

Adventures in Reporting: John Kennedy and the *Cinema Verité* Television Documentaries of Drew Associates

Mary Ann Watson

When Edward R. Murrow delivered his signature sign off --"Good night... and good luck"-- at the close of a *See It Now* documentary in the 1950s, attentive viewers knew what they were supposed to think. Their correspondent had taken them through a carefully constructed discussion of the issue at hand and led them to a summary conclusion. Encircled with the smoke from his omnipresent cigarette, Murrow was the voice of authority and *See It Now* was the model for serious television documentaries. The radio tradition, with the primacy of the written word, penetrated television documentaries throughout the 1950s.

While few in the industry questioned the patterns and limitations of American television documentaries, a *Life* magazine reporter and editor named Bob Drew gave deep thought to the subject while he spent a year at Harvard as a Nieman Fellow in the mid-1950s. It was the heavy use of narration in documentary films that troubled him. Drew wanted to lift the form above the realm of illustrated lecture.

Returning to his home base at Time-Life, Inc., Drew experimented for a few years with motion picture photo-journalism and successfully captured highly visual subjects. His short film on NASA's tests on weightlessness, for instance, appeared on both *The Ed Sullivan Show* and the CBS news.

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In early 1960, the company offered to support Drew's efforts to develop more mobile, lightweight film equipment if he would work with the Time-owned television stations in cultivating their documentary offerings. With a pared-down TV news film camera patched to a one-quarter-inch sound tape recorder, Drew and his team were ready to try their hands at a new style of documentary filmmaking at precisely the same time John Kennedy was ready to experiment himself with political communication in the new decade.

Time-Life had OK'd the idea of a film about the decision-making process in the Wisconsin presidential primary of 1960. At first, the senator from Massachusetts was skeptical when Drew and his associate, filmmaker Ricky Leacock, told him they wanted to record history in the making. The pair wanted Kennedy's permission to film in his hotel room while he listened to election returns.

Drew and Leacock flew to Detroit, where Kennedy was campaigning, but he couldn't talk to them there. So the two men boarded the candidate's private plane in hopes of having their discussion in the air. Kennedy never got around to it.

The next day the pair visited his home in Georgetown. "He had a cold," Leacock recalled, "that's what saved us." The candidate, in his pajamas and with his daughter running about, listened as Leacock said, "Look, I want to be with you alone. No interview, no questions, no lights, no tripods, no cables -- just me and my camera want to be in your suite in Wisconsin when you listen to the election results." "That's a very personal situation," Kennedy replied. "You could make me look very silly." "Essentially, you have to trust me or you don't trust me," Leacock told the candidate. "That's it." Kennedy thought for a minute and said, "If you do not hear to the contrary, you can assume that you can do it."

Drew and Leacock didn't hear to the contrary -- and they did it...along with Donn Pennebaker, Albert Maysles, and Terrence McCartney Filgate. The equipment they used was unique in early 1960. "Nobody else had it," Leacock said, "Everybody else was working with cameras stuck on tripods and all those goddam cables and things. We could go running and jumping and wiggling all over the place....Nobody else could do this."

With *Primary* the Drew team introduced a style of unscripted documentary known as *cinema verité* to American television and gave viewers candid and intimate glimpses of their next president. Though *Primary* aired on just the four local stations owned by Time, Inc. rather than

on network television, it was a landmark piece of work not only for its innovation in technique but, perhaps more importantly, for its impact on John F. Kennedy's thinking about television.

After the election, Bob Drew visited the president-elect in Palm Beach, Florida to show him *Primary*. Kennedy watched himself banter with kids and sign autographs for a crowd. The rigors of campaigning came back to him as *Primary* showed candidate Kennedy shaking hands with early shift workers at the factory gate. He witnessed the excited anticipation of a throng of people in Milwaukee's Serb Hall moments before he arrived. The president-elect observed the chemical reaction that took place in the room the instant he appeared. Women in babushkas swooned and, as he passed, everyone in proximity reached out for him. He saw his wife's delicate beauty fill the screen as she spoke briefly to the group. A close-up of Mrs. Kennedy twisting her gloved fingers behind her back gently betrayed her discomfort. Kennedy studied the scene of himself in the Wisconsin hotel room waiting for results. He observed himself under stress. He saw his characteristic nervous tapping and watched himself react as precinct reports came in.

