

Henry R. Luce Oral History Interview – 11/11/1965
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Biographical Note

Luce was founder and publisher, Time, Inc. and editor-in-chief of *Time Magazine* from 1923-1964. In this interview he discusses writing the foreword to the 1940 and 1961 editions of *While England Slept*, his friendship with Joseph P. Kennedy, Sr., the Cuban Missile Crisis, and the Time, Inc. publications' coverage of the Kennedy administration, among other issues.

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Henry R. Luce

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Oral History Interview

with

Henry R. Luce, Editorial Chairman, *Time* Incorporated

by

John L. Steele, Chief, Washington Bureau, *Time-Life*.

Thursday, November 11, 1965, at 3:30 P.M.

Office of Mr. Luce, *Time & Life* Building, Rockefeller Center, New York, New York.

For the John F. Kennedy Presidential Library

STEELE: Mr. Luce, in 1940 you wrote a foreword to a book called *Why England Slept*, by a young man just out of Harvard. His name was John F. Kennedy and in your foreword you wrote: "If John Kennedy is characteristic of the younger generation... many of us would be happy to have the destinies of this republic handed over to his generation at once." Twenty-one years later the destiny of the republic had been handed over to John F. Kennedy, with his election to the presidency, and you wrote another foreword, to the 1961 edition of *Why England Slept*. How did you come to write the foreword for the early, the 1940 edition?

LUCE: Well, the immediate circumstance was that I was asked to do it by John Kennedy's father [Joseph P. Kennedy, Sr.], who was then Ambassador to the Court of St. James. Ambassador Kennedy called me up by overseas

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telephone several times in 1940, and one time, as I recall it, he asked me if I would write a foreword to this book and I said, "Well, send the manuscript and let me look at it." When the manuscript, or rather the proofs, arrived, I was very impressed by it. I was impressed by the

scholarly work, if you like, because this book was based on a comparative review of proceedings in the House of Parliament for several years. At this time, of course, it was after Munich and the hot war was on. England, as they said, stood alone and the popular tendency was to put all the blame on the so-called appeasers, namely, Mr. Chamberlain [Neville Chamberlain] and the Tory appeasers, the Cliveden Set. This book showed that blame would have to be shared quite generally by nearly all aspects of British opinion, including the Labor Party. The book made a particular analysis or used, you might say, as one of its tests, the attitude on the appropriations for defense during the '30s. And while no great credit could be given to either party—if one must put it in party terms—there was certainly just as much lack of foresight on the part of the Labourites as there was on the part of the Conservatives. I'm not trying to make out a partisan point because Kennedy was by no means making a case for the Conservatives. What impressed me was, first, that he had done such a careful job of actually reviewing the facts, the facts such as attitudes and voting records, with regard to the crisis

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in Europe. And I was impressed by his careful scholarship, research, and also by his sense of personal involvement, responsibility, in the great crisis that was at that time in flames. And that's what made me very optimistic about the qualities of mind and of involvement in public affairs that was displayed in this book.

STEELE: In 1961 you wrote another foreword on the reissuing of the book. You expressed belief that "Democracy in the West is in far better shape than it was in the '30s." And for this general reason, President Kennedy himself was in better position to do what ought to be done than were the leaders of what you called "the shameful '30s." And you agreed with the general Kennedy thesis that wise and effective leadership of a democracy is the most difficult of all human tasks. How in general terms do you appraise President Kennedy's leadership of the Western democracies?

LUCE: There is difficulty in that question because of the word "general." It's obviously a very big question. It's hard to know how to answer the question except in terms of some generalities which have become pretty much clichés. Some of the specific events we will come to later, such as the Cuban matter and so on. In general—in a very general sense—I think that his leadership of world democracy was good, and in a way effective. I don't think that he accomplished a

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great deal because perhaps there wasn't a great deal of opportunity to take initiative on the world scene. For example, NATO [North Atlantic Treaty Organization] is now in some state of disrepair. In my own view, MLF [Multilateral Force], which was one of the last things that President Kennedy was involved with as an attempt to re-form NATO, had very little to commend it. I thought it was a rather useless gimmick; it has proved to be that. The challenge

to re-form NATO or to find a substitute for it had not really developed to the critical point by the time that President Kennedy died.

Now, leadership abroad as well as at home was very much involved with what has so often been referred to as the Kennedy style. There is no question that the Europeans responded to him as a person, as a man with certain manners that they could appreciate and identify with. Comparisons are always invidious but sometimes necessary. I was recently in Europe and obviously President Johnson [Lyndon B. Johnson], for whose actual deeds I have great respect, is held in no such esteem in Europe as the late President Kennedy was. As I say, this has more to do with style and manner, perhaps, than it has in actually solving problems. Another thing that hasn't really been accomplished yet is the so-called Kennedy round. It's been so long in reaching fruition that one almost forgets what the Kennedy round is supposed to be.

There was one thing that *did* happen in Kennedy's term,

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the Berlin wall. Apart from the argument as to whether the wall should have been promptly torn down or more drastic measures should have been taken, it reactivated the Berlin crisis. It brought Berlin very much back in the headlines. And on Kennedy's second trip to Europe he made that tremendously effective speech of "I am a Berliner" as well as other speeches, so he commended himself to Europe as he did here for his style. Style is perhaps an inadequate word, but we know how much is read into that word, for his attitude of courage and so on. I think I've made my point: He didn't really do very much—partly because there wasn't a great deal to be done at that time.

STEELE: Or perhaps a great deal of time in which to do it as it turned out.

LUCE: Perhaps, yes.

STEELE: In one area there were some accomplishments—in the so-called area of détente with the Russians, there was the limited nuclear test ban treaty, wheat sales, and the hot line agreement.

