalks lay across the swimming pool. According to the version given in *A Thousand Days*, “My partner and I ventured out on to the catwalk; it shook under our tread; and to our horror we saw Ethel’s chair slide on the wet boards on the edge and then into the water. After a moment I plunged in after her. We changed our clothes and the party went pleasantly on.”³¹ Later that evening, another guest fell in.³²

²² Roger Stuart, *The Thought Brigade: America’s Influential Ghosts in Government* (New York, 1963), 69.

²³ Evans, *The Liberal Establishment*, 79.

²⁴ *ibid*, 320-323.

²⁵ Schlesinger, *A Thousand Days*, 591

²⁶ As *A Thousand Days* and *Robert Kennedy* point out, Taylor believed in flying saucers, and thought that the Voting Rights Act was planned by the Communist Party U. S. A. Taylor had served as American Ambassador to Switzerland under Eisenhower.

²⁷ Lasky, *J.F.K.*, 105.

²⁸ Schlesinger, *A Thousand Days*, 590-591. *New York Times*, (June 22, 1962), 22:6. “The Moonlight Writer,” *Time* (June 29, 1962), 12.

²⁹ Robert Montgomery, “Arthur Schlesinger Jr.,” *American Opinion*, 7-18.

³⁰ Anderson, *President’s Men*, 227.

³¹ Schlesinger, *A Thousand Days*, 591.

Years later, In *Robert F. Kennedy and His Times*, Schlesinger revealed that Lee Udall had pushed him in. Galbraith *Ambassador's Journal* simply stated, "those who did not dive were thrown."³³

Whatever actually happened, the nation's press was soon full of stories of drunken Arthur Schlesinger gleefully pushing guests into the pool, and diving in after them. Tommy Corcoran, one of Franklin Roosevelt's closest advisors warned Schlesinger, "I scent a man hunt. Whenever the market goes down, those fellows demand a human sacrifice, and they have nominated you. The play they gave the swimming-pool story was the big tip-off."³⁴ Schlesinger worried that he was harming the administration, and offered to resign. The President re-assured him, "Don't worry about it. Everybody knows what Henry Taylor is like. No one pays any attention to him. All they are doing is shooting at me through you. Their whole line is to pin everything on the professors--you, Heller, Rostow. When the market fell, *Time* put Heller on the cover, not Dillon. Don't worry about it. This is the sort of thing you have to expect."³⁵

Within the Executive branch too, some hard-line conservatives despised Schlesinger. F.B.I. Director J. E. Edgar Hoover (despite Schlesinger's supportive remark in *The Vital Center* that spy-chasing should be left to the F.B.I.) had long disliked the professor. A 1950 F.B.I. memorandum quoted Hoover calling Schlesinger "a stinker"; in 1954, the Director ordered agents not to talk with him.³⁶ When Schlesinger and Sorenson came face-to-face with Hoover, as Hoover left a meeting with Kennedy, the President offered no introductions. Kennedy later explained that he did not want to upset Hoover.³⁷

Unbeknownst to Schlesinger, some CIA officials suspected that Schlesinger was a Soviet mole, because the Russian embassy in Caracas had been aware of the Bay of Pigs before the landing, and Schlesinger had been in Caracas visiting Betancourt.³⁸ Perhaps another factor implicating Schlesinger was that he was a brother-in-law Harvard Professor John K. Fairbanks, whom Senator McCarran had called "a conscious agent" of Stalinism.³⁹ But Kennedy and the rest of the staff with access to files knew Schlesinger well enough to ignore the Agency's suspicions.⁴⁰

Despite the distraction of being persecuted, Schlesinger found plenty of time to do productive work at the White House. One of his tasks was to help with speech-writing, especially after Richard Goodwin moved to the State Department.⁴¹ Although the President usually found Schlesinger's speeches "too Stevensonian," he did sometimes use them. Among the most important speeches Schlesinger helped craft was the 1962 Yale Commencement speech. President told the New Haven audience that the days of ideology were gone, that the passions of the 1930s were past. It was time to move beyond the clichéd battles of right and left, for what America needed now was technical managers, skilled at operating the complex machinery of our giant

³² White, *The Making of the President 1964*, 294n.

³³ Galbraith, *Ambassador's Journal*, 137.