Kennedy thought *Primary* was terrific and so did Mrs. Kennedy. They were very impressed with the work of Bob Drew. Through the candid lens the president-elect realized, without vanity, how enormously attractive he was and how effectively moving images conveyed his rapport with the people.

The next night, the young filmmaker again visited the young chief executive-to-be. Drew showed Kennedy a film he had made on Latin America called "Yanki, No!" This program, which aired on ABC as part of the *Bell & Howell Close-Up!* series in early December of 1960, was rife with haunting images. The abject poverty of the region was humanized through the stories of individual families. The lure of communism in offering to meet basic needs seemed reasonable in the context depicted in "Yanki, No!" Kennedy was distressed at the visual evidence of the overwhelming scope of the problem faced by the United States in dealing with Latin America. (It was also during this transition period in Palm Beach that the president-elect would be briefed by the CIA on the plans for its invasion of Cuba by Cuban exiles in an attempt to depose Castro.)

In *Primary* Kennedy saw himself as a leader with the innate ability to move people. The next night, in "Yanki, No!" he observed, at close range,

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the magnetism of Fidel Castro as he addressed a rally of one million people in Havana. It was a portentous juxtaposition.

Through the voice of a translator, the president-elect heard Castro say "before America and the world" that the dictator was "grateful for and accepts the help of Soviet rockets should Cuban territory be invaded by military forces from the United States." Unlike a written or oral report from an administrative aide, Kennedy could see the enormity of the crowd and feel their passion for Castro. Kennedy could look into the eyes of his future nemesis and contemplate what kind of showdown was on the horizon.

After the viewing and discussion of "Yanki, No!," Bob Drew and John Kennedy got to talking about Drew's innovations in the documentary form. Sync sound would facilitate a new form of history, the filmmaker told the president-elect. Kennedy agreed that the ability to record what happens as it happens could be a profound historical tool. "Think of what it would be like," he said, "if I could see what happened in the White House twenty-four hours before Roosevelt declared war on Japan." He was thinking of documentation different from official papers or posed photographs. He was thinking of a film record that would provide the real looks on people's faces and their tone of voice.

Drew told the president-elect that he wanted to try to make such a document in the Kennedy White House. "I told him," Drew recalled of the meeting, "that when he moved into the White House that I'd like to move in with him, with two film teams. One with him on the business side and one with his wife on the home side." Drew remembered, "He liked the idea and called his wife over and sort of outlined the idea to her." Even though Mrs. Kennedy appreciated the artistry of *Primary*, she wanted nothing to do with Drew's new idea. "Nobody is going to move into the White House with me," she told her husband. The filmmaker remembers the president-elect saying "Of course not, of course not. We're just thinking..." to reassure his very private spouse.

After Mrs. Kennedy left, the president-elect said to the filmmaker, "Alright, let's try the office side. Not right away -- but after I've been in office a few weeks why don't you come down and see if I can do it." Kennedy wasn't certain the experiment would work. "If I can actually lose consciousness of the camera and it doesn't intrude, we might be able to do something. If the camera is bothersome then we can't. But we could try it."

A short time after Drew's conversation with Kennedy in Palm Beach, ABC called Drew to a meeting with Bell and Howell, the sponsor of the *Bell and Howell Close-Up!* documentary series. Another producer, John Secondari, who headed the documentary unit at ABC, was also there. Drew was surprised to realize the meeting was a competition for a film assignment. Secondari outlined his project, which Drew recalls had something to do with sewage treatment plants. "Bob, what have you got?" he was asked. "Well," said Drew, "I would like to make a film about the inauguration and I already have an arrangement to be with the Kennedys in the White House." Drew was given the assignment without delay.

Everyone wanted to get close to John Kennedy and each network wanted to provide that opportunity through documentary programming. After his happy experience with *Primary*, Kennedy was not nearly as reticent as might have been prudent for a new chief executive. George Herman of CBS recalled: "Very early on in the Kennedy administration I applied to Pierre Salinger for permission to have what we call a walking sound camera--two men, a sound man and a cameraman walking with equipment that they could walk around with in the President's office and make sound film of him at work....And Pierre Salinger, to my complete astonishment, after consulting with the President, came back and said, yes, this would be acceptable." CBS, as did Bob Drew, agreed to the condition that the White House would be allowed to review the program for sensitive security material.