LUCE: Yes, yes. All those things could be put down, and the détente—if you call it that, or anyway some relaxation of tension with Soviet Russia continues at this time. Of course, it takes two to make a détente. In this case, one doesn't know whether the Russians really wish to have a permanent détente

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with the United States. But I think Kennedy with his State Department and his team, his administration, is to be given credit for the things you mentioned. The fact still remains that the broad relations between the United States and Europe are subject to change. They are not settled at the present time. For this, if one wants to put the blame, and I do it merely to identify the time and place we're talking about, we can refer to General de Gaulle [Charles

A. de Gaulle], who in some people's minds makes it impossible for an adequate rebuilding of relations, of structural treaty arrangements between Europe and United States. In general, his leadership of the Western democracies was very good but it was in a rather generalized way rather than in specific accomplishment.

STEELE: Since we have been talking a few minutes ago about the early book, did you have any considerable contact with the young John Kennedy who wrote this book just after he got out of Harvard? Did you see him before publication of his book?

LUCE: No, I did not. Well, I think I must have met him once or twice but only in a rather casual way.

STEELE: Apparently you knew President Kennedy's father, Joseph P. Kennedy, for a number of years before you knew the son. What were your relations with him?

LUCE: Well, I knew him before I knew his son, though I may

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have met his son. Well, I would say they were social in the personal sense of having become friends. I would say that my direct relationship with him began, of course, with journalism. I remember particularly a long story we had on his administration of the Maritime Commission. I don't know why I was particularly involved with that, but we had a long, in-depth story on what Kennedy was doing about the Commission. And certainly we paid considerable attention to him in connection with his earlier chairmanship of the Securities and Exchange Commission, although I don't particularly remember my own personal involvement in any such stories.

STEELE: Do you feel from your knowledge of Ambassador Kennedy that he had a decided influence on his son?

LUCE: I don't think I could add anything to what other people have said on the basis of much more knowledge than I have. Obviously he had instilled a highly competitive attitude and I would say one that was strongly directed in favor of public life at a high level. Joe Kennedy was not in favor of any of his sons starting at the bottom.

STEELE: In 1938, sir, he became Ambassador to the Court of St. James. Did you visit him there and did you meet the young John Kennedy who was spending a good deal of time in London, in and about the embassy?

LUCE: I remember having met John Kennedy, but I don't

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know quite where, and young Joe [Joseph P. Kennedy, Jr.], too, who was lost in the war. The Kennedys—Ambassador and Mrs. Kennedy [Rose Fitzgerald Kennedy]—gave a nice, a very large and very distinguished dinner party for us at the American Embassy when my wife [Clare Booth Luce] and I were there in 1938 or 1939. I remember one dinner in particular. It was very pleasant—not much conversation. Old Joe wasn't much for that sort. We had a movie after dinner. That eliminated the necessity for postprandial conversation.

STEELE: He took a rather pessimistic view on the war, a war which looked to him like a losing proposition even if it was won by Britain. Did you talk to him at any great length about that?

LUCE: Well, notably I talked about that to him; he talked to me over the open Atlantic phone in 1940 when the Blitz was on. And one has, first of all, to give credit to Joe Kennedy that he was sitting right there with the bombs, so there was no lack of being on the job. But I must say that I was somewhat astonished at the kind of things that he would say to me, such as that the thing was hopeless for England. You say that his view was that no matter which side won it would be bad, he probably said that too. But most notably, in 1940, he thought that England was sure to be beaten. He put this in most colorful language; and he was sure that Great Britain was going to get beaten and was going to get beaten soon. Now from

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the point of view of objective calculation, he couldn't be faulted. The odds were considerably against Britain at that moment. But my own attitude was a quite different one—whatever the odds were, my own feeling was that Hitler [Adolf Hitler] ought to be fought to the end, and that as much as possible, the United States ought to join the fight.

STEELE: Years later, on July 15, 1960, the then-Senator Kennedy accepted the Democratic presidential nomination in Los Angeles. You spent that evening in New York City with the nominee's father, Joseph P. Kennedy. How did that meeting come about and what transpired there?

LUCE: It was a memorable moment in my life, it so happens. I would like to go into it in some detail. The way it happened was simply that right out of the blue on a Tuesday of that Convention week, Joe Kennedy called me from Los Angeles and asked whether he could come to see me, I think he mentioned around five o'clock on Friday. I think it went through my mind that it was a little odd that he was getting back so fast. But I didn't think too much of it, and so I made a date with Kennedy for five o'clock in my apartment at the Waldorf. Then I made a date with my son [Henry Luce, III] to come over to have dinner at seven o'clock after I assumed my conversation with Kennedy would have been concluded. Well, when Henry came at seven o'clock, Kennedy hadn't arrived. He called up a few minutes later and said that

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his airplane had been delayed a couple of hours.

STEELE: Coming in from the West Coast?

LUCE: From Los Angeles where he had been watching at some distance, inconspicuously, watching the convention. So Joe called me up about seven o'clock and asked if he could come to dinner. I said: "By all means, what do you want for dinner?" Well, he wanted lobster, so by the time he got there we had the dinner about ready and, as I remember, two lobsters. He ate a very hearty meal and he was in great form. Oh, earlier I told him my son was going to be there and asked did he mind? Not at all, he said. As a matter of fact, he gave my son his first job after college. Joe then was a member of the Hoover Commission and he took my son on as his special assistant. So for the first year my son was out of college, he and his bride lived in Washington and Henry worked on the various details of the Hoover Commission [Commission on Organization of the Executive Branch of Government].

Well, so we had this good dinner and it was over along about nine o'clock and, as I remember it, the television wasn't going on till ten. I thought that Joe hadn't come to see me just for chitchat about the convention, so I thought I better get down to cases. I said to him when we were in the living room: "Well, now, Joe, I suppose you are interested in the attitudes *Time* and *Life*, and I, might take about Jack's candidacy. And I think I can put it quite simply." I divided the

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matter into domestic affairs and foreign affairs, and I said, "As to domestic affairs, of course Jack will have to be left of center." Whereupon Joe burst out with, "How can you say that? How can you think that any son of mine would ever be a so-and-so liberal?"

