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# **Production Diary of the Debates**

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THE FORUM for the 1960 presidential election was the living room of the American home. Because the debates were televised, few could avoid contact with them. Every word said on these programs was weighed by the editorial writers and pundits. Every motion made in front of the television camera was examined for meaning. Every eye-blink, every bead of perspiration, every exhibition of strength or weakness, sureness or doubt, was magnified as never before. Whether voting decisions were conditioned by what the voters saw has been the concern of others in this book. Our subject is the examination of the influences and pressures which ultimately shaped the four debates into what they were. Through study of the debates as TV programs, and through interviews with the production personnel, technical operators, network executives, political advisers, and observers, we have brought together this production diary of four television programs which became milestones in U. S. political history.<sup>1</sup>

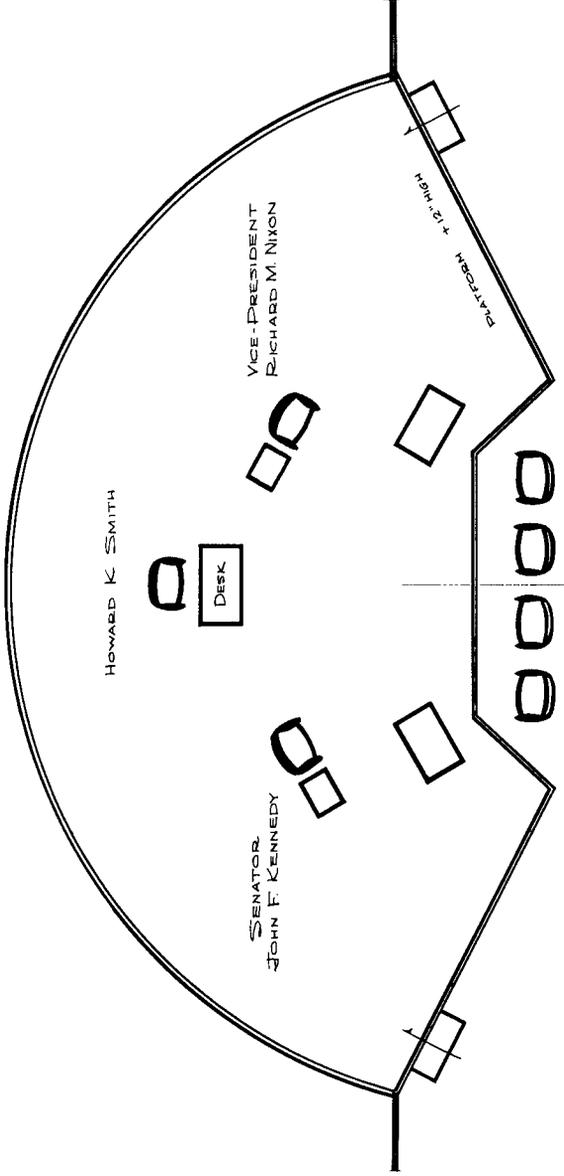
If anyone thinks it was a simple matter to arrange a face-to-face meeting between presidential candidates, he is unaware of the complexities and impact of the mass media.<sup>2</sup> It was not just a matter of agreeing to dates and then showing up at the appointed TV studio on time. On the one hand, the American broadcasting industry was able to present such debates legally for the first time and was painfully conscious of the possible far-reaching consequences.<sup>3</sup> On the other hand, the candidates—both seasoned radio and television performers—and their advisers, both political and technical, realized the tremendous impact of the media with its “winner-take-all” implications.

Throughout the discussions of Section 315, it was clear that the networks were going to provide extensive free time for the candidates in the 1960 election, either under existing "equal time" provisions or under the desired suspension. Some of the proposals made by the networks included time for the candidates to appear on existing or specially designed public affairs programs. The major proposals by CBS, ABC, and NBC for the debate series in this campaign were first made by network officials in the spring of 1960.<sup>4</sup> The networks' formal proposals were made to both candidates immediately after Nixon's nomination in Chicago, July 27. That same evening NBC announced its "Great Debates" proposal. Apparently the NBC offer reached Kennedy first, and he accepted eagerly and without qualifications.<sup>5</sup> Nixon stated his acceptance through his press secretary, Herbert Klein, the same day, and confirmed it three days later. The other network proposals were also quickly accepted. Since both candidates favored the debates, it is not surprising that the House of Representatives approved Senate Joint Resolution 207 (suspending Section 315) on August 24, during its post-convention session.

#### THE FORMAT

The "Meet the Press" proposal, the debate idea, and Vice President Nixon's formal acceptance wire all played major roles in determining the formats for the programs which were planned during the next six weeks. The details were hammered out in twelve meetings between a committee of network news executives and the representatives named by the candidates. For the networks, the committee consisted of William McAndrew, Executive Vice President for News, NBC; Sig Mickelson, President, CBS News Inc.; John Daly, Vice President for News, ABC; and Joseph Keating, Vice President, MBS. Leonard Reinsch served as the chief adviser for Senator Kennedy, and William Wilson was his production adviser for radio and television; Fred C. Scribner Jr., Under Secretary of the Treasury, served as Nixon's chief representative, with Herbert Klein and Carroll P. Newton as advisers for radio-TV, and Edward (Ted) Rogers as technical adviser for radio and TV during the campaign.<sup>6</sup>

The first meeting took place at the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel in New York on August 9. It was agreed then that "debates were desirable," that they should be on all networks simultaneously, one hour in length, end by October 21, and be worked into the candidates' travel schedules