On February 17, 1961, CBS aired an installment of the *Eyewitness to History* series entitled "Kennedy Close-Up." Walter Cronkite's opening narration promised "a view of the President of the United States you have never seen before." In the next half-hour the audience saw footage and shot composition that was uncharacteristically rough for CBS News. Kennedy was seen waiting for a call from Adlai Stevenson on the crisis in the Congo, visiting with the governor of West Virginia, and in a session with government agency chiefs and White House staff to discuss budget issues. In closing, Cronkite reminded his audience it was a privileged view: "Our eyewitness cameras were on the scene moving about the room for these informal views--the first time television has ever been permitted in the office of the President during the actual conduct of official business....A President at work, viewed for the first time tonight in close-up. And you were there, an eyewitness to history."

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Later in the month NBC aired the first of a series called *JFK Reports*. The producer, Shad Northshield recalled, "The idea was that in the New Deal days, Roosevelt made some enormous changes in the first forty days. So, this seemed to be a good idea. In the first forty days of the Kennedy administration, he did absolutely nothing. But, because of my extensive show business experience, I was able to do a one-hour show....It was a puff. It had nothing to say except that this beautiful young man was president."

"JFK Report No. 1" was not an attempt at *cinema verité*, but rather a traditional documentary report with an emphasis on the President's life and career. It featured the striking still photography of Jacques Lowe which gave an intimate aura. The President liked the show very much and Northshield recalled: "I was summoned to the White House to discuss documentaries. After that meeting, forty-five minutes or so with him, he said, 'Why don't you have an interview with me next time?'"

Several weeks later, "JFK Report No. 2," which was a far more hard-hitting piece of journalism, did include the suggested interview with President Kennedy. In the Cabinet Room correspondent Ray Scherer discussed the duties of the members of the White House staff with the President. At the conclusion of the talk the reporter said, "We think you're very gracious for making yourself so available. If it isn't entirely irrelevant, may I ask you this--Why did you make yourself so available to us?"

The President -- who had given thought to how television documentaries could be used to educate citizens and generate more effective government--replied, "The presidency is an office, which in a sense, is shared in by all the people. So, I would say the more we can communicate successfully beyond the White House and the more we can take back, the more effective this office will be administered -- so that everybody has a piece of the White House. Everybody's lives and security are affected by the judgments which are made, inevitably, here. And I think everybody ought to know about it as much as possible."

In late March 1961, ABC's *Bell & Howell Close-Up!* presented the film Bob Drew and John Kennedy first discussed in Palm Beach. It was called "Adventures in Reporting: Adventures on the New Frontier." The voice-over introduction, written by Drew, promised, as did the earlier CBS program, that the viewer would get closer to the Chief Executive than ever imagined: "Now you will begin to move with the President--seeing and hearing for yourself, in a new kind of report--not a filmed version of

summary and opinion you can find in print, but rather a personal adventure with the President as he confronts great problems of the U.S. and the world."

"Adventures on the New Frontier" was a more intimate document than CBS's "Kennedy Close-Up." Both, however, were criticized for being surface presentations meant to satisfy curiosity about the man, rather than being firsthand lessons in government. A columnist for *The New Republic* inaccurately predicted, "I think the networks may yet turn the glamorous JFK into the nation's number one bore."

In "Adventures on the New Frontier" viewers catch glimpses of the President in a workaday routine, sometimes chewing the arm of his eyeglasses or pacing in thought. Speaking into the dictaphone he says, "Ah... This is a memorandum to David Bell, Bureau of the Budget...." Most of the audience is, of course, less interested in what the subject of the memo is than in seeing the milieu in which the Chief Executive operates.

Later in the film the President's sisters interrupt their brother at work at his desk, to ask if he would autograph some photos. Quickly accommodating the request, Kennedy says, "Well, listen, have a good trip," as the women take their leave. In a meeting on the economy, the President and Walter Heller share a hearty laugh over an inside joke. The audience never learns the source of the amusement, but the fun of the moment is, nevertheless, delightful. Several minutes of footage from *Primary* were woven into "Adventures on the New Frontier," thereby exposing a much larger audience to the first *cinema verité* television images of John Kennedy.

Before "Adventures on the New Frontier" aired on ABC, Bob Drew took the film to the White House to show the President. If Kennedy had said something that he felt compromised the presidency or would undermine a negotiation, he could ask that it be deleted from the sound track. This was the exchange for being allowed to shoot in the Oval Office. Drew recalls setting the film up in Pierre Salinger's office late one evening. "We sat down and looked at it." When it was over, he said, Kennedy "stood up, smiled, and walked out." The filmmaker had the impression the President was pleased with what he had seen. No deletions were requested.