STEELE: What, sir?

LUCE: A so-and-so liberal. It's well known that Joe Kennedy's colorful manner of speech is not always suitable for the tape recording.
I said: "Now wait a minute; don't get upset about that. Of course, any Democrat, in the way that American politics is at the moment and has been for years, any Democratic candidate for president has got to be left of center, the winning proposition being that you carry the South for old times sake and then you have to win the liberal vote in the North. So we won't hold that against him if he is going to be a little bit left of center. The important thing that I am trying to tell you, Joe, is to divide this in two parts—the domestic and the foreign. And in the domestic he's going to be left of center, okay. Now on the foreign matter. If there he shows any signs of weakness, in general toward the anti-Communist cause, or to put it more positively, any weakness in defending and advancing the cause of the free world, why then we'll certainly be against him."

“Well,” Joe just said, “There’s no chance of that; you know that.”

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So I said, “Well, I think I know it, so I’ve said all there is to say.”

I think the conversation may have gone on about that for a while, but not very much. Then pretty soon the moment came, the television was on and the nominee, Jack Kennedy, got up to make his speech while the three of us were watching the television screen. I forget what it was now but something in the opening of his speech, I made some objection to, made some noise about, and Joe said, “Oh, well, now, don’t mind that.” And then he went on; the rest of the speech I thought was perhaps not a great speech but I had no particular criticisms of it. Soon after that Joe left and at the door he said, “I want to thank you for all that you’ve done for Jack.” I think this was said with great sincerity and, if I recall, he repeated it, “I just want you to know that I, or we, are very grateful for all that you’ve done for Jack.”

STEELE: And that was the end of the evening?

LUCE: Yes.

STEELE: During the years before President Kennedy received the nomination, when he was first in the House of Representatives and then a senator, did you have a good deal of contact with him in those years?

LUCE: No, not very much. I saw him once or twice. One time I had a lunch date with him. It turned out to be the day

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that he had been managing the 1959 labor bill in the Senate. He was very active in that and was out on the center of the floor that day, so when I arrived at his office at about 12:30, one of his aides took me over to the floor of the Senate, explaining that he had a message from Senator Kennedy that Senator Kennedy was advised to be on the floor and maybe I’d like to come over and listen to the debate for a while, which I did, very gladly. I sat for about an hour or so and I watched Kennedy on the floor while he was there and he got up several times, usually only for a rather short little speech; of course, it was the general proceedings on the bill. Messages came up to me several times that he was sorry that he was delayed and finally, the message came up that he was stuck; he was never going to be able to get out to lunch, so would I come down. I came down to an anteroom off the Senate floor and we had a little chat. He said how sorry he was that he had to break this date, but naturally I understood the circumstances; they were right below my eyes. I remember that occasion because it was interesting. I lost the chance to have a good conversation with the Senator, but at least I saw him in action. Then I saw him two or three other times but only in a casual way.

STEELE: In August, 1960, after he had accepted the nomination, Senator Kennedy lunched with you and some of the editors here in the building in New York.

How did that meeting come about

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and what was your impression of it?

LUCE: Actually it was when he was still at Hyannisport, before the campaign had really been launched. He came down to New York for one day, he had some business here, and he very kindly gave us a lunch date. I don't think I met him at the street level, but I went down to say good-bye at the street level and there was a big crowd, especially of teenagers, the first good whiff I had had.

STEELE: What we call the jumpers...

LUCE: Yes, how the teenagers and what not were going to go for him.

STEELE: And that was right in the lobby here in this building?

LUCE: There was very little public announcement of it, or none. In the lobby and outside in the street there wasn't a huge crowd, but there certainly were several hundred, maybe a thousand, people, with the teenagers, as you say, really jumping.

STEELE: Now as I recall at that luncheon we practically covered the horizon on both domestic and foreign affairs and a good deal of the give and take involved issues of domestic economic policies. That lunch was a long time ago and nobody took any notes, but do you have any particular remembrance or impression of the manner in which then Senator Kennedy conducted himself?

LUCE: I can tell you one anecdote, which I think is very

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characteristic of the late president. As for the general discussion that went on, no I don't recall. But it was a feeling—it was the point that he was not anti-business and he didn't see why business should be against him. My partner Roy Larsen [Roy E. Larsen] had been involved in a meeting in which somebody had made an effort to get some of the leading businessmen of New York to be for Kennedy, and it just hadn't had much success. So it was on his mind. Kennedy thought that the business community, in general, or businessmen individually had him wrong, and that they shouldn't assume he was going to be anti-business because he had no intention of being anti-business. In a way he was trying to tell us that we ought not to represent him as in any way anti-business. He did say, in general, that if he was the president, and he intended to be president, there was no good reason why businessmen shouldn't at least give him an even break.

Now an anecdote: early on in lunch I said, "Jack, I'm sure you haven't read it, but I just happened to pick it up the other day, a new biography, a new 600-page biography of President McKinley [William McKinley]."

STEELE: Yes, that was, I believe, Margaret Leech's *In the Days of McKinley*.

LUCE: Of all people to write about, President McKinley, in 1960, and it had good reviews. That's one reason I picked it up. I read about 40 pages and I indeed agreed with the

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reviews. This was an extremely interesting book and I intended to go on finishing it. Now I don't know what the point was that I was trying to make apropos McKinley, but it was some little minor point. I said, "Of course, you haven't read it." He said, "What do you mean, I haven't; of course I have." I said, "Now, Jack, now look here, this book only came out two or three months ago; when the hell did you ever have time to read that 600-page book?"