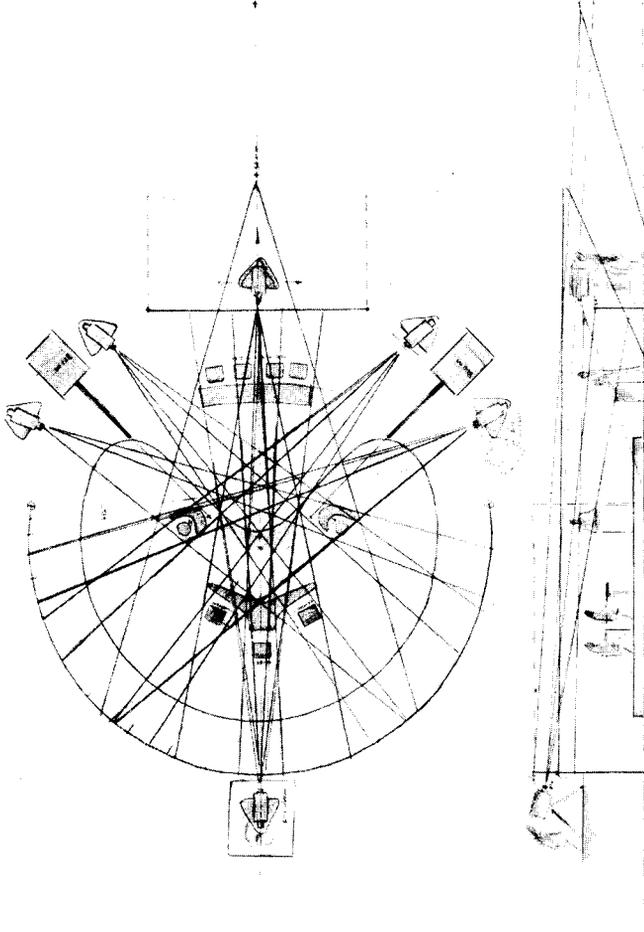


4 CHAIRS FOR CORRESPONDENTS

CBS TELEVISION STATION DEPARTMENT		STUDIO		CHICAGO	
SHOW	DATE	TIME	DATE	TIME	DATE
"THE GREAT DEBATE"	9/28/60		9/28/60		
SCENE		YPR		DATE	
PRODUCER	DIRECTOR	ASSISTANT	DATE	TIME	DATE
ROSEMARY M. CHOMSKY	DON HEWITT	R. BALDWIN	9/25/60		
EDITOR	APPROVED	DATE			
J. GALLUZZI	J. BORNELL				
SCALE: 1/2" = 1'-0"	UNLESS OTHERWISE INDICATED				

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*First debate floor plan:* CBS's original concept for the setting for the debates was not materially changed by NBC or ABC when their turns came. The circular wall, candidates on a raised platform, a podium for each candidate, and a setting for the reporters so they would be facing the candidates.



THE GREAT DEBATE. \*Z - WASH. D.C. 10-7-46 (N.Y.U.)

*Hjalmar Hermanson*

*Second debate floor plan:* Hjalmar Hermanson's original sketch of the floor plan, with camera angles, for the second debate. Lower portion is an elevation showing one candidate standing with the moderator and the other candidate seated with the press panel to the right. Camera on the left shoots the press panel through the porthole in the set wall. Camera on the right shoots the candidates over the heads of the press panel. The upper portion shows Hermanson's concern with providing a set which would give the director a wide variety of shots. Triangular shaped items are cameras, the winged desk is on the left, press chairs and table on the right, candidates' podia are the moon-shaped items in the center.

by mutual agreement.<sup>7</sup> The Democrats wanted a later closing date but agreed to October 21. Subsequent meetings between the candidates' representatives helped to determine the dates. And, according to network representatives, the candidates' teams also talked about the format.<sup>8</sup> Nixon, in his acceptance wire, gave the following general outline of what he wanted: "joint television appearances of the presidential candidates should be conducted as full and free exchange of views, without prepared texts or notes, and without interruptions . . . and with time for questioning by panels of accredited journalists."<sup>9</sup> The network committee also came up with proposals. All of these ideas were discussed at a meeting in the Mayflower Hotel in Washington on August 31, where the formats were established although, apparently, not agreed upon.

Formats for the first and fourth debates were quickly approved: opening statements, questions from the news panel, and closing statements. Kennedy drew the first position in the first debate, a turn of fate his advisers considered very important. Nixon, therefore, went first on the last debate. The candidates' representatives also gave the networks the dates and the cities agreed upon. The place of the second debate was later changed twice, and its date was moved up twenty-four hours.<sup>10</sup>

The format for the first and fourth meetings was the choice of the candidates' representatives. At the August 31 meeting the networks, led by Mickelson, proposed that the candidates engage in what is known as "Oregon Debate."<sup>11</sup> Under this form, debaters present opening statements, then are permitted to question each other directly. This suggestion was rejected by the candidates' representatives.<sup>12</sup> Neither the networks nor the candidates' teams were in favor of an outright debate, on the ground that it would not hold an audience. Furthermore, a major consideration for a good debate must be a relatively narrow, clear-cut issue, on which the debaters can take definite stands. However, the candidates' representatives were frank to admit no such clear-cut issue existed in the campaign. While the candidates disagreed on methods and approach, degree and application of policy on both foreign and domestic issues, their representatives and the networks feared that use of a debate format to present such "shades of grey" arguments would result in rapidly diminishing interest from the audience. In the immediate background were the West Virginia primary debates between Kennedy and Hubert Humphrey. Both men had been overly polite and the results had been disappointing. The debate

format, in the view of at least one of the leading representatives, held hidden traps because accuracy of statements could not be checked immediately, and because one of the candidates, in the heat of an argument, could make an injudicious remark which would have immediate international repercussions.<sup>13</sup>