"Adventures on the New Frontier," though, was not a film that satisfied Bob Drew's desire to develop a new form of history. He knew that to create a revelatory moving image document, he would have to have access to the President during a time of crisis--when the Chief Executive's back was to the wall and he was making decisions under pressure. There would be no

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shortage of such times in the Kennedy White House, but, in the heat of various crises the President did not accede to Drew's requests for entry to the Oval Office.

Finally, a situation emerged in the spring of 1963 that would allow the group known as Drew Associates to create a television documentary that captured the most humane and moral qualities of the New Frontier, and would become a permanent reference point in the legacy of the Kennedy administration.

An Unprecedented Television Documentary-- *Crisis: Behind a Presidential Commitment*

In May of 1963, Greg Shuker, a former *Life* magazine reporter, was on a story finding research trip for Drew Associates. He was looking for documentary subjects with a beginning, a middle, and an unknown outcome. The ideal was to get as close to drama as possible without putting actors in front of the camera.

He happened to be a guest at a barbecue along with the deputy director of the USIA, Don Wilson -- who, because of director Edward R. Murrow's illness, was actually in charge of the agency -- and director of its motion picture division, filmmaker George Stevens, Jr. Wilson, who had been a *Life* bureau chief in Washington, was a member of the White House crisis committee, Ex Comm. He had been intimately involved in the President's decision-making process regarding the integration crisis at the University of Mississippi in September 1962, and the Cuban Missile Crisis in October 1962.

Wilson and Stevens got to discussing how valuable it would be to have film documentation of how the two incidents were handled. They both agreed, in front of Greg Shuker, that Drew Associates would be the logical organization to produce such a record the next time a crisis arose.

A short time later Shuker read a brief article buried in the newspaper about the upcoming integration of the University of Alabama and George Wallace's stated opposition to it. Shuker recognized the elements of a good documentary story in the Drew tradition. He got in touch with Don Wilson and asked him to push the idea with the administration. Wilson told Shuker: "I can set it up for you to meet Bob Kennedy because he's going to handle the integration thing with his deputy Katzenbach. If you can sell it to him, you can sell it to the President because he already knows you guys."

Shuker recalls: "I went to Washington and met with Bob Kennedy and he was a little suspicious. But he thought it sounded like an interesting idea. He still wasn't sure. I got the impression--and I'll never know--that the President said 'It's up to you Bob, it's your show.'...I went back to New York and a couple of days later I got a call from Bob Kennedy's press aide Ed Guthman saying, 'The Attorney General would like to see the documentary about that lawyer you guys did in Chicago. We understand it's terrific.'"

Robert Kennedy's aide was referring to the Drew Associates film entitled *The Chair*, which documented the 1962 struggle of a young Chicago lawyer to save his client, Paul Crump, from the electric chair. It was a well-known case which pitted the prosecuting attorney Jim Thompson--who would later become governor of Illinois--against the charismatic defense attorney Don Moore and, in a surprise development, the famed New York attorney Louis Nizer. The documentary, which would become part of the syndicated *Living Camera* series, had not yet been broadcast, but had been submitted to the Cannes Film Festival.

Shuker flew back to Washington and met in a USIA screening room with Robert Kennedy, his aide Ed Guthman, Don Wilson, and George Stevens, Jr. Shuker remembered: "When it was over Bob Kennedy was grinning all over and said, 'Gee, I really like that guy,' meaning Don Moore--a young, aggressive lawyer. And he obviously totally identified with him." (Don Moore would before long be hired to work for the Justice Department.)

Robert Kennedy asked Shuker about the print of the film, "Can I keep this?" "You can borrow it," the filmmaker said. "I'll get it back to you," the Attorney General promised and Greg Shuker went back to New York.

The next day Robert Kennedy called Shuker and said, "Come on down, we'll talk about it." The night before, the Attorney General had taken "The Chair" to the White House and it was shown as the evening movie for the President.

Right after Memorial Day, about ten days before the scheduled integration at the University of Alabama, Greg Shuker and Robert Kennedy met to discuss the logistics of the filming. At this point Drew Associates did not yet have a solid commitment from any network to air the documentary. It was a film being made on speculation.