³⁴ Schlesinger, *A Thousand Days*, 591.

³⁵ *ibid.*, 591.

³⁶ Schlesinger, *Robert Kennedy*, 281.

³⁷ Schlesinger, *A Thousand Days*, 566.

³⁸ Schlesinger, *Robert Kennedy*, 665.

³⁹ Halberstam, *The Best and the Brightest*, 234-235.

⁴⁰ Interview 4/23/82.

⁴¹ A bright, ambitious young man, Goodwin was quickly promoted from White House Special Counsel to Deputy Assistant for Inter-American Affairs. But Goodwin and the State Department did not get along; he fell from Kennedy's favor was sent to write speeches for Sargent Shriver.

society.⁴² The philosophy matched what most Kennedy associates already instinctively felt.⁴³

Schlesinger also helped on Kennedy's 1963 American University speech, which called for an end to the cold war. To the liberals around Kennedy, the American University speech epitomized the President's sincere concern with peace, and his mature acceptance of an evolving world.⁴⁴

Occasionally Schlesinger served as a speech-writer and researcher for Civil Rights issues. He filled in for an ailing Ted Sorenson during the crisis over the admission of a black, James Meredith, to the segregated University of Mississippi, and the occupation of the University by federal troops. In addition, Schlesinger was the White House liaison with civil rights lobbyist Joseph Rauh, and Roy Wilkins and other black leaders.⁴⁵

Schlesinger produced a prodigious number of memos. One colleague called them, "beautiful memos, witty, masterfully written memos, but often showing bad judgment," and consequently "often ignored."⁴⁶ According to U. P.I. White House correspondent Merriman Smith, the President showed one Schlesinger memo to a visitor:

Look at that will you. Seven single-spaced pages. And what a lot of blankety-blank. I dearly love this man. He has a fine mind and some fine ideas, but in this case ... He is proposing that I conduct myself as Franklin Roosevelt did in 1933, but this fellow can't get through his head that first, I'm not FDR and this is 1963 not 1933; that what was fine for Roosevelt simply would not work today for me simple reason--in 1933, Roosevelt faced one central problem, the Depression, and he could take more liberties with domestic matters than I possibly could enjoy today. Also, in 1933, there were no nuclear bombs or jet aircraft or cold war.

The President tossed the memo into the wastebasket.⁴⁷

One the other hand, Kennedy did value some Schlesinger briefs. The President called Schlesinger's memo on the British Labour Party, written after a trip to Europe, the best he had ever read.⁴⁸

Even Schlesinger would admit that his advice was sometimes wrong. One of Schlesinger's mistakes was arguing that the President should, like Franklin Roosevelt, not risk his prestige on the mid-term elections⁴⁹

But more often Schlesinger's advice went unheeded because it was too recklessly liberal. Schlesinger's suggestion that advertising be taxed was picked up by the press, provoked a storm of indignation and was quickly withdrawn. As Galbraith noted, "It would be hard to imagine a measure that would get you less support from the television and press."⁵⁰ Along with many of Kennedy's other advisors, Schlesinger unsuccessfully discouraged the President from making Trade

⁴² Schlesinger, *A Thousand Days*, 592-594.

⁴³ Especially John Kenneth Galbraith, who detailed the theory in *The New Industrial State*. Non-Communist intellectuals had been discussing "the end of ideology" since the early 1950s.

⁴⁴ *A Thousand Days*, 821-824.

⁴⁵ Interview 4/23/82.

⁴⁶ *Time*, "Combative Chronicler," 54.

⁴⁷ Lasky, *The Myth and the Man*, 305-306.

⁴⁸ Bradlee, *Conversations with Kennedy*, (New York, 1975) 158.

⁴⁹ Sorenson, *Kennedy*, 353.

⁵⁰ Interview, 12/8/81.