All of these considerations seemed to have prompted the candidates' representatives to insist upon the interposition of a panel of newsmen who would ask the questions. The representatives of both the candidates and the networks felt that such a format was well known to the American TV audience. To be fair, it must be pointed out that Nixon's telegram suggests a form closer to a straight debate than that used in the actual programs. The "Meet the Press" type of program, however, was specifically urged by Nixon's representatives during the negotiations. Kennedy's representatives said that they were not as interested in the format as in getting the Senator on the same TV program with the Vice President. They realized Kennedy's skill with the question and answer setup, and were really happier with it than with a straight debate format.<sup>14</sup>

Final format of the second and third debates was not established at the August 31 meeting. The candidates' representatives wanted the form that finally appeared on the air—question to candidate A, answer, comment by candidate B, question to candidate B, answer, comment by candidate A. The network representatives objected to this form, claiming it would be confusing to the audience and would not permit much follow-up or expansion of views. They continued to battle for the "Oregon Debate" system up to a few days before the second debate went on the air in Washington; but they never succeeded.

Concerning the subject areas of the first and fourth debates, it is not clear how the idea of having one program devoted solely to domestic issues and another solely to foreign policy evolved, but once the idea of having a news panel ask the questions was established, it must have become clear that some control over the direction of at least some of the programs would have to be exercised.

With the moderator-news panel format rather firmly entrenched, the question of who would serve in these roles also became an issue. The various factions wrestled with the idea of using a public figure as moderator. Along with other notables, the President of the American Bar Association was suggested. In the end, all sides agreed on a TV professional to be selected by the network responsible for a given debate.

The selection of the news panel was a more difficult problem. Since

the networks were putting on the programs, they insisted that the panels for programs one and four be made up of network newsmen, but agreed to 50-50 representation between the electronic and print media on debates two and three. Not more than ten days before the first debate, however, Press Secretaries Pierre Salinger and Herbert Klein opened the question again with a protest—that the lack of newspaper reporters on the panels was discriminatory. But the networks stuck to their guns, and told Klein and Salinger to devise a method for picking the print media representatives on debates two and three. An elaborate lottery system was established by the press secretaries to provide for newspaper, wire service, and magazine representation as the argument concerning discrimination went on right up to the day of the first debate. There is evidence that Senator Kennedy was pushing most strongly for more newspaper representation; the Republicans do not seem to have been as much involved in this discussion. Immediately after the first debate, Klein, who was prompted by requests, suggested the possibility of representation on the panel of special interest groups such as the civil rights advocates. The networks rejected the suggestion on the ground that it would be impossible to satisfy all.

Shortly after the August 9 agreement that there would be debates, at least one network received inquiries from prospective sponsors as to whether the programs would be for sale. When the question was raised by House Interstate and Foreign Commerce Committee chairman Oren Harris, NBC publicly explained that it would consider sponsorship of the programs unless the candidates objected.<sup>15</sup> At the August 31 meeting, it was announced that there would be no sponsorship.

Each of the decisions and discussions we have outlined was reflected in the productions as they appeared on the air. The overriding attention to detail, the attempts on all sides to add a touch here and gain an advantage there was a prelude to what everyone—with 20-20 hindsight—now refers to as “four simple panel shows; but what a cast!”

### *Opening Night*

#### First Debate

Date: September 26, 1960, 9:30 EST, CBS

Place: TV #1, WBBM-TV, Chicago, Illinois

Producer-Director: Don Hewitt, CBS, New York

Designers: Lou Dorfsman and M. Chomsky, CBS, New York

Lighting: Bob Barry, CBS, New York

Makeup: Frances Arvold, CBS, New York  
Timer: Sig Mickelson, President, CBS News Inc.  
Technical Supervisors: Robert Hammer and Robert Sammon for CBS; Al Pierce for WBBM-TV  
Moderator: Howard K. Smith, CBS  
Panel: Robert Fleming, ABC; Stuart Novins, CBS; Sander Vanocur, NBC; Charles Warren, MBS  
Format: Domestic issues. Opening statements of eight minutes, questions and answers covering statements and domestic issues, closing statements of three minutes.

The task of being the first network ever to telecast and broadcast a live debate between two presidential candidates fell, by lot, to CBS. Chicago was picked as the site for the first debate in order to accommodate the candidates—particularly Kennedy's campaign schedule. The CBS-owned-and-operated station, WBBM-TV, had facilities which were ideal for the occasion. Furthermore, WBBM had the necessary room to accommodate the traveling press corps. WBBM-TV studio TV-1, which is 80 by 65 feet, includes a large fly area over one end of the studio, a modern light control board with complete dimming and patching facilities, and is in all respects a first-rate production facility.

On September 8, after drawing the assignment, CBS officials had a general production meeting. Agreement was reached on the matters of positioning the candidates and the news panel, and the general actions which would take place during the debate. In addition, they agreed that a special set would be built for the program. CBS President Frank Stanton took a close personal interest in the program and in particular, the set. Stanton is well known for his interests in design and the arts, and the set was designed for his personal approval.<sup>16</sup>

Lou Dorfsman was assigned the job of coordinating the set design, which CBS wanted as simple as possible to avoid distracting the viewers. Dorfsman said, "The set would be considered in sophisticated design circles as a fine set; even though it was not an exercise in outstanding TV set design, but an exercise in staying away from the two important elements—the candidates themselves."<sup>17</sup> The chairs for the candidates were personally selected by Dr. Stanton; they were Hans Wegner chairs borrowed from Stanton's executive office. The total effect attempted was one of "clean, uncluttered, modern design."