The members of Drew Associates voted to begin shooting the film without outside financial support, even if it meant investing their own rent money. When ABC learned, however, the group was determined to make the

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documentary, the network agreed to finance just the shooting. A decision would be made later, after the event transpired, about whether to invest in developing and syncing the film.

The story was to be one of decision-making in the Justice Department. Shuker remembers: "We had an agreement right up front, but not in writing, that this film would start and end at the Justice Department. And if the story ended up in the White House, so be it, but we weren't going to arrange anything in the White House per se. The President liked that--it was no 'Day in the Life.'"

Soon after the informal arrangement with the Kennedys had been agreed upon, Bob Drew--who had long been lobbying through Pierre Salinger to gain access to the White House during a crisis situation--received a call from Salinger. "Would you give some footage to Wolper?" the Press Secretary asked, referring to documentarian David Wolper who was producing *The Making of the President, 1960* at the time. Drew was not inclined to share his material, but, in an attempt to grease the wheels of access, he took the opportunity to negotiate. "Look," Drew said to Salinger, "we're shooting something on Bobby....This is the crisis. This is it. If you can make sure we're included in the White House, I'd be glad to give the footage to Wolper." Drew was amazed to hear Salinger say "OK, it's set." He remembered: "I was surprised to hear that Salinger thought he had the authority to say 'Yes.' Heretofore he had always gone to the President."

Another member of the Drew Associates, Jim Lipscomb, was charged with soliciting the cooperation of Governor George Wallace of Alabama, which would be crucial in documenting the confrontation. Governor Wallace's PR assistant Doug Jones promised he would get Lipscomb in to see the governor, but after sitting outside his office for three days, Lipscomb was about ready to quit.

In a final attempt, he slipped a note to Wallace via his secretary saying a film was going to be made about the event at hand and that the Kennedys had agreed to be recorded. "If you want your side of the story told, you ought to talk to me," Lipscomb advised the governor. The filmmaker was let in to the office and Wallace agreed to participate. The governor did not want to be upstaged by the Kennedys and he could use the opportunity to convince his own constituency of the depth of his commitment to segregation. The right of preview afforded the Kennedys, was not asked for by Governor Wallace and was not offered by Drew Associates.

With the help of Jack Greenberg of the NAACP Defense Fund and John Doar of the Justice Department, Greg Shuker worked with the black students, Vivian Malone and Jimmie Hood, who would be at the center of the confrontation between the federal government and the state of Alabama. He secured their assent for the project.

The plot of the story and the cast of characters were set. The outcome, of course, was unknown. Would Governor Wallace be arrested? Would troops be deployed? Would the students be peacefully registered?

On June 10th and 11th, 1963, the Drew Associates were ready to cover the action. Robert Drew remained in New York to receive film and begin editing as it arrived. Producer Greg Shuker and Donn Pennebaker were filming the events in Washington. Jim Lipscomb and Mort Lund were with Governor Wallace in Alabama. Ricky Leacock and Patricia Powell also in Alabama, were assigned to Nicholas Katzenbach, Robert Kennedy's deputy. And Hope Ryden and Abbot Mills, who had already been filming the students, continued their work with them as they prepared for the ordeal ahead.

A new twist entered the drama when President Kennedy, who had been contemplating a television address to the nation on civil rights, had to decide whether or not to deliver it on the night of the Alabama encounter. It was a delicate question of timing and his closest associates were not in agreement on the course of action he should take.

The opening scenes of the documentary show the Robert Kennedy household at full tilt around the breakfast table. The Attorney General begins the momentous day surrounded by youthful exuberance. Kids and animals seem to have the run of the place. In contrast, the governor's mansion in Montgomery is a sedate domicile. His daughter is attended to by a black nanny.

Wallace directs the camera to view the portraits of Southern Civil War heroes displayed in his home. He admires the sentiment attributed to one of the military men: "I'd rather live a short life of standing for principle than live a long life of compromise." Wallace says point blank to the film team, "Of course that may not mean much to you folks." Moments such as these contribute to the power of *Crisis: Behind a Presidential Commitment* in portraying the ideological misalignment between the North and the South. To Wallace, only those imbued with true Southern heritage could grasp the redemptive power derived from a noble defeat.