"Well," he said, "Mr. Luce," (He always called me 'Mr. Luce.' I didn't think it was quite fair because if I called his father 'Joe,' I didn't understand why he had to 'Mr. Luce' me, but anyway he did, all very courteously.) He said, "Mr. Luce, you've forgotten the kind of life I've been leading." I said, "What do you mean?" "Well," he said, "I spend all this time in airplanes." Well this seemed to me to be even more extraordinary; it was after a day's campaigning through Wisconsin; he finally gets up in an airplane; he has a few hours where he might get a little sleep; instead of which he reads McKinley, so I was very impressed with that.

Later on at the inaugural, at a private dinner, I was sitting next to Eunice [Eunice Kennedy Shriver], and incidentally she spoke of how she well remembered when Jack came back from that luncheon he said how much he enjoyed it and so on. I said, "I want to ask you something," and I told her the story about the McKinley book and

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I said, "Now level with me. Do you think he really could have read that McKinley book?" And she said, "Yes, if he told you he read it, he did." Well, to me this was amazing that the man in the middle of the terrific campaign he was in, the presidential nomination campaign, could have found time to get around to reading among other books, a 600-page volume on McKinley. But the late President's intellectual interest in politics was well illustrated by that.

I remember another occasion, just to quit with this, I was in the White House upstairs in the big hallway...

STEELE: Living quarters?

LUCE: Living quarters and down at the end of the hallway there was a couch with a long table in front of it with a number of books on it, and there were two or

three children's books, which evidently the President had been reading to his children. And there was also a novel by Disraeli; I'm sorry to say at the moment I've forgotten which of Disraeli's novels it was. But the President evidently was reading one of Disraeli's two or three once-famous novels. I doubt if there are more than half a dozen people in the United States who have read Disraeli's novels in the last decade, but the President was one of them.

STEELE: During those pre-presidential years you did refer to him, and call him "Jack," but I remember a very poignant note

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you wrote him just before he assumed the presidency. You said that this would be the last time you would address him as "Dear Jack." You wrote him in Palm Beach that beginning January 20th he would be "Mr. President" to you.

LUCE: Of course.

STEELE: Shortly after the luncheon here in the building in August of 1960, you received a handwritten note from then Senator Kennedy thanking you for the luncheon. While expressing, as he put it, "a faint feeling" that your endorsement of the 1961 issue of his book would be "the last one I shall get." Did you seriously consider the editorial endorsement of Kennedy for president, and what was the major factor in your decision to endorse Vice President Nixon [Richard M. Nixon] instead?

LUCE: Well, as they say in press interviews, John, that's a very interesting question.

STEELE: It must have been pretty touch and go because you were not unfriendly toward him.

LUCE: That's the first thing I was going to say that we certainly weren't unfriendly or unfair. As a matter of fact, I did want to underline what Joe Kennedy said that famous television night, that he thanked me—I'm sure with the greatest sincerity—for all that you've done for Jack. As a matter of fact, I was a little taken aback by it. If anything, my conscience.... I began to wonder if, did we do too much? Well,

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in the course of the campaign, I think that the greatest effort was to be fair. At the proper time, in election years, about early in October, we have to consider whom we are going to come out for explicitly on the editorial page of *Life*. There was some discussion between half a dozen of the top editors here with me. I think that we were always going to be for Nixon, but when the time came for Jack Jessup [John K. Jessup] to write the editorial, we were in some trouble about this because we had expected that the foreign policy issue might become sharp. Nixon himself, I believe, had said that he was going to make foreign policy *the* issue.

Well, up to the day that Jack Jessup was to start getting to his typewriter and writing the pro-Nixon endorsement, Mr. Nixon had not made this foreign policy issue sharp enough. In other words, Jack Kennedy had prevented him from doing so. As a matter of fact, Kennedy was going after Mr. Nixon about Cuba on grounds that the Eisenhower-Nixon Administration had been soft on Cuba. I think that Jack gave Nixon a little opening once on China, but Nixon wasn't able to make much of that. On the whole Nixon had not really established himself as clearly superior to Jack Kennedy from our point of view in the foreign policy area. So we decided, and it seemed a good idea at the time—Jack Jessup, the editorial page editor, and I—and others such as Hedley Donovan and Ed Thompson [Edward K. Thompson]—that we would do it in two parts. All Jessup would write that week was the

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endorsement of Nixon on domestic policy grounds. That was perhaps the general Republican versus Democratic position and the Republican side generally coincided with our notions about the business enterprise system, and so forth. So Jessup did write that editorial saying that Nixon had the best of it on what he and the Party stood for in domestic affairs and on the domestic economy. In our opinion it was the better stand. Now partly we did this, too, because we thought another week would go by and Nixon might sharpen the foreign policy argument.

A week went by and Nixon hadn't done any better so we were in kind of a hole. It didn't seem quite right. We were not against Nixon's foreign policy stand, so having endorsed him on domestic grounds, we couldn't very well go against him. He hadn't given us any occasion to go against him on foreign policy grounds. Well, having said (a) we had to say (b), ending up with an endorsement of Nixon.

STEELE: Well that apparently left no scars because in January 1961 you and Mrs. Luce were official guests of the Joseph P. Kennedys at the inauguration of their son. I'd like to talk to you for a few minutes about that snowy, cold inauguration. What were some of your impressions?

LUCE: Snow, first of all.

STEELE: You got snowed out?

LUCE: I got snowed out for a short time. Whatever it was,

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Monday night was going to be the pre-inaugural festival and Joe Kennedy especially was having a big party that was supposed to last most of the night, and I never got there for it.

STEELE: I think you were trying to get in from Florida, were you not, and your plane was turned back?