A week later, in Chicago, the final sketch of the set was shown to the candidates' representatives and it was approved. The background

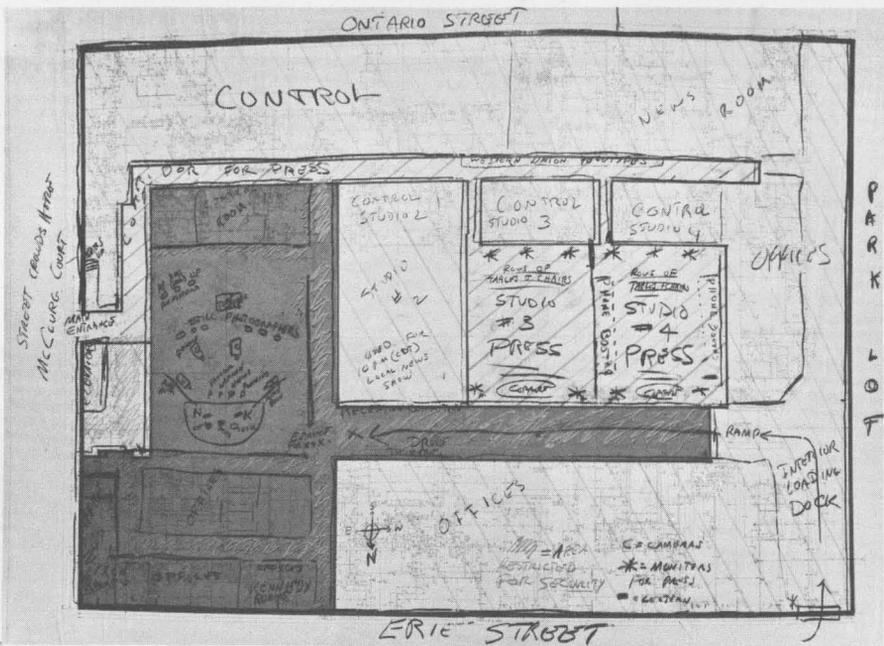


Photo courtesy of CBS

**Debate traffic control:** The first floor of WBBM-TV, Chicago, showing the traffic and security control for the first debate. The shaded area is the "red," or most secure, area, which includes the debate studio, the candidates' offices, and the entrance ramp along which the candidates' cars drove.

**First minutes:** View of the first debate, September 26, 1960. Senator Kennedy's image as he makes his opening remarks is seen on the control room monitor, lower right. Timekeeper Sig Mickelson is shown in center foreground, Vice President Nixon is seated right of center. The clock shows the debate has been on the air about two minutes. Men shown seated just below the candidates are members of the press panel.

Photo courtesy of CBS





*Photo courtesy of CBS*

*During set and lighting adjustment:* CBS President Frank Stanton, kneeling left, studies the lighting effects on the set wall as shown through a TV monitor. Kneeling right is Lou Dorfman, CBS advertising and sales promotion creative director, who supervised set design. Standing are, left to right, Leonard Reinsch, Kennedy's chief TV adviser, and Don Hewitt, CBS debate producer-director.

*Reporters cover the TV debate:* A portion of the huge corps of reporters who covered the second debate at NBC Washington, October 7, 1960. TV monitors, through which the reporters viewed the debate, are set up against the outside wall of the debate studio.

*Photo courtesy of NBC*



chosen was a painted pattern of squares, given perspective by shading in a light grey color. This color was intended to equal No. 5—a middle tone—on the TV grey scale. The set had a curved back wall, 9 feet high by 39 feet long. The entire set—back wall, desks, chairs, podia—was placed on a platform eighteen inches high. In addition to the chairs for the candidates, there was a chair for the moderator, and lecterns which can best be described as austere music stands. The original design also included a large, moulded, spread-winged eagle symbol, which was to be mounted in the center of the back wall.<sup>18</sup>

The set was built in New York, set up in the CBS scene shop at the CBS Production Center, and viewed by various people, including the set designer. It was not seen by the producer-director or the lighting director, nor was it viewed on camera in New York. Such previews, as we will see, could have saved much time and trouble.

The set arrived in Chicago Saturday, September 24. Robert Link, WBBM-TV Production Manager, brought in a crew and the set was erected in TV #1 that day and evening. As Director Don Hewitt watched the setup, he immediately decided that the background tone was too light, and he ordered it repainted to bring it to the grey scale of #5 as originally prescribed. Hewitt, Dorfsman, and Stanton then became involved, along with the candidates' representatives, in a long series of discussions and changes in the dressing of the set which took almost two hundred man-hours to complete, and covered the next thirty-six hours in time.<sup>19</sup> Major aspects of this re-dressing included, in order: repainting the set to a darker tone at about 11 A.M. Sunday, September 25, relaying and restitching of the green carpeting which covered the candidates' platform, and building new furniture for the principals and the moderator.

The candidates' representatives asked that moderator Smith be seated behind a desk so that there would be more separation between the candidates and they requested that small tables with carafes be placed near the candidates' chairs. Since the addition of this furniture confused the original design concept, there was much resistance on the part of the CBS executives. Several people went looking for furniture in Chicago. The designer drew plans, and furniture was built in the WBBM shop. This home-made furniture was later rejected. The decorative eagle design for the back of the set was removed. Early in the setup period, Hewitt had pictures taken of the set from the various shooting angles he proposed to use. These pictures were processed Saturday evening, and Hewitt met Kennedy and Reinsch at the

Chicago airport Sunday morning to show them the pictures, spending about fifteen minutes discussing the production details with the candidate. He had no similar meeting with Nixon, although Hewitt had requested it.