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In Washington, Robert Kennedy sent Nick Katzenbach off to Alabama. Then the Attorney General went to the White House to participate in the discussion regarding the television speech on civil rights. So, as agreed, Greg Shuker and Donn Pennebaker went to the White House too. But their presence was kept low key. "I was very aware," Shuker said, "that as we went in and out of the White House, we went in and out through the back."

Ted Sorensen, Kennedy's special counsel and closest aide, recalled walking into the Oval Office and being surprised to see a man with a camera. He looked to the President as if to ask "What's going on?" The President put up his hand in a reassuring gesture as if to say, "It's OK. They're alright."

The meeting proceeded without accommodation to the filmmakers. Shuker recalled it was not a situation in which he could say, "Hold on while I get this stuff ready." There were "no arrangements, no presetting of anything, no lighting. If we weren't ready it would have gone right by."

In Alabama, Ricky Leacock was filming Nicholas Katzenbach as he consulted over the phone with Robert Kennedy about strategy. Out of the blue, the deputy attorney general said, raising the pitch of his voice, "Hi, Kerry, how are you, dear?" and then chatted playfully for a moment, presumably with a child on the other end of the line. It was not until footage from both ends were viewed in New York that anyone realized the entire conversation between Katzenbach and three-year-old Kerry Kennedy had been preserved. It was a scene of tremendous warmth and charm--an inspiring instance of *cinema verité*.

Throughout the crisis, producer Greg Shuker was with Robert Kennedy. While at the Justice Department, he was in charge of sound recording. As he witnessed the Attorney General's phone conversations with Katzenbach, the young filmmaker reached an epiphany: "Bob Kennedy hits the button and says something like, 'You know, Nick, I think your attitude with Wallace...' Then he pauses and says, 'Well, he's really a second-rate character to you. He's wasting your time. He's wasting the students' time. And, let's not make a big deal about it. I don't want to put the students through that indignity. I don't want the man to stand there and say things to them.' And then he says, 'Well, no, I wouldn't pick the governor up.' Suddenly, you see this tough kind of Jesuit brain--it's tough, it's compassionate. 'Don't let him say anything to the students. They've had a hard enough life being black.' It's all there in that one scene at the Justice

Department. To me, that was the best of the one thousand days. To me, with a kind of romantic streak, that's the best of the Kennedy presidency right there--pragmatic and compassionate. That was the moment I knew, not only that I liked this man, but also, that no matter what happened, we really had something."

The portrait of Vivian Malone and Jimmie Hood *Crisis: Behind a Presidential Commitment* revealed was entirely different from what was delivered in standard news footage. Black citizens shown in the news coverage of civil rights demonstrations were men and women who had already fortified themselves for confrontation. In this documentary, the two students were seen in the process of finding their personal strength. They wonder about the details of their safekeeping, they discuss their ambitions, they exchange nervous but determined laughter. Vivian Malone and Jimmie Hood are thoroughly appealing young people--and it becomes difficult for viewers not to feel a vested interest in their futures.

When George Wallace actually fulfilled his promise to stand in the schoolhouse door, he was confronted by Nicholas Katzenbach. Jim Lipscomb was trying to find a way to record the face-off. In the crush of reporters and guards it was difficult for the filmmaker to secure a good vantage point. But the building had bars in front of the windows and finally Lipscomb worked out a solution. "I stood on the low sill of the window and I took my belt and I tied my leg to the bars so I could hang there....That's the only way I could get the shot of Katzenbach and Wallace facing each other."

On that evening, when President Kennedy was preparing to deliver the television address, Robert Kennedy intimated to Shuker and Pennebaker that he did not want the filmmakers to go home with him and shoot any more footage at Hickory Hill. "You guys should go to the White House," the Attorney General advised. "We took the hint," said Shuker. Robert Kennedy provided a car and a driver and the two men went to the White House and "hung out in the back" even though they had purposely decided not to shoot the President presenting the speech. That footage would be taken from other sources.

As Shuker and Pennebaker stood in the covered walkway behind the White House, a pregnant Mrs. Kennedy stopped and chatted with them. "I don't remember you from *Primary*," she said to Shuker who had not yet joined the Drew team when that film was shot. But she did remember Donn Pennebaker and she certainly remembered the innovative film.

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The presence of Shuker and Pennebaker in the White House during the integration crisis was not reported in daily press coverage of the President's activities. It was not until over a month later that the filming of the documentary became a news item. On July 25, 1963, the front page of *The New York Times* carried a report of the Kennedy-Drew collaboration. The article mentioned that the Attorney General would screen the finished film.

