

## CHAPTER XII

### THE 1968 CAMPAIGN

*“We had already glimpsed the most compassionate leaders our nation could produce, and they had all been assassinated. And from this time forward, things would get worse: The stone was at the bottom of the hill and we were alone.”-Jack Newfield<sup>1</sup>*

The week after deciding to write anti-escalation books, Schlesinger and Galbraith met with Robert Kennedy to discuss the formation of a National Committee Against the Widening of the War. Believing that President Johnson would be able to outmaneuver the movement if it lacked a nationally known leader, and unsure about taking a leadership role, Kennedy discouraged the idea. At Galbraith’s Vermont home the next weekend, Galbraith, Schlesinger, and Senator George McGovern optimistically discussed Robert Kennedy’s chances of taking the Democratic nomination away from Lyndon Johnson in 1968.<sup>2</sup>

The search for a candidate to replace Lyndon Johnson began in earnest in the fall of 1967. By then it had become clear to the vast majority of the American Left, and to Robert Kennedy himself, that Lyndon Johnson could not be swayed from his futile course of escalation. Allard Lowenstein, a liberal Congressman from New York, was among those searching for a liberal candidate to oppose Johnson in the primaries.

In September 1967, Lowenstein went to Robert Kennedy, to attempt to convince Kennedy to run. At the September 23rd meeting at Hickory Hill, Lowenstein and Kennedy were joined by the radical writer Jack Newfield, Arthur Schlesinger, and several other Kennedy advisors. Schlesinger opposed Lowenstein’s idea, arguing, as Newfield remembered, that “it was ‘impossible’ to dump Johnson, that 1968 would be ‘a Republican year,’ and that Kennedy should wait until 1972.” Instead of running, Schlesinger believed, Kennedy should help the Democrats work towards a peace plank in the 1968 platform. Kennedy retorted, “How do you run on a plank, Arthur?...When was the last time millions of people rallied behind a plank?... If I was Lyndon Johnson, I would be much angrier at Jack and Al, than at you, Arthur.”

But Kennedy declined to run. “People would say I was splitting the party out of ambition and envy. No one would believe that I was doing it because of how I felt about Vietnam and poor people. I think that Al is doing the right thing, but I think that someone else will have to be the first one to run. It can’t be me because of my relationship to Johnson.”<sup>3</sup>

Representatives of the Peace and Freedom Party asked John Kenneth Galbraith to run as an anti-war candidate, and Schlesinger suggested that Galbraith let his name be entered on the New Hampshire primary ballot. Galbraith, who had been born in Canada,

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<sup>1</sup> Newfield, *A Memoir*, 337.

<sup>2</sup> Schlesinger, *Robert Kennedy*, 797-798.

<sup>3</sup> Newfield, *A Memoir*, 199-200.

considered the possibility, but realized he would spend more time talking about the Constitution's prohibition of foreign-born Presidents than he would about Vietnam.

In any case, he felt that the anti-war movement needed an electable leader to coalesce around.<sup>4</sup> Galbraith described the course his anti-war work took:

In late October 1967...I went to see Kennedy. He said flatly that he would not be a candidate. That same day I talked with Gene McCarthy at Kennedy's suggestion. And McCarthy told me what I knew from many others, that he was considering it. He was coming to Cambridge and we had a further talk here in this room. And I went out then to support him, (and) spoke for him in New Hampshire and Wisconsin. What was much more important, I went out to raise money for him, so I was committed to him.<sup>5</sup>

Pierre Salinger called a meeting of Kennedy's advisors in late October in New York City. Schlesinger was out of town at the time and in any case, Salinger, who did not want Kennedy to run, would not have invited Schlesinger, who was changing his mind.<sup>6</sup> The group came to no decision except to commission a secret poll of New Hampshire voters.<sup>7</sup>

But Arthur Schlesinger did get his point of view across. On November 3rd, Schlesinger became the first member of John Kennedy's 1960 team to urge Robert Kennedy to oppose Johnson. He sent Kennedy a private memo stating:

Until recently I have argued against the idea of your trying anything in 1968. My main ground has been while you might conceivably get the nomination the fight would shatter the party... and encourage the Republicans to nominate...Nixon. In other words, I have feared that your candidacy would result in making Nixon President.