The most complicated set change was not decided upon until about noon on the day of the debate, and was not completed until late afternoon. Dr. Stanton, when he viewed the set on camera after it had been repainted, still felt that the background was too "busy." A gauze scrim, long enough to cover the entire curved back wall of the set, was rented. Since the back wall was curved, the mounting of the scrim was no small task.<sup>20</sup>

Robert Barry, senior lighting director for CBS, was assigned to the lighting of the debates about two weeks in advance. He had seen a model and a sketch of the set in New York, but had not viewed it at the time of the trial setup in the shop. He arrived in Chicago, Friday, September 23, and "roughed in" his lighting while the set was being installed Sunday. But a detailed lighting job was held up because of the difficulties in redressing the set, and by a controversy between Hewitt and the candidates' representatives over the placement of the lecterns for the candidates. Hewitt wanted them closer together, and kept moving them to the accompaniment of protests from Rogers and Wilson.

Barry was in on the decision to darken the set. He, too, recognized that the lightness of the background would make it difficult for the television tube to differentiate between the flesh tones of the candidates' faces and the grey scale value of the set. TV #1 is equipped with a five-scene preset lighting control board with more than enough dimmers for each light to be connected to a separate dimmer. Barry said he approached the lighting job with the idea that it would be conventional. He put up key, fill, and back lights, and lit the background so that its light intensity could be controlled separately. Bruce Allan, one of Nixon's advisers, asked that Barry avoid "modeling" when lighting the Vice President; that he avoid sharply defined facial contours and shadows. This was done. By the time Barry had placed all of his lights, the set was covered with about 125 foot-candles of intensity. Nixon's advisers had requested the addition of two 500-watt spotlights shining up into the Vice President's eyes; one aimed at the level of his seated position, the other at the podium position. These were placed on the floor about twelve feet in front of the platform and were directed upward at about a 35-degree angle. Nixon's chief adviser, Ted Rogers,

had prescribed these lights for Nixon wherever he went. From Rogers' point of view, there was nothing unusual about the addition of these two lights. Rogers, who told the authors that Nixon was an extremely difficult subject to light, said, "He's critical on television; there's an enormous contrast between his very pale, white translucent skin, and his jet black hair."<sup>21</sup>

Barry said the Nixon advisers pressed him for the addition of the floor lights during most of the day of the debate, and that they were added by 5 P.M., when the lighting job was finished. Barry was opposed to adding the lights because the height of the platform and the relatively low angle of the cameras would have forced the cameras to shoot upward and into Nixon's eyes anyway. However, he acceded to the request, and all parties said they were satisfied with the lights, set, and general production details at least two hours before air time.

About 7:30, one hour before air time, the candidates arrived at WBBM and were driven inside the building along a wide production corridor behind the studio. Nixon arrived first, Kennedy only a few minutes later, and each was greeted by the executives of all the networks. When Nixon went on camera for a pre-show check, his representatives were in the control room. They asked for certain lighting changes to reduce a shine on his temple and for the floor lights to be raised in intensity to increase his eye light. CBS personnel and the Kennedy advisers looked at Kennedy for about the same amount of time—three or four minutes—and made no changes.<sup>22</sup>

Although Frances Arvold, a CBS make-up expert who had been sent out from New York to make up the candidates, was on hand, both refused her services. Because of Nixon's heavy beard, Everett Hart, another of his advisers, applied a commercial product, Max Factor's "Lazy Shave," a pancake cosmetic, to Nixon's face. In the light of later reactions to Mr. Nixon's looks, it is interesting to note that Barry and Miss Arvold during the program discussed the fact that Nixon would have profited from professional make-up services, while the candidates' representatives were satisfied with his looks.<sup>23</sup> Kennedy had a rather heavy tan from open-car campaigning in California, and his advisers felt he needed no make-up at all. Rogers had recommended Nixon use a sunlamp as far back as August 15, but there is no indication that he took the advice.

There was little discussion of what the candidates would wear; both had originally chosen light to medium tone grey suits. Kennedy's advisers changed him into a dark blue suit after noting the light set

background. Nixon wore the grey suit, as planned. At the last minute, the Kennedy people sent back to the hotel for a blue shirt, which he changed into after arriving at WBBM-TV.<sup>24</sup>

It is clear, both from what he said and the philosophy of his approach, that Don Hewitt thought of the first debate as a special event. He had had thirteen years of experience as a director with CBS, including an extensive special event role, much of it under extremely difficult conditions. It is interesting to note that Hewitt was named producer-director for the first debate, whereas the other networks split the job between two or more men. While this is not unusual it did put a heavy load on Hewitt. Hewitt said: "I realized that the most important function of my job as producer was not to be a producer, in other words, not to make a television program out of this. Just to make it possible for the people sitting at home to watch the significant event, probably the most significant event they had ever watched, and to fight the temptation to turn it into a show. I would have preferred an audience, that this debate take place in Madison Square Garden, and that we cover it as a special event, not as a television show."<sup>25</sup>

Hewitt even extended this audience feeling to the press panel. They were seated with their backs to the camera, "they were sort of the front row. The [home] audience was sitting back behind the cameras, and the reporters were sort of asking questions that the audience would have asked had they been there."<sup>26</sup> In the shots that he took, Hewitt was also trying to shorten the distance between the candidates and the home viewers—"I tried to have the cameras react more or less like Joe Average Citizen would have reacted if he had been able to sit there rather than have it fed to him on a coaxial cable."