Two days after the straight news item, the *Times* carried a surprisingly sharp editorial condemning the admission of cameras into the Kennedys' offices during the decision-making process. Whether *The New York Times* was smarting at having been passed over in gaining privileged access, or whether it was taking a sincere editorial position, is open to debate. "To eavesdrop on executive decisions of serious Government matters while they are in progress is highly inappropriate," the commentary concluded. "The White House isn't Macy's window."

After *Crisis: Behind a Presidential Commitment* was shot, and ABC realized a dramatic confrontation had been captured, the network put up the money to develop and sync the film. The president of ABC-TV, Tom Moore, later viewed approximately two hours of selected footage. He was tremendously impressed. There was no question that ABC would fund the remainder of the project to its completion.

Moore knew it was a scoop on the other networks. While CBS and NBC were in the heat of a ratings battle, ABC had the freedom to experiment. And the other networks regarded it with some envy. Burton Benjamin, executive producer of *The Twentieth Century* on CBS, reflected on the *cinema verité* documentaries of Drew Associates: "It was obvious to me that they could get closer to the essence of the truth through this technique than you could get through the conventional technique. It just seemed to be a breakthrough."

In August, *Show*, a monthly magazine about television, movies, and theater, was preparing to run a preview picture story about the documentary in its next issue. Greg Shuker assembled a layout of stills taken from the footage of *Crisis: Behind a Presidential Commitment*, which synopsised the story. As a courtesy, he called on Robert Kennedy to show him the photos. "He really had a problem looking at himself with the dog in the office and his daughter," Shuker recollected. "He wasn't sure if that was dignified. He was confused. He just didn't know for sure. I was saying, 'Oh it makes you

look human. It's a great moment.' And he said, 'I think you better take these ones over to the White House.'"

So, Greg Shuker and the editor of *Show* magazine visited President Kennedy in the White House on a hot and quiet Saturday afternoon. Smoking a cigar, the President looked through the layouts and chuckled. Teasing Shuker he asked, "Where's the one of you and me and your microphone?" The President then took the layouts and left the room for about ten minutes. "We'll never know where he went with them," said Shuker. "He may have gone to see Mrs. Kennedy. He may have gone to call his brother. I don't know. But he came back in the room, dropped them on the table and said 'Terrific'--quite sincerely."

The article in the September issue of *Show* was entitled "A New Kind of Television Goes Backstage with History." Though the final version of *Crisis* was not yet completed, the publication recognized the breakthrough of Drew Associates. They were able to "accustom the principals to the presence of their minimal equipment," and to achieve "an intimacy and lack of self-consciousness almost impossible to the mastodon lumberings of ordinary documentary-making."

Also in the late summer, Robert Kennedy and Ed Guthman were shown a rough cut of the documentary in the New York office of Bob Drew. The Attorney General, pleased with the work, arranged a second screening for his Justice Department staff and family at his Washington office. When the lights came up, there was murmuring among some aides about the candid discussion of pending civil rights legislation that had taken place in the Oval Office. It was decided the film should be taken to the White House for the President's review. Shortly after, Greg Shuker and Bob Drew met with Nicholas Katzenbach who asked that they omit some of the direct remarks that might offend Congressional sensitivity. The compromise the men reached was that the images would stay intact, but a voice-over narration explaining the crux of the discussion would replace comments such as one referring to "nut cutting on the Hill."

Before its ultimate October 21, 1963 airdate on ABC, the documentary, without the minor sound alterations yet made, was shown at Lincoln Center in a double feature with "The Chair" as part of the first New York Film Festival. In the *New York Herald Tribune* columnist John Horn previewed the film for television viewers and attempted to rebut criticism of the project: "The warm breath of human life is felt in every scene of this

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absorbing document....evidently the documentarians became an unobtrusive part of the scenery. Not less but more such television journalism should be produced and telecast."