LUCE: No, just from New York, from Idlewild, now Kennedy Airport, and I went out there about three o'clock, four o'clock, expecting to get down to Washington in time to change for dinner, and I never got there. At Idlewild I did run into the managing editor of the *Saturday Evening Post*, and luckily I happened to get about the last remaining Carey Cadillac out there and I brought myself and the managing editor of the *Saturday Evening Post* back to New York. If I'm not mistaken, he had very strong reasons to get to Washington that night and he took a train. I thought I would just go back to the apartment and get down there in the morning. I never did get down there that night. As far as that big Joe Kennedy party, I think Clare was one of the few people who showed up. The next day I got a train down.

STEELE: It's been said that this was an inauguration with the accent on youth and there was the sense of a new start portrayed in Kennedy's inaugural address. How did you feel about the portion of the inauguration which you did see?

LUCE: Well, it was the excitement of an inaugural and all that. There was a very special case of my wife and me being in

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a Kennedy box.

STEELE: At the ball?

LUCE: One of the balls. There were several. We had been invited to what I gathered was the main social dinner. It was given by a couple who were supposed to be the social leaders in the Kennedy regime. But they didn't turn out to be. At any rate, they gave the dinner to which the President and his wife [Jacqueline Bouvier Kennedy] came, the private dinner. That's when I sat next to Eunice and brought up this matter of the McKinley book. Then we got in a bus to go to the ball and in the bus standing up was Ted Kennedy [Edward M. Kennedy]. He was very good-looking, and I expect he's the best-looking of the Kennedys and he surprised everybody by singing in the bus. He started songs and people would join in; he had a very good voice; and so on the bus ride over to the ball we were entertained by Ted Kennedy, now Senator Kennedy, and his songs. We got over there and we got up in Joe Kennedy's box and at one point the President came up to greet his family. He shook hands with Clare and he had to reach way over in the box to shake my hand and this appeared on television, so I got lots of, a lot of people said, "I saw you on television." Otherwise, naturally the whole thing was a gay, ebullient thing like most inaugurations are. Of course, it wasn't quite the same for us as the Eisenhower [Dwight D. Eisenhower] inauguration of '52 because then we were on the winning side and here we were not on the winning

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side, although very friendly to the hero of the occasion.

STEELE: It's been said that relations between a president and an independent editor never run smoothly. Such appears to have been the case in this phase of your relationship with President Kennedy after he assumed office. In August of 1961, President Kennedy, at a news conference, castigated an account of the Bay of Pigs disaster written by Charles J.V. Murphy for *Fortune*, parts of which were reprinted in *Time*. A few days later the President sent his then presidential military representative, General Maxwell Taylor [Maxwell D. Taylor], with a 17-point critique of the article, to visit with you here in your office in New York. How did that come about and what occurred at that conference?

LUCE: Well, it was quite an extraordinary meeting. President Kennedy called me up and asked if I would see Maxwell Taylor. I said, "naturally, of course." So it was decided it should be done quite off the record, quite secretly. Maybe it was Maxwell Taylor who proposed he should come to this office at 11 o'clock and then have lunch with 12 or 15 *Time*, *Life*, and *Fortune* editors, and there should be no mention at the lunch of the meeting we had just been through. So Maxwell Taylor came up here with at least one aide and I had Charlie Murphy here and, I think, Hedley Donovan. Here was Maxwell Taylor with a 17-point critique.

STEELE: Which had been delivered to you, I believe. I had the

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unfortunate job of having to bring it to you before the meeting occurred.

LUCE: Well, I don't recall that I had much time to look over it; maybe Murphy had, just before the meeting. And you say 17 points; you are quite right; I was trying to remember. I would have said 27 points because there were so many points. A whole sentence or a paragraph would be typed out from the *Fortune* article and then opposite it was.... This was a mistake, and so and so.

Now Murphy had made one mistake. He got the name of the flattop riding off shore wrong. So there's where he was wrong. And so often, as you know, John, journalists get into trouble because in a 3,000 word factual article everything will be right except one little fact, and so you're taken over the coals for that; people say because you're wrong there, you're wrong with everything. Well, actually, in this case there wasn't a single point that I felt at all necessary on our part to concede, except that Murphy had got the wrong flattop. And my general impression which I wouldn't want to ask General Taylor to concur in now, but I think if he was on the stand he would probably have to; when we got all through with analyzing these 17 points—I'm not sure we didn't stop after about 12 of them—he, in effect, threw in his hand and said, by his tone and attitude more than by anything he said, that it was evident that the critique of the article

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was not substantiated.

STEELE: Is it your feeling that the article has stood the test of time quite well?

LUCE: Yes. At any rate, Maxwell Taylor, having been briefed by a sufficient number of experts, bringing up his 17 points, they just were not very persuasive. I said when we broke up the meeting here and went upstairs for lunch there absolutely was no question of our having to make any corrections because, what the hell, corrections couldn't be made when the article was correct. And, in general, the attitude was all right, the incident is closed; the less said the better about it.

STEELE: On this same point of an editor's sometimes stormy relations with a president, a year later, a year after this incident, in the fall of 1962, President Kennedy complained in a conference with you at the White House about the attitude taken by *Time* toward his administration. Can you tell us something about that meeting? What was the nature of the complaint and of your findings?

LUCE: I don't recall that particular meeting, no. Can you bring it to mind? Let me talk about, in general, the relation of the President to *Time*, in particular—well *Time* and *Life*—and to *Fortune* on certain occasions. The first thing is, the most important thing is that the President read *Time*. Now any

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editor, I should say, the main thing he is concerned about is whether people read his magazine or his newspaper. What he's out to do mainly is to interest readers to the point where they become regular and careful readers, and President Kennedy was. I think that he desired to have an early copy off the press each week. Now as to relations between President Kennedy and *Time*, first of all, between him and Hugh Sidey, our White House correspondent, and you as the chief of the Washington Bureau. I take it that almost every week we would hear about the attitude of the President, often directly, and of various people surrounding them. We would hear if they were more or less mad, pleased, or tolerably pleased. This was communicated often to the editors and sometimes directly to me. So that there was this very close relationship stemming from the fact that, first of all, the President read *Time*.