Because the candidates were placed so far apart on the platform, Hewitt was unable to get a shot including both candidates other than the wide "cover" shot used at the beginning and the end. Later directors, using more cameras, solved this problem with set designs which gave more protection on the sides. A major factor in Hewitt's difficulty in getting "two-shots"\* was a technical decision, that only fixed focal length lenses would be used on the studio cameras. Hewitt had requested "zoom lenses" for his main cameras. The CBS technicians, however, believed that the fixed focal length lenses would provide a "sharper" picture, and overruled Hewitt's request. So the main cameras were equipped with lenses of 17 and 15 inch and 135 and 90 milli-

\* A one-shot shows one person; a two-shot shows two persons.

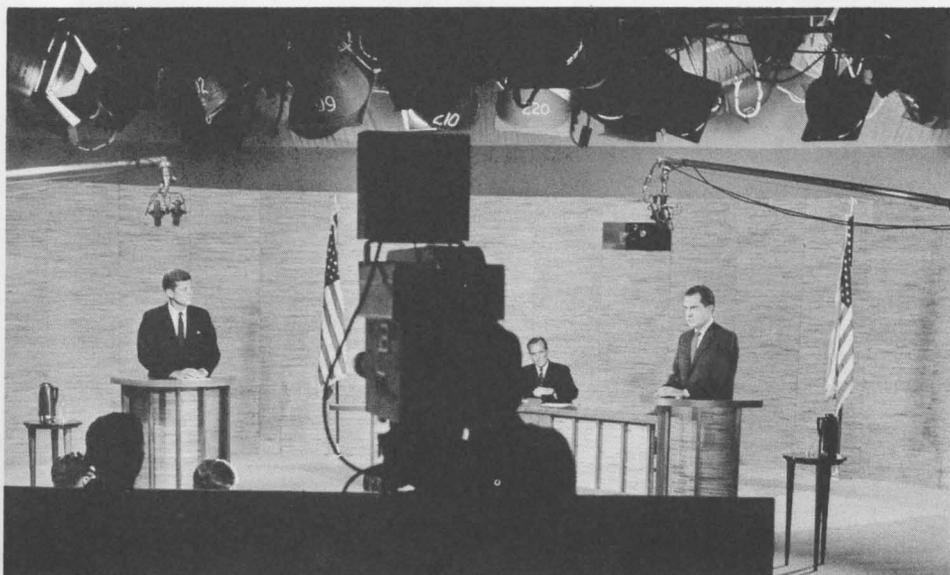


*Photo courtesy of NBC*

*Kennedy becomes a lighting expert:* During the pre-program lighting check on the second debate, Senator Kennedy objected to the number of lights on him, compared to the number on Vice President Nixon. Scratching his head on the extreme left is debate moderator Frank McGee.

*Second debate action:* Viewed over the heads of the press panel, Vice President Nixon waits for a question from the reporters. The camera taking the picture of the reporters is visible through the open porthole in the set wall (an innovation in the production of the second debate) just above and to the left of Nixon.

*Photo courtesy of NBC*





*Photo courtesy of ABC*

*The two third debates:* (above) The Lincoln-Cherney debate. Dan Lincoln, left, the stand-in for Vice President Nixon during the third debate pre-program lighting and camera checkout eyes Richard Cherney, Senator Kennedy's stand-in. The men are 3,000 miles apart, but here united on one TV screen. (below) The real debaters as they appeared on the air, Vice President Nixon in Los Angeles, and Senator Kennedy in New York. (photographed from TV screen)

*Photo courtesy of ABC*



meter focal lengths. The two center cameras used mostly the 90 mm. shot, the two main cameras on either side used the longer lenses for the close-ups of the candidates.<sup>27</sup>

Hewitt positioned his two main cameras at either end of the press panel, so that each candidate would be facing toward the other when they talked to the cameras. The other two cameras were placed behind the press panel, and took shots which included the reporters and the candidates. The lack of an easily obtainable "two-shot" forced Hewitt to take a "one-shot reaction shot."\* This caused great concern to the candidates' representatives, and may have been at least partially responsible for the public reaction to Nixon's looks which developed after the first debate. The question of whether or not to use a reaction shot had been discussed extensively before the broadcast. Hewitt argued in this way: "I tried to put myself in the position of the viewer, and there were certain times when if the guy at home had been in the studio, I'm sure he would have looked over to see what Kennedy's reaction was to what Nixon was saying, and vice versa . . . I made no conscious effort to balance, I just called them as I saw them."<sup>28</sup>

Nixon's chief production adviser, Ted Rogers, had objected strenuously to any plans of using one-shot reaction shots. His objections were based on two things. First, his recognition that "Nixon's physical image on television was critical." Second, that one-shot reaction shots took the audience's attention away from what was being said.<sup>29</sup> It is apparent that Rogers and Hewitt argued a long time over the one-shot reaction shot. Hewitt finally took the question to Dr. Stanton and Mickelson for a decision. They supported Hewitt, and told him to shoot the show as he saw it. Kennedy's advisers favored reaction shots of any kind.

In effect, the argument continued even during the broadcast. Although the networks had agreed that each candidate could have two representatives in the control room during the broadcast, Hewitt had made clear that they would not be allowed to talk to him while the program was on the air. However, during the program Bill Wilson, in what Hewitt says was "a kidding manner," told Hewitt he owed Kennedy more reaction shots. As Hewitt described the conversation, he replied: "What do you mean, I've cut away from Kennedy more than I've cut away from Nixon . . . he [Wilson] said that's what I mean, we like

\* A reaction shot shows one person's reaction when another person is speaking.

it when you cut away from Kennedy and show Nixon's reaction." Wilson said, "Reaction shots are one of my loves; we were there to use TV as a medium; I felt we ought to do it as well as possible."<sup>30</sup>

The Nixon camp had three more requests, two concerning shots and one concerning the camera tally lights. Rogers had asked that Hewitt avoid all left profile shots of the Vice President. As it happened, no profile shots were used anyway. And, shortly before air time, Nixon himself asked that Hewitt avoid taking a reaction shot while he was wiping perspiration from his face. Although Hewitt assured Nixon he would honor the request, one such action did appear on the program. It came, on a wide shot, when Nixon wiped his face with his handkerchief while waiting for a panelist to finish a question. Although Hewitt had planned to have the tally lights turned off, he left them on at the request of Nixon's advisers.