I am now having second thoughts about this argument. I think the country is feeling increasingly that the escalation policy has had a full and fair trial, that it just hasn't worked, that Johnson is not going to come up with anything new or different and that we must therefore have a new President (If you do not run, McCarthy will, and McCarthy would then) become the hero of countless Democrats across the country disturbed about the war... If you were to enter at some later point, there might well be serious resentment on the ground that you were a Johnny-come-lately trying to cash in after brave Eugene McCarthy had done the real fighting. In other words, McCarthy might tie, up enough in the way of emotion and even of delegates to make another anti-LBJ candidacy impossible... I think you could beat LBJ in the primaries and that you have unexpected reserves of strength in the non-primary states. And, if all this would lead the Republicans to nominate Nixon, so much the

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<sup>4</sup> Galbraith, *A Life in Our Times*, 486-487.

<sup>5</sup> Interview 12/8/82.

<sup>6</sup> Newfield, *A Memoir*, 207.

<sup>7</sup> Theodore White, *The Making of the President 1968* (New York, 1969), 196. The poll results showed a discouraging 57-27 Johnson victory over Kennedy. Jules Witcover, *89 Days: The Last Campaign of Robert Kennedy* (New York, 1969), 34.

better. He is the one Republican candidate who would reunite ever, a divided and embittered Democratic party.<sup>8</sup>

Schlesinger saw Kennedy in person soon after, and pressed the point.<sup>9</sup>

On the tenth of December, Kennedy held another meeting at William Vanden Heuval's New York apartment. Schlesinger's journal entry of the day states:

I said...that, if McCarthy did moderately well in the primaries, he might expose Johnson without establishing himself; that state leaders would understand that their own tickets would go down if LBJ were at the head of the ticket; and that Bobby would emerge as a candidate, rescue the party and end the war in Vietnam.<sup>10</sup>

One participant recalled, "Robert and Arthur Schlesinger were the only guys in the room with any class. Arthur went out on a limb and said that Bob owed it to the kids to run, even if he lost. Bob was more focused on the war than anyone else besides Arthur. The rest of us talked in abstract generalities."<sup>11</sup> Schlesinger recalled:

I felt very much at a disadvantage in the meeting, since so much of the talk was so narrowly political. I felt like an amateur and the impractical liberal again... It was all a little bit like the Bay of Pigs meetings, when the vocabulary and the context of the discussions undercut the liberals at a moment when the President needed reinforcement from the liberals.... I remember Bob saying, "I don't give a damn about 1972, I care about Vietnam."<sup>12</sup>

Of all the members of the Kennedy circle from 1960, only Arthur Schlesinger, Richard Goodwin, Jean Smith, and Ethel thought that Robert Kennedy would have a chance.<sup>13</sup> The opinion of the professionals was unanimously negative.

Robert Kennedy convened another Hickory Hill conference on in mid-January. But the Kennedy house was overflowing with celebrities working on a previously-planned benefit for a Washington, D.C., orphanage, so serious political talk did not begin until late that night.<sup>14</sup> And finally, Robert Kennedy decided not to run. Schlesinger remembers being "badly disappointed," but kept in mind that "few questions seem to an historian purely moral."<sup>15</sup>

The January Tet Offensive in Vietnam did some damage to the American army in Asia, but shattered the credibility of the war effort for middle America. Although not a candidate, Kennedy, with Schlesinger's assistance on one major speech, broke with

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<sup>8</sup> Newfield, *A Memoir*, 208. Schlesinger, *Robert Kennedy*, 802.

<sup>9</sup> *ibid* 892.

<sup>10</sup> *ibid*, 894.

<sup>11</sup> Newfield, *Memoir*, 209.

<sup>12</sup> *ibid*, 209-210.

<sup>13</sup> Schlesinger, *Robert Kennedy*, 902.

<sup>14</sup> Witcover, *85 Days*, 51.