Reform--hardly at liberal priority--the major item on his 1962 legislative agenda.⁵¹

Schlesinger was constantly urging Kennedy to be more forceful with Congress--for example to take on the Lafollette-Monroney Committee, which was keeping many of the President's bills from even reaching the floor of the House.⁵² Schlesinger himself was certainly aggressive enough with Congress; once, after some particularly tactless handling of a Congressional matter, Schlesinger was harshly rebuked by Larry O'Brien, much to the President's amusement.⁵³

While much of Kennedy's program was being blocked on Capitol Hill, Schlesinger urged the President to use television to carry his case directly to the people. Not wanting to become "the national bore," Kennedy demurred.⁵⁴ "One had to assume that Presidents had a better sense of 'public psychology' than their critics; that was one reason why they were Presidents and their critics were critics," rationalized Schlesinger.⁵⁵

On several issues, especially Civil Rights, Kennedy did move more slowly than Schlesinger preferred. In retrospect, Schlesinger saw the caution as, "an acute and anguished sense of the fragility of the membranes of civilization, stretched so thin over a nation so disparate in its composition, so tense in its interior relationships, so cunningly enmeshed in underground fears and antagonisms, so entrapped by history in the ethos of violence."⁵⁶ For all the beauty of Schlesinger's prose, one must remember the President's duty to do what is right. Kennedy was willing to move far ahead of public opinion, and to risk losing the election, on initiatives he felt vital, such as the Test-Ban Treaty.⁵⁷ But civil rights just did not inspire similar moral commitment in President Kennedy.

And on more personal issues, one also sees in Kennedy a pragmatic insensitivity. Along with several other top aides, Arthur Schlesinger asked the President to rehabilitate John Paton Davies, a foreign service officer from the China desk had been destroyed by McCarthyism. Davies was currently living in exile in Peru. Kennedy had no doubt of the injustice of Davies' exile, but, having rehabilitated Robert Oppenheimer, postponed Davies until the second term.⁵⁸ As Schlesinger explained, Kennedy "felt there were other people like Oppenheimer that he had to do first. The atmosphere was still that you had to proceed one at a time."⁵⁹

Several sources argue that Schlesinger's impact on policy-making was insignificant. White House Press Secretary Pierre Salinger said of Schlesinger: "He was not a policy maker. His official role was as White House liaison with United Nations Ambassador Stevenson."⁶⁰ The President's secretary Evelyn Lincoln wrote that Kennedy "admired Schlesinger's brilliant mind, his enormous store of information, and his ability to turn a phrase...but Schlesinger was never more than an ally and assistant...He knew that Schlesinger would have preferred to be working for 'President' Adlai Stevenson."⁶¹ Patrick Anderson noted that an office in the East

⁵¹ Schlesinger, *A Thousand Days*, 774.

⁵² Hugh Sidey, *John F. Kennedy, President* (New York, 1964), 417.

⁵³ Anderson, *President's Men*, 216.

⁵⁴ Halberstam, *The Powers That Be*, 541.

⁵⁵ Schlesinger, *A Thousand Days*, 661.

⁵⁶ *ibid*, 665.

⁵⁷ Halberstam, *The Best and the Brightest*, 361

⁵⁸ *ibid*, 129.

⁵⁹ Interview 4/23/82.

⁶⁰ Anderson, *President's Men*, 213.

⁶¹ *ibid*, 214.

Wing; “ranks in White House prestige slightly ahead of an office Baltimore.”⁶² “You have to understand that *Arthur* was over in the *East Wing* drinking *tea* with *Jackie*,” an unnamed administration official told Anderson.⁶³ In 1965 a *Time* magazine cover story about Schlesinger called him “more a part of the atmosphere rather than the substance of the New Frontier.”⁶⁴ When a 1962 *Newsweek* article quoted the President as saying, “Boy, when those liberals start mixing into policy, it’s murder,” the President asked his newspaper friend Ben Bradlee, “with your well-known tact, to let Arthur know the quote came from “somewhere else, not the President. Tell him it was Kenny.”⁶⁵ *Washington Post* editor Ben Bradlee believes that Schlesinger was a man, “whom (Kennedy) admired as a historian, liked enormously as a friend, but whose liberal policies he felt were impractical.”⁶⁶ In an oral history interview, Robert Kennedy observed that the President “thought Schlesinger was a little bit of a nut sometimes.”⁶⁷ President Kennedy told William Allen White, “Arthur has nothing to do with making policy. He works over there (in the East Wing) and is a good writer, period.”⁶⁸

Others were more generous. Ted Sorenson, Kennedy’s closest advisor, recalled Schlesinger as the President’s “constant contact with liberals and intellectuals, both in this country and abroad, as his adviser on Latin America, United Nations, and cultural affairs, as a source of innovation, ideas, and occasional speeches on topics.”⁶⁹ Asked how influential Schlesinger was, Kenneth Galbraith answered:

That’s a difficult question, but he was certainly one of the people whom the President saw the most. The President had a great sense of history, and a feeling for history. He saw Schlesinger as the historian of his administration and it would be my feeling that the President had great confidence in his advice on current issues; but he also enjoyed Schlesinger very much as a raconteur, somebody who could give him a perspective to what was going on, who could say how things were in the time of Woodrow Wilson or Chester A. Arthur.⁷⁰

Schlesinger lists his most important contributions as speech-writer (especially for Stevenson during the Missile Crisis), liaison with Stevenson, sometimes consultant on civil rights, and proponent of the *apertura sinistra*.⁷¹

Not content to rely on one source of information, Kennedy kept open many channels to different parts of the government and the outside world.⁷² Schlesinger served as a link with the cultural and intellectual communities. He had long believed

⁶² *ibid*, 214. At least in the old days, the office must have had more prestige, for James Byrnes, Franklin Roosevelt’s director of the Office of War Mobilization had worked there. Schlesinger, *A Thousand Days*, 160.

⁶³ Anderson, *President’s Men*, 216.

⁶⁴ “The Combative Chronicler,” *Time* (Dec.27, 1965). Schlesinger has called *Time* story, “not entirely accurate.” (letter to Buford Wright 6/28/74.) One should also keep in mind Schlesinger’s dictum, “It is an old principle of common law that no man can be held accountable for what a *Time* magazine cover story may say about him.” “Time and the Intellectuals,” reprinted in *Politics of Hope*, 232.

⁶⁵ Bradlee, *Conversations with Kennedy*, 70. The President was referring to Kenny O’Donnell.

⁶⁶ *ibid*, 127.

⁶⁷ Wofford, *Of Kennedys and Kings*, 177.

⁶⁸ William White, “Schlesinger and Goodwin Demand Softer Viet Policy,” *Washington Post* (Oct. 11, 1967), A 17.

⁶⁹ Sorenson, *Kennedy*, 264.

⁷⁰ Interview 12/8/81.

⁷¹ Interview 1/14/82.

⁷² Anderson, *President’s Men*, 202.

that the government had a responsibility to encourage culture and the arts. In the new President, Schlesinger found, if not an aesthete, at leader with an understanding of his responsibility to encourage good taste. "Excellence was a public necessity, ugliness a national disgrace. The arts were, in his view, part of the presidential responsibility."⁷³ With Schlesinger's assistance, Kennedy met many distinguished artists, including Isaiah Berlin and the composer Gian Carlo Menotti.⁷⁴ Pierre Salinger and Schlesinger recommended that the President commission a special consultant to survey the areas where public policy had impact on cultural life and to define the elements of a national cultural program.⁷⁵ Although there were few concrete measures the President could take, Schlesinger credited Kennedy's tone with restoring the dignity of learning and the arts in American life.⁷⁶

Schlesinger also served as liaison to the intellectual community. Many intellectuals, such as C. Wright Mills (author of *The Power Elite*), criticized Kennedy for not being progressive enough, and Schlesinger for selling out to a politician. After reading Alfred Kazin's thoughtful article about the corruptions of politics, Schlesinger arranged for a lunch meeting of Kazin and Kennedy. But a friendly luncheon could not change the hostility of some academics and the New Left to the Kennedy administration.⁷⁷ In defense, Schlesinger wrote an article for *Encounter* magazine entitled, "The Administration and Its Critics," that explained the New Left/Kennedy split as another manifestation of the ancient utopian/pragmatic division within liberalism. Schlesinger considered the critics out of step with the times: "The politics of modernity was intolerable for the true believers."⁷⁸

A friendlier intellectual was the columnist Walter Lippmann, who frequently lunched with Kennedy and Schlesinger. When Schlesinger suggested inviting Lippmann to a minor ceremonial event, the President replied, "No, we're doing so well with him, let's not spoil it."⁷⁹