The timing of the program was given considerable attention. Robert Hammer, of the CBS engineering department, had designed and built special cueing devices. These were similar in size to a teleprompter, and were mounted on top of the cameras. Using a system of colored lights and numbers, these boxes warned the candidates when they had one minute, thirty seconds, and no time left. The cue-boxes were controlled by CBS News President Sig Mickelson, who kept electric timers on the candidates and saw to it that the warning lights were turned on in proper sequence. In addition, a stage manager was located in the studio with sets of cue-cards, which could have been used in case the cue-boxes failed to work. The same cueing instruments were used throughout the debates. Mickelson was in the studio, and there was only one hitch in the plan. There was no way to tell moderator Smith how much time was left, and Mickelson shouted it to him when Smith asked for time, which may have been the only unplanned moment in the entire four debates as far as the networks were concerned.

Howard K. Smith, the moderator, was to serve as program guide. He had to set the scene for the audience including the reading of the all-important "ground rules," to introduce and acknowledge the press panel and to provide directions where necessary. He kept the order of questioning straight—an order which was agreed upon, and he was prepared to interrupt the proceedings to assure equal time to both candidates. He went outside the simple task of announcing the order twice: first, motioning to Senator Kennedy to stand and walk to his rostrum for the first question from the panel; second, calling for the amount of time left. Smith, Hewitt, and the panel had met earlier in

the day to affirm the order of questions, but, of course, not the content of the questions.<sup>31</sup>

Obviously, the head-on meeting of the two presidential candidates attracted attention. Hundreds of reporters for all media were present to watch and report on the program itself, what the candidates said, and to interpret, analyze, and record the event both as a political milestone and as a moment in history. Then too, the networks—because this was the first joint venture—had their highest executives on hand to greet the candidates; technicians were numerous both for the broadcast itself and for the communications necessities of the press. Caterers were brought in to serve the press, crew, and VIP's. And the candidates had their own entourage, including guests. WBBM originally planned to use its Studio 4 to accommodate the reporters, installing TV monitors, telephone and teletype circuits and instruments, running transcript facilities, and food service. So many reporters asked for accreditation (200 reporters had been expected, and 380 turned up), that another studio of the same size was opened and identical facilities provided.

It would not be a wild estimate to say that between 600 and 800 people were in the building when the program went on the air. CBS assigned specialists from its press information department to work with the Chicago police and the Secret Service in handling traffic and security problems. The WBBM building was divided up into six different zones; badges admitting people to the various zones on the basis of their needs were struck off. The hottest zone—the “red” area—was in the studio, the control room, and the office area assigned to the two candidates. Only those people who were directly connected with the broadcast were allowed in this area, i.e., the candidates and their advisers. Reporters and photographers covering the event were not allowed in the studio during the broadcast, with the exception of a small special press and still photo pool group. Three reporters, two for the wire services and one for the magazines, and five photographers were permitted in the studio during the broadcast, but were restricted to a specially marked area.<sup>32</sup> The rest of the press group viewed the program from the other studios over a battery of TV monitors. A large group of photographers were permitted in the studio prior to air time, to photograph the candidates on the set.

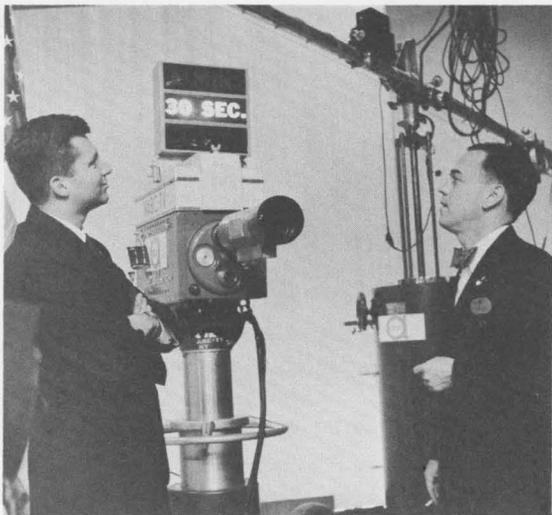
The VIP's, after greeting the candidates, went to the executive office suite and watched the program from there, except for NBC Board Chairman Robert Sarnoff and CBS Chairman William Paley, who

stood in the back of the control room for part of the broadcast. They had no active part in the broadcast itself. Dr. Stanton also went into the control room for a time, and was observed taking pictures with his own miniature camera. There was nothing remarkable about the top executives being there; after all, it was "opening night," and a signally important one for the broadcasting industry.<sup>33</sup>

WBBM-TV technical personnel, supplemented by CBS technicians and supervisors from New York, handled the electronic problems with special care. Technically it was not a complicated program to produce. No special equipment was needed, and while a four-camera, two mike-boom program was a full effort for WBBM-TV, station personnel had presented many programs with more technical complications. Great care was taken in selecting the equipment used. The image orthicon tubes were specially chosen from stock. The candidates' voices were picked up from RCA "BK-5" microphones mounted on standard booms, and an identical microphone and boom were set up in the studio on standby. The panel of reporters and Smith wore "lavalier" microphones. In addition to the full crews assigned, many other technicians were present in case of an emergency. As a precautionary measure, AT&T had long-lines service personnel in the building.