STEELE: He did indeed. I remember a remark he made at one point; it was after one of his European trips. He said that wherever he went he found the people who made opinions were deeply influenced by *Time* and read *Time* perhaps more than any other American publication. He felt that what *Time* said was very important. He read it with extreme care himself and his comments, usually very informal, ran sometimes in a kidding vein, sometimes from real anger, and sometimes from pleasure.

LUCE: Now perhaps I shouldn't bring this up, but I'm

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going to anyway. It's about what Mr. Sorensen [Theodore C. Sorensen] has to say in his book on the President about the President's attitude toward various publications, especially—from the space given—to *Time* and *Life*. I don't want to quarrel at all with Sorensen's own opinion. He can have his own opinion of *Time*, but I do want to put in a caveat to the effect that what Sorensen says about *Time* is not necessarily what the President thought about *Time*. To use the words you used just a little while ago, the President's attitude was sometimes kidding if he was going to criticize—sometimes in a very light-hearted mood. I think very rarely, as far as I am concerned, on the few notable occasions—one or two, two or three perhaps at most—he was quite angry—well perhaps angry isn't the word—but at any rate strong in his objection—took strong objection to what we had said. But, in general, I think the attitude was—I'm not saying that he approved of everything we said or even perhaps the majority of it—but there was, as you say, a dialogue—a dialogue, and I think the dialogue from his point of view was for the most part quite civilized and even in a friendly manner.

Now perhaps at this point I might speak of two or three relatively important matters that I was involved in with the President.

First of all, there was, I believe, the first time I had lunch with him after he was in the White House, a couple of

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weeks perhaps—I think not more than that—after the Bay of Pigs. On that same day the President went to Congress to make his great speech about space and to propose a long-term program that would involve eventually 20 billion dollars in going to the moon, and so forth. At this time it looked for a while as if I was going to get stood up again.

STEELE: Because of the speech?

LUCE: Because the speech was being given at 12:30 or 1 o'clock. I attended the speech; I went and heard him give the speech and I got to the White House before he did and I had to wait there for him for about a half an hour. When he got back he went up and took a shower and then I remember I met him at the elevator. He came down the elevator and he pulled out of his pocket two or three memorandums from—one of which was from the chairman of the Joint Chiefs, and I think he had one or two others, military reports. He displayed a good deal of disgust with these reports, or these advices. I don't know whether they were pre-Bay of Pigs or whether they were later reports. He was quite unhappy with them.

This was the first time I had had lunch with him after he was in the White House and there was the Bay of Pigs behind us and there was the space program in front of us, so it was quite a notable occasion and something else came up.

First of all, I congratulated him on his space speech. I

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said that I was not sure in my own mind just how high a priority ought to be given to this. At any rate I said how well he had launched this space business. Now there was the Bay of Pigs that could not be ignored entirely, and so he asked me what he should do now. And I said, "Well, in my mind the answer is very simple, namely that a strong application of the Monroe Doctrine should be re-applied, re-asserted." I did not think it was in conflict—any contradiction to the global character of current history. That was about all that was said on that point.

And then he brought up the China question—the question of the admission of Communist China into the U.N., and he pointed out that there was a real fear that we would get beaten on the vote and that if we weren't beaten now, we'd get beaten soon and then, in effect, he asked me if I would review the whole question of admission of Red China. He, of course, knew that, along with many others, I was very much against it, had been up to that time very much against it. I took this as something of a command performance to do a serious job of reviewing this thing in my own mind and with what counsel that I might take, and I did a conscientious job of reading a certain amount of material pro and con on the matter. It happened at that time that Ambassador Henry Cabot Lodge was working as a special adviser here in Time Incorporated, so I consulted with him and

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then also with the man who had been with him at the U.N. for so many years, Mr. James Barco, who was here as Ambassador Lodge's assistant here. And so Mr. Barco prepared a memorandum on this matter which I revised somewhat and sent it on to the President. The general effect of that memorandum and advice was that the President should waste no time in seeing that it was made perfectly clear that the United States was going to maintain its very strong stand against admission of Red China and that if a strong stand were taken right then, without any further delay, that the chances then were very good that once again we would receive the necessary votes.

STEELE: Which we did.

LUCE: We did, and that's perhaps the only example where I undertook a special mission of advice and counsel to the President.

I'd like to get back a minute because I don't want to seem in any way to evade it or slur it over. I think I said to you a minute ago that I did not recall the details of a meeting with the President around September of 1962, in which the President had, in general, gone over what Mr. Sorensen has called an unfair account of his presidency. I'd like to put into the files—I suppose one can't put some things in the file—a correspondence between me and the President on this subject. I think he has a letter here—my letter of September

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21st to the President from which, for the convenience of anybody who may use these tapes, I will read a paragraph or two.

“Dear Mr. President:

“Mr. Donovan and I have made a most careful review of what *Time* has said in 1962 on President Kennedy and his policies and programs. *Time*'s 1962 coverage of Kennedy began the Man-of-the-Year story of generally hopeful and admiring attitude. Indeed, the story concludes on the note that Kennedy might become a great president (language *Time* uses sparingly). The next general appraisal of the President was a lead story in the issue of March 16. That was a highly favorable story. In the six months since *Time* has, of course, expressed judgment explicit or implicit on the President's performance in a number of specific areas. In reviewing the most important of these areas, Mr. Donovan and I found no broad policy that we would not be happy to defend.”

I enclosed a much longer analysis by Mr. Donovan which I think is a total rebuttal to some schoolboy who had written an analysis for the White House which was cited by Mr. Sorensen. So I say Mr. Sorensen has a right to his opinion. I thoroughly disagree with it, and I do not believe it properly expresses the attitude of the President to *Time*, Inc. publications.