One portion of the New Frontier's intellectual atmosphere in which Schlesinger played a major role in was the "Hickory Hill seminars." After being prodded by Robert and Ethel Kennedy, Schlesinger organized a monthly series of seminars at the Attorney General's Virginia home. Lecturers included Isaiah Berlin, cartoonist Al Capp, John Kenneth Galbraith, the historian David Donald, the philosopher A.J. Ayers, and the psychologist Lawrence Kubie.⁸⁰ Among the regular guests were Sargent Shriver, Assistant Secretary of Defense Roswell Roosevelt Gilpatric, Alice Roosevelt Longworth, Secretary of Defense Bob McNamara, and about fifteen other members of the President's official family or Washington elite.⁸¹ The self-improving McNamara and Ethel Kennedy always supplied questions.⁸² To Schlesinger, the seminars "summed up a good deal of the humor and questing spirit of the New Frontier."⁸³

⁷³ Schlesinger, *A Thousand Days*, 671.

⁷⁴ *Time*, "Combative Chronicler," 54.

⁷⁵ Schlesinger, *A Thousand Days*, 673.

⁷⁶ *ibid*, 677.

⁷⁷ *ibid*, 681.

⁷⁸ *ibid*, 679.

⁷⁹ Steele, *Lippmann and the American Century*, 538. Lippmann himself felt the proper role of the intellectual was to be a detached commentator. *Pastmasters*, 364.

⁸⁰ Schlesinger, *Robert Kennedy*, 638-639.

⁸¹ Stuart, *The Thought Brigade*, 56. Schlesinger, *Robert Kennedy*, 638. Alice Roosevelt Longworth was Theodore Roosevelt's daughter and *grande dame* of Washington society.

⁸² Halberstam, *The Best and the Brightest*, 292.

⁸³ Schlesinger, *A Thousand Days*, 638.

Whatever their working relationship, John Kennedy and Arthur Schlesinger enjoyed a strong friendship. He was more a member of John Kennedy's social circle than was any other White House staffer.⁸⁴ After the day's work was done, Schlesinger would often sit in the Oval Office and listen to Kennedy go over the day's events. Apparently the afternoons drinking tea were pleasant, for Schlesinger and Jacqueline Kennedy became good friends.⁸⁵ Schlesinger served as cultural advisor to Jacqueline, and to the White House in general. A "great believer in the movies" Schlesinger, along with Pierre Salinger, screened the films to be shown in the White House.⁸⁶

With the President's permission, he moonlighted as a film critic for *Show* magazine.⁸⁷ Among the most sought-after of Washington party guests, Schlesinger was becoming a "beautiful person."⁸⁸ Parties at the Schlesingers' rated high on the Washington social scale. John Kenneth Galbraith came by Schlesinger's office one day, he found Schlesinger chatting with Angie Dickinson.⁸⁹ In New York, Schlesinger and Robert Kennedy met Marilyn Monroe. "Bobby and I engaged in mock competition for her; she was most agreeable to him and pleasant to me."⁹⁰ Said one person who claimed to know Schlesinger well, "Arthur enjoys society with a capital S. He admires the ease, the graciousness that money and social status bring. He isn't interested in prestige per se; he simply feels that these people are decorative that they know how to live well. He admires elegance."⁹¹

Unlike fellow intellectuals McGeorge Bundy and Ted Sorenson, Schlesinger was clearly not a member of the inner policy-making circles. But in any administration, only a handful of men have the President's ear more closely than did Schlesinger. Cynics who state that Kennedy merely used as a showpiece to the intellectual community ignore the close friendship between the President and Schlesinger. Had Schlesinger been as self-serving as some suggest, he would have abandoned the idealistic liberal principles that prevented his advice from being taken.

[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>.](http://www.davekopel.org/schlesinger/main.htm)

⁸⁴ Anderson, *President's Men*, 217.

⁸⁵ Relations with Caroline and John Jr. must have been good too; the children included the Schlesinger home on their trick-or-treat rounds. *ibid*, 614.

⁸⁶ Stuart, *The Thought Brigade*, 156. The President apparently appreciated the cinema less than did Schlesinger, and often left a half hour after the film had begun. Schlesinger, *A Thousand Days*, 612.

⁸⁷ *ibid*, 612.

⁸⁸ Sidey, *John F. Kennedy, President*, 275.

⁸⁹ Galbraith, *Ambassador's Journal*, 256.

⁹⁰ Schlesinger, *Robert Kennedy*, 637.

⁹¹ Lasky, *J.F.K.*, 304.