During the day of the debate, the technicians had spent a lot of time "balancing" the four cameras so that all had the same picture quality. The lenses were stopped down to between f 11 and f 16, which is a slightly smaller lens setting than WBBM normally uses.<sup>34</sup> With all cameras balanced technically, video control operator Joe Grisanti thought the addition of the floor lights for Mr. Nixon tended to change the quality of pictures of the Vice President. Grisanti told the authors, "This was done at the expense of the grey scale; consequently, we had no blacks in the picture. We tried to compensate by dropping the black level, the average level of the picture down; so that we were in effect clipping part of the lower grey scale in trying to bring out some contrast in the picture." The Kennedy picture, therefore, by technical assessment, had a better grey scale, or in lay terms, more contrast.

It is interesting to note that because of, or despite, the extreme care taken about production details, they became front-page news after the first debate. Perhaps for the first time in television history professional information such as the make-up worn by a performer and the number of lights used on a television program were matters of public discussion. Much, if not all, of the general reaction in the press dealt with Nixon's appearance and the visual impact of the program. Reporters



*Photo courtesy of ABC*

*The production rivals:* William Wilson, left, Kennedy's TV production adviser, and Ted Rogers, right, Nixon's TV man, in a conference before the fourth debate. Shown on top of the TV camera is one of the time-warning devices placed on all the cameras during all the debates.

*Not all the pictures were on TV:* A part of the photo corps which was allowed into the studio before the start of the third debate. Vice President Nixon, right, and Senator Kennedy posed for the pictures before the debates because only a few pool photographers were allowed in the studios during the broadcasts.

*Photo courtesy of ABC*





*Photo courtesy of ABC*

*Closest together:* During the fourth debate, the candidates were moved closer together on the platform. In the center the light fixtures are shown duplicated, an ABC safety precaution. The time-warning device on the camera to the right shows Vice President Nixon has run out of time.

continually mentioned that Nixon looked "tired, drawn and that he appeared to be ill." One Republican leader said Nixon must have been made up by people with Democratic leanings, and then the storm broke over CBS' head. The *Chicago Daily News* put reporter Richard Stoud onto the story of Nixon's appearance, and Stoud found John Hall, business agent of the Make-up Artists and Hair Stylists of America New York local willing to say the make-up job was very bad and could not have been the work of a professional make-up artist or union member. The Stoud story was headlined "Was Nixon Sabotaged by TV Make-up Artists?" and was widely reprinted. CBS received the brunt of the reaction, but its defense was undeniable: no CBS person had anything to do with Nixon's make-up—as the authors have already detailed—and subsequently, the *Daily News* clarified its story with quotes from press secretary Herb Klein that Nixon's make-up had been applied by one of his advisers.<sup>35</sup> For a day or two everyone was also a lighting expert, and Klein even blamed the TV cameras for Nixon's looks.

The fact is that Nixon was not feeling well the day of the first debate; he had appeared before a hostile union audience in Chicago that morning, and had been running a temperature most of the day. He had lost weight during his convalescence from a knee operation early in September, and had been campaigning hard. To quote Ted Rogers, "No TV camera, no make-up man can hide bone weariness, physical fatigue. He was actually sick, he had a fever. Because Nixon did not give viewers the expected performance . . . deliver . . . the predetermined mental picture of what they expected, they looked around to find out what was the matter . . . he was not the 'fighting commando' of the Republican cause. So for the first time, they were more conscious of his appearance than of what he was saying."<sup>36</sup>

Probably professional make-up services would have helped. Nixon's appearance was especially critical on reaction shots. He looked to many, including the authors, to be uncomfortable, unsure of himself. In reaction shots Nixon's eyes darted around, perspiration was clearly noticeable on his chin, and with the tight shots used by Hewitt these things were more obvious.

Kennedy's advisers had rested and briefed him during the day, and had avoided all public commitments with the exception of a brief appearance before the same union audience that Nixon had addressed earlier. Kennedy came through on the broadcast as a strong, self-assured personality. In the reaction shots Kennedy was seen looking

at Nixon with an intense concentration, a look which gave the attitude, again to the authors, of command and comfort in the situation.

### *First Debate: Program Analysis*

**OPENING:** Wide shot including moderator Howard K. Smith; Vice President Nixon seated right, Senator Kennedy left. Smith continuity establishes program, introduces Nixon and Kennedy on extreme close-up. At 00:20 Smith in the same opening wide shot reads rules, introduces Kennedy for opening statement; Kennedy rises and walks to rostrum; cut to close-up of Kennedy.

**SHOTS: Candidates:** Earliest shots are tight, barely including necktie knot; later shot selection includes chest or "top-button-of-the-coat" and one including lectern shelf and supporting stand.

**Newsmen:** Following opening statements reporters are introduced as they swivel their chairs around to acknowledge the camera; shot revealing candidates set in background. During questions shot is over the head and shoulders of the newsmen with the candidate listening in the background. The attention focused on the candidate.

**Reactions:** All reaction shots are one-shots of the candidate who is not speaking. There are 11 of Kennedy for a total of 118 seconds, and 9 of Nixon for a total of 85 seconds. First reaction shot at 07:02, during Kennedy's opening statement. The next at 10:35, during Nixon's opening statement, and there are two other reaction shots of Kennedy during Nixon's opening statement.

**CLOSING:** From one-shot of the last speaker, Kennedy, to one-shot of Smith, and on the cue: "Good night from Chicago," cut to wide shot over the panel, which pulls back to an even wider shot showing all four newsmen, the complete set and studio personnel and equipment. Over this shot, two graphics, containing identification of the three television networks, are superimposed.

**COMMENT:** Hewitt was free-wheeling in his approach and execution; reaction shots were