<sup>15</sup> Schlesinger, *Robert Kennedy*, 903-904.

Johnson completely and came out unequivocally against the war.<sup>16</sup> Tet had caused a surge in McCarthy's support, making Kennedy ever more unsure about what to do; Schlesinger noted in his diary, "How Stevensonian can we all get?"<sup>17</sup>

One person who was sure about what Bobby should do was Ethel Kennedy. On March 10th, the Sunday night before the New Hampshire primary, Ethel called Schlesinger, who was in Cambridge visiting Galbraith, to relay the news that Bobby would run if Eugene McCarthy would withdraw after the New Hampshire primary.<sup>18</sup> Having no idea how well McCarthy was about to do in New Hampshire, Schlesinger saw the main problem as defusing the McCarthy people. When Schlesinger called Kennedy on Monday, Schlesinger suggested that Kennedy support McCarthy in the next day's primary. But Kennedy disliked McCarthy personally, considered him unfit for the Presidency, and refused to make a statement.<sup>19</sup>

New Hampshire voted the next day. Winning 42 percent of the vote, Eugene McCarthy dealt Lyndon Johnson a stunning moral defeat. That night, Schlesinger, William Vanden Heuval, and Robert Kennedy dined at in New York. Kennedy reacted to the news of McCarthy's impressive showing grimly.<sup>20</sup> Schlesinger declared that Kennedy *must* endorse McCarthy: McCarthy would not be able to win the nomination himself, but would force Johnson out. Everyone would then turn to Kennedy.<sup>21</sup> The next day, Kennedy's brother-in-law Stephen Smith presided over another inconclusive meeting.

On Friday, Robert Kennedy convened one more "council of war" at Hickory Hill. Schlesinger, Ted Sorenson, Fred Dutton, and William Vanden Heuval all told Kennedy he should back McCarthy. "How can I retain any self-respect if I say Eugene McCarthy should be President of the United States?" answered Kennedy.<sup>22</sup> Late that night, they went to bed, without coming to a decision. Shortly after Schlesinger had fallen asleep, Ted Kennedy woke him with the message, "Abigail said no." Senator McCarthy's wife Abigail had just rebuffed a Kennedy response to a McCarthy peace feeler.<sup>23</sup>

The next morning the group reassembled. Kennedy had decided to go ahead and run.<sup>24</sup> Before Bobby came downstairs, Schlesinger wondered if dissuading him would be worth one last try. Teddy told Arthur that Bobby had made his mind up, and not to press the case any further. "But all I could think of was a conversation seven years before in the same house when Robert Kennedy asked me to stop worrying his brother about the Bay of Pigs," remembered Schlesinger.<sup>25</sup> John Kenneth Galbraith heard the news that Kennedy was entering the race while at a (McCarthy) money-raising meeting at the

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<sup>16</sup> *ibid*, 904.

<sup>17</sup> *ibid*, 907.

<sup>18</sup> *ibid*, 910.

<sup>19</sup> *ibid*, 910-911. White, *The Making of a President 1968*, 201.

<sup>20</sup> Newfield, *A Memoir*, 237.

<sup>21</sup> Schlesinger, *Robert Kennedy*, 911. White, *The Making of the President 1968*, 202.

<sup>22</sup> Newfield, *A Memoir*, 247.

<sup>23</sup> *ibid*, 247-248. Schlesinger, *Robert Kennedy*, 913. White, *The Making of the President 1968*, 205-206.

<sup>24</sup> *ibid*, 207.

<sup>25</sup> *Robert Kennedy*, 920. After the November election, McCarthy told an interviewer that Kennedy would have won the nomination by staying on the sidelines in a McCarthy-Johnson battle. *ibid*, 919.