But, when the program aired, controversy continued to swirl around it. In *The New York Times* Jack Gould questioned the sincerity of the key players in participating in such "an incredible bit of play-acting." New York's educational TV station, Channel 13, ran a half-hour panel discussion titled *Crisis: Presidency by Television*, which explored the validity of the documentary. On the 23d of October another critical editorial appeared in *The New York Times*. Headlined "Government on Camera," the piece called *Crisis: Behind a Presidential Commitment* an improper way to enlist sympathy for the civil rights movement. The *New York Herald Tribune* also editorialized against the program, referring to it as satisfying entertainment, but noting "the President has no business in show business." And Jack Gould vented his displeasure yet again in an October 27 piece in the *Sunday Times*. He especially faulted Robert Kennedy for "demeaning government through a careless flirtation with the entertainment business."

Pierre Salinger recalls the President "was quite upset about it" after *Crisis: Behind a Presidential Commitment* aired. "He thought he'd gone too far....He said he had forgot the cameras were there. He was not sure that the image he gave was the right image." How much of President Kennedy's discomfort with the documentary stemmed from the highly-charged criticism rather than his own aesthetic assessment, Salinger could not say. But it was clear to the press secretary that this was the last time such a project would be sanctioned. Then, remembering the program aired just a month before Dallas, he added, "We wouldn't have a chance to do it again."

So, *Crisis: Behind a Presidential Commitment* remains a solitary historical artifact. As a television documentary and as a chronicle of the executive branch of government, it is a peerless document.

"I felt privileged to be able to be a part of that group who was going to record a presidential confrontation in a manner that had never before been done and I don't think has ever been done since," Jim Lipscomb reflected. "Very seldom is it that a politician has absolutely nothing to hide in a confrontation. Always there are some things they don't want you to know. In this case Robert and John Kennedy had nothing to hide and they had a story to tell and they chose us as the instrument for the story to be told. We may have told it a little more intimately than they'd ever imagined."

Horn in the *New York Herald Tribune*, "Preview: A TV Milestone," September 16, 1963, "TV Reviews: Documentaries Score," October 22, 1963, and "A Criticism of 'Crisis' Program's Critics," October 25, 1963; "No Business in Show Business," editorial, *New York Herald Tribune*, October 24, 1963; "CRISIS: A New Kind of Television Goes Backstage with History," *Show* magazine, September 1963.

The narrative developed in this article regarding President Kennedy's involvement with documentary and particularly the work of Drew Associates was enlightened by many printed sources on the subject, but is based primarily on personal interviews in conjunction with program viewings.

Background on the context of the emergence of *cinema verité* on American television, as well as the networks' experiences and relationships with the Kennedy administration in producing documentaries, was the subject of an academic conference held at The University of Michigan, October 24, 1987. The proceedings are summarized in the *Television Quarterly* article written by M. A. Watson entitled "The Golden Age of the American Television Documentary" (Vol. XXIII, no. 2, 1988).

The participants in the documentary conference included the late Burton Benjamin, who, during the Kennedy years, was executive producer of the CBS documentary series *The Twentieth Century*; Reuven Frank, who was a writer/producer for NBC News including documentaries and the Huntley-Brinkley Report; Richard Leacock, a member of the Drew Associates; Robert Northshield, NBC producer for documentaries as well as several installments of the series *JFK Reports*; and Bob Rogers, who was an associate on NBC's *David Brinkley's Journal*.

In addition to these personal accounts, interviews were conducted by the author with the following people: Robert Drew--phone discussion, March 17, 1989; James Lipscomb--phone interviews conducted on November 1, 1988 and June 6, 1989; Greg Shuker--series of extensive interviews conducted at the University of Michigan during the week of January 30 through February 3, 1989; Pierre Salinger--personal interview conducted in Toronto, Canada, October 16, 1988; Theodore Sorensen--a brief discussion regarding the presence of filmmakers in the Oval Office took place at LaCrosse, WI at the "John F. Kennedy: Person, Policy, Presidency" conference on October 17, 1986.

Also, comments by George Herman were taken from the Press Panel transcript that is part of the John F. Kennedy Library Oral History collection.

The following programs were among those viewed in the research for this article: *Primary*; from *Bell & Howell Close-Up!*, "Yanki No!"; from the *Living Camera* series, "The Chair"; and *Crisis: Behind a Presidential Commitment* were acquired through Direct Cinema Limited, Los Angeles, CA. The *Bell & Howell Close-Up!* program "Adventures in Reporting: Adventures on the New Frontier"; from *Eyewitness to History*, "Kennedy Close-Up"; and *JFK Reports*, "JFK Report Number 1" and "JFK Report Number 2," were viewed at the Audiovisual Archive of the John F. Kennedy Library.