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STEELE: Now some time later after this session, indeed in October 1962, you received an urgent call from President Kennedy to come to the White House for a briefing on the then unfolding Cuban Missile Crisis. Thereafter you visited Defense Secretary Robert McNamara [Robert S. McNamara] and John McCone [John A. McCone], then director of the Central Intelligence Agency, for a look at the aerial reconnaissance photos. At the President's instructions you were shown by Secretary McNamara and Mr. McCone the aerial reconnaissance photographs taken of the missile sites in Cuba. After the session with the President I believe that you took some notes on the meeting for your own archives, and I wonder whether you would tell us something about that meeting, how it came about perhaps and what was said.

LUCE: Well, when the President made his television speech to the nation, to the world, I happened to be in Detroit and of course everybody was very much moved by it. The next morning I was on my way to Chicago and at the Chicago airport I was told that there was a telephone call from the President and so I went to Washington. By coincidence I happened to occupy a seat next to the Chief Justice [Earl Warren]; I don't know why.... He had been out making a speech in Chicago. So we came in to see the President about four or five o'clock, I should think, we meaning me and Otto Fuerbringer, the managing editor of *Time*, and when we left the meeting we went to your office, and I debriefed

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myself and you wrote a memorandum as to what he said for our private recollections. And I suppose now that this is history it is not inappropriate to put this in the record if the historians want it.

After looking over your account of what we reported, then I wrote one of my own some weeks later, a week or so later, I wrote my own impressions in a little more personal way. I visited with the President for about 45 minutes. He looked tired but the conversation was entirely in a serious, I was going to say nonemotional, tone. But it was emotional, because it was deeper than any ordinary emotion, because the President evidently felt that the situation was very serious and that the worst could happen. I think when I came in, I expressed my appreciation for his calling us in at the time and he said with a smile, "Well, you've been very interested in Cuba for a long time." I replied, "Not just Cuba, the global situation."

And then Mr. Fuerbringer, adding a few notes, recalls that when we left, after I had thanked the President again for his visit, the President said, "Well you have been the strongest advocate of vigorous action in Cuba and you were right." I'll put this in the record.

Then we went over to the Pentagon and were shown this extraordinary display of reconnaissance photographs which I must say I was very impressed by. There was some question as to whether

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reconnaissance shouldn't have picked up the missile sites sooner, but I must say looking at the photographs you could see how extremely difficult it was to spot the beginnings of these locations.

STEELE: Mr. Luce, I gather from what you told me at the time about the session with the President, that there was no attempt on the President's part to justify anything or to sell *Time* anything. It was really more of an exploration.

LUCE: He just wanted to be sure that we knew the circumstances, and I went on to say that I deeply appreciated the President calling us in at that moment. He didn't have anything particular to tell us, but I think the main thing he wanted us to have a good look at the photographs.

STEELE: You recalled at the time...

LUCE: ...the dates as to when they were taken and so forth and then next week *Time* published four pages or more of these photographs to explain the whole situation.

STEELE: You met the President before the crisis was resolved...

LUCE: Oh, yes.

STEELE: At a very touchy point.

LUCE: Oh, he was extremely worried.

STEELE: And you and Mr. Fuerbringer came away with an impression that the unfolding crisis might hold within it the imminent probability or at least possibility of invasion of Cuba.

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LUCE: The most important thing, too, he was very concerned about Berlin, and obviously there could be a double play there if the Russians had wanted to get us to concentrate entirely on Cuba, they might take that occasion to overrun Berlin. So there were the elements of huge catastrophe.

STEELE: I understand the refrain of "Berlin, Berlin" ran throughout the discussions. Your notes show that he kept putting a question to you personally: "Are you for or against invasion?" And I think that your attitude at the time was that this was a corner that you were not going to be drawn into, that you weren't for an invasion, that you were for blockades and had been editorially for some time. Is that not correct?

LUCE: Yes, he brought that up before, months before, so at that time.... Well, I wasn't undertaking.... As I say there really was no argument between the President and us at this time. It was a very serious moment and all we could feel was the sense of tremendous responsibility on him that the worst would not happen and that we would back him up in any case with the deep hope that everything would turn out not too badly.

STEELE: Your notes show that while you were not for invasion, you did speak out for a blockade, but you...

LUCE: Well, so to be prepared for an invasion.

STEELE: "I also always added, of course, that a blockade would have to be backed up by readiness to invade." Those

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are your words.

LUCE: Exactly.

STEELE: Certainly that confrontation, missile confrontation in Cuba, and the successful resolving was a high point in the conduct of Kennedy foreign policy. Did you ever feel that it held extremely dangerous potentials? How do you feel it was handled, in general, aside from your...

LUCE: It seems to me it was handled very well. Isn't this your recollection that we on the whole said that at the time in our reporting of it?

STEELE: In the magazine, yes.

LUCE: I think it was handled very well. Well, obviously while I couldn't exclude the deep personal fear that atomic war might happen, I really didn't think it would. That doesn't at all diminish the seriousness—potential danger—of such a confrontation, but I think this is not relevant really to my report of the President. I did think a strong stand could be taken without dire consequences so that I wasn't.... Well, as far as the difference between being president and not being president, if I had been president, no doubt I wouldn't have been able to go to sleep, but my own personal opinion as an individual, as an editor, was that I thought that a strong show of force in any case was the only thing to do, and I believe that.... As a matter of fact, the thing was resolved somewhat

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more easily than I thought it would be. The Russians backed down quicker than I thought they would. I thought there might be more longer moments of worrying about what might happen.

Now, that's enough about that, isn't it?