University, in the Faculty Club. “However I might prefer Kennedy or not, I was committed to McCarthy,” Galbraith later recalled.<sup>26</sup>

As in 1964, Robert Kennedy’s campaign was miserably organized. One Schlesinger memo asked, “Is anyone in charge of anything, anywhere?”<sup>27</sup> Although none of the candidates fully understood, 1968 was the year of the “new politics.” Imitating Jack’s 1960 campaign, Bobby, felt Schlesinger, was spending too much time in motorcades, and not enough on television. A Schlesinger memo “The Old Politics and the New” detailed the problem.<sup>28</sup> Asked if Robert Kennedy changed his approach over the course of the campaign, Schlesinger responded

I think he may have, but not necessarily because of that memoranda. There were various people around him... like Dick Goodwin who was very strong on television and film and Adam Walinsky...So I do think he moved in that direction, but it was more his own perception of the needs of the time than any particular memorandum.<sup>29</sup>

Although all of the Left in America shared in the joy at Lyndon Johnson’s March announcement that he would not seek renomination, Schlesinger believes that parts of the Left, especially the New York intelligentsia, replaced Johnson with Kennedy as a hate object. Schlesinger’s journal noted:

I have never felt so much in my life the settled target of hostility... I am hissed at practically every public appearance in this city. I have just been out to get the morning *Times*, and inevitably someone harangued and denounced me on Third Avenue--again a McCarthyite. I think these people are crazy.<sup>30</sup>

Robert Kennedy’s first primary test was in Indiana. Michael Harrington, SNCC’s John Lewis, and Arthur Schlesinger all spoke for Kennedy at pro-McCarthy colleges across the state.<sup>31</sup> Schlesinger’s main contribution to the Kennedy campaign, though, was making appearance for Kennedy in New York State, whose primary was scheduled later in the summer. He wrote no speeches for Kennedy, but did submit an occasional memoranda.<sup>32</sup> Kennedy beat McCarthy in Indiana, and later in Nebraska, and lost in Oregon. The final battle would occur in California in early June.

Beginning May, Schlesinger spoke for Kennedy in California, especially in pro-McCarthy suburban areas, and helped Kennedy prepare for the June first debate with McCarthy. Kennedy won in California. McCarthy later observed, “I do think that if people like Schlesinger had said they were not going to go with Bobby—John Galbraith and Richard Goodwin for example—then we might have won in California.”<sup>33</sup> That night,

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<sup>26</sup> Interview 12/8/81.

<sup>27</sup> James M Burns, *Edward Kennedy and the Camelot Legacy* (New York, 1976), 330.

<sup>28</sup> Schlesinger, *Robert Kennedy*, 936.

<sup>29</sup> Interview, 4/23/82.

<sup>30</sup> Schlesinger, *Robert Kennedy*, 963.

<sup>31</sup> Newfield, *A Memoir*, 285.

<sup>32</sup> Interview 4/23/82.

<sup>33</sup> Dan Cohen, *Undefeated: The Life of Hubert H. Humphrey* (Minneapolis, 1978), 309.

McCarthy workers Allard Lowenstein and John Kenneth Galbraith agreed that the time had come for anti-war activists to unite around Robert Kennedy.<sup>34</sup>

Schlesinger had been listening to election returns in Saul Bellow's Chicago apartment:

Richard Wade and Frances Fitzgerald were with us. When it became evident that Kennedy had won, I went back to my hotel to try to call him in Los Angeles, but the line was always busy. The phone rang. Wade said in a choked voice, "Turn on your television; he's been shot."<sup>35</sup>

In a tribute to Robert Kennedy, Schlesinger called him "In his private relations, a man of exceptional gentleness and generosity." The nation had lost "another part of its claim to civilization."<sup>36</sup> Hubert Humphrey's "politics of joy" campaign had shown how far out of touch conventional liberals were with America in the late 1960s. Robert Kennedy had been the only leader who had combined liberalism's human values with an ability to understand the passions of America. Eight years ago, Arthur Schlesinger had helped defeat Richard Nixon. Now John and Robert Kennedy were dead; America was caught in spasm of hatred; Richard Nixon was on his way to the Presidency, and pragmatic liberalism lay in ruins.

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<sup>34</sup> Schlesinger, *Robert Kennedy*, 981.

<sup>35</sup> *ibid*, 982.

<sup>36</sup> *New York Times* (June 7, 1968), 29:3.

## EPILOGUE

Eight years of Democratic leadership ended when Richard Nixon swore to “preserve, protect, and defend the Constitution of the United States of America” In January 1969 Arthur Schlesinger collected and revised some of his essays for a book aptly titled *The Crisis of Confidence*. The essays varied in quality from sharp attacks on Noam Chomsky and Herbert Marcuse to a wandering collection on the origins of violence in America. The last time Schlesinger had been so removed from politics, from 1957 to 1960, he had produced two volumes of *The Age of Roosevelt*. Despite the research freedom provided by the Albert Schweitzer Chair, Schlesinger's literary output slowed markedly. Aside from editing and writing introductions for other people's collections, he did not write a book until *The Imperial Presidency* in 1973.

Schlesinger had supported McGovern right from the start in 1972, but had to suffer through the landslide defeat of his friend. Although McGovern proposed a variety of innovative ideas, the intellectual research to back them up was lacking. As campaign manager Gary Hart put it, "I'd gone out and looked for the new Schlesingers, and they weren't there."<sup>37</sup>

A certified “White House enemy,” Schlesinger proved he deserved the label by producing a book to speed the self-induced collapse of the Nixon Presidency. Like most of the rest of Schlesinger's work, *The Imperial Presidency* became a best-seller and found its way into the homes of the influential, including House Judiciary Chairman Peter Rodino.

In the introduction, Schlesinger admitted “that historians and political scientists, this writer among them, contributed to the rise of the Presidential mystique. But the Imperial Presidency received its decisive impetus, I believe, from foreign policy; above all from the capture by the Presidency of the most vital of national decisions, the decision to go to war.”<sup>38</sup> Having thus narrowed the issue, Schlesinger managed to condemn Johnson and Nixon without recanting earlier support of a strong, populist, President: “We need a strong Presidency—but strong Presidency *within the Constitution*.”<sup>39</sup>

Schlesinger did recognize the right of the President to act extra-Constitutionally in times of emergency such as the Civil War, when “temporary despotism was compatible with abiding democracy.”<sup>40</sup> But Schlesinger carefully countered the Nixon myth that Nixon's enlargement of his powers had many precedents in American history.

Having considered the problem of the runaway Presidency, Schlesinger argued against imposing additional institutional constraints on the office, for existing Constitutional procedures and the popular will would provide sufficient checks: “Retribution may be a long time in coming. But it gets there

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<sup>37</sup> Robert M. Kaus, “Should this man be president?” *Rocky Mountain News*, (Oct. 11, 1981), 82.

<sup>38</sup> Schlesinger, *The Imperial Presidency*, 10-11.

<sup>39</sup> *ibid*, 12.

<sup>40</sup> *ibid*, 74.

in the end. Ask Johnson. Ask Nixon.”<sup>41</sup>

The problem of the imperial Presidency vanished once Nixon left office, as America entered a time of the impotent Presidency. And much to Schlesinger's dismay, even the Democrats, in nominating Jimmy Carter, seemed to rebuke the idea strong leadership from Washington.<sup>42</sup>

Political debate began to center on the death of liberalism. Disagreeing, Schlesinger argued that liberalism was still a vital force, and predicted a victory for Edward Kennedy in the 1980 election. Schlesinger's prediction was based on the assumption that the nation was facing a severe crisis and was looking for a dynamic progressive leader, as it did in 1932. He had made that same prediction five years before, and made it again in April 1982: “One cannot help noting the similarities between 1982 and 1932.”<sup>43</sup> For Arthur Schlesinger, 1933 is always just around the corner.

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<sup>41</sup> *ibid*, 467.

<sup>42</sup> Unable to join in the anti-Washington movement, Schlesinger did not vote in the 1976 Presidential election.

<sup>43</sup> “Will 1975 Equal 1932?” *Wall Street Journal* (Dec.2, 1974); letter to *Wall Street Journal* (Jan. 9, 1979); “Liberalism on a Darkling Plain,” *Wall Street Journal* (Mar.16, 1982).