There is one thing I would like to talk about—the tax cut. This was one of my other occasions when I told the President—I forget what particular reason it was—anyway when I had occasion to go and see the President, I think the year was '61, the first year, and this does come into some dispute later on. It's a trivial dispute, really, about whether *Time* was inconsistent or right, or whatnot. Having occasion to go to see the President in Washington, I also asked for an interview with Secretary Dillon [C. Douglas Dillon], a personal friend of mine, as well as having known him officially in Washington under the Eisenhower regime. And I brought up with Secretary Dillon, as I had with Secretary Anderson [Robert B. Anderson] under Eisenhower, the question of major tax reform. Some years before then, in the late fifties, *Fortune* ran a three-part article, in which we, in effect, rewrote the whole tax system of the United States. There wasn't a single person that agreed with us *in toto*. As far as I can see nobody agrees—you can hardly get two people to agree on all items of taxation. But at any rate, it wasn't—what we undertook to do was more than advocate a tax cut. We undertook to set reform....

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To be sure, our interest, in the *Fortune* articles, was on tax reform, not merely a tax cut.

STEELE: It was more on reform, was it not?

LUCE: More on reform if you like. Later on, I was willing to settle when finally Johnson—or even before Kennedy was killed—I was beginning to accept the

proposition that the first element of reform is cut, and while these cuts were not necessarily cuts I would have made, or not those that were necessarily advocated in *Fortune*, it was high time for a tax cut, so I was willing to go along with the proposition that the first element of reform is cuts. Anyway, when I talked to Dillon he said, “yes.” I said, “Are you serious? Are you really serious about a tax cut or tax reform?”—I forget which phrase he or I used. He said, “We are,” and presumably the effort was going to be made in 1962.

STEELE: For a major overhaul of the tax...?

LUCE: A major overhaul. I then went to see the President and I said, “Your Secretary of the Treasury tells me so-and-so. Is that right? Is he right; do you agree with him?” And the President said, “yes.” And he was very serious about tax reform and that he intended to give a very high priority to it. Well, now I’ve forgotten the details of history as to when—what bill was first sent to the Congress to go through committee, and so on. But in any case, the President and the administration

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had our support. In fact, we had been prior advocates of tax reform and I may say I think it was a big mistake of Eisenhower and Secretary Anderson not to have achieved tax reform before Eisenhower’s second term got through.

Well, I guess that’s about it but this was one of the major topics, one that I felt was very important—the tax situation—and I was delighted when I heard first from Dillon and then had it confirmed by the President that indeed this was going to be one of their top priority things. Now I’m not going to make any criticism about Kennedy’s not having got it through in ‘62. I have never been satisfied that there was enough priority, push, given to it.

STEELE: There was great difficulty in the Congress.

LUCE: Great difficulty in the Congress, as you remember.

STEELE: We got speeded tax write-offs.

LUCE: I guess I did.... In this case, while Kennedy was not able to handle the Congress—and I don’t blame him entirely—I give him full credit, for him and Dillon for having started the thing, but it does—well, no buts—the thing I wanted to register on that here was one point of basic importance to the whole governmental policy in which not only were we in agreement with—in general agreement with the President and his Treasury Department, but we had been prior advocates of the thing. So, if you like, they were agreeing with us.

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STEELE: Mr. Luce, the President on several occasions wrote for Time, Incorporated

publications. There was one particularly noteworthy exchange—letters to the President written by Mr. David Rockefeller [David Rockefeller, Sr.] and from the President to Mr. Rockefeller which you printed in *Life* on July 6, 1962. It was a rather unusual exchange. It dealt with the gold flow problems and the balance of payments and the President made a very categorical pledge not to devalue. How did that exchange come about?

LUCE: July, July, yes, I remember, we worked pretty fast on that. I was thinking it was in June, a few weeks before. Of course, the magazine goes through the press a week or ten days, part of it, before it comes out. The President had made a speech again in which he had said there ought to be more dialogue between the government and business. For whatever reasons this speech was, on the whole, not well received by the business community.

STEELE: It was in the speech in which he talked about old myths and new realities.

LUCE: Oh, yes, he got off into some of perhaps Galbraith's [John Kenneth Galbraith] language. At any rate, this talk about myths and old realities, or new, at any rate in general it did not go down well with the business community. However, he spoke about a dialogue. Now it just happened that very soon after that I had occasion to see Mr. David Rockefeller of Chase National Bank, and in discussing this

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general topic he told me that he had written confidentially a letter to the President on this subject and so I said to David, "Why don't you let me have that letter and let me ask the President if he will permit its publication in *Life* with his reply to it." And the President instantly agreed to that, so we had, as you say, rather an unusual story. David Rockefeller's letter to the President—a long letter in which he goes into some considerable detail about these difficult problems—and the President's reply to him.

STEELE: Well, Mr. Luce, we've been talking a good long time about President Kennedy and various phases of his administration. The end came tragically, as you well know, and I just wonder if in closing this interview you would like to sum up the lasting impression, or...

LUCE: Well, I don't know about attempting anything such as a summing up. I would like to pay my personal tribute to this memorable figure, this young man who occupied the White House for nearly three years, and I do it just in a personal way, but it is the kind of a personal way in which no doubt thousands and even millions of people in this country and elsewhere in the world felt about it. For my part it was a great privilege to know him for himself and to have had the privilege of knowing him when he was president of the United States, and as president of the United States. Whatever may be the balance sheet of his

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specific achievement, it is certainly favorable on balance. After all, as you said a while ago, John, he didn't have much time to carry through a number of the programs which he had started or to follow through on certain attitudes of mind that he had developed. But there is no question that he made a tremendous contribution to the intangible attitude of the American people—toward government, toward life, toward the things that mattered. I think I should end there because if I go on, I will only be saying in an impromptu manner what other people have said so eloquently. My recollection of President Kennedy is of a great and courteous person whom it was always a delight to be with, even if one was being hauled up on the carpet, you might say. I think that I can only repeat again—it was a great—the fascination, as well as the privilege to have known him and to have had such contacts as I did with him.

STEELE: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Luce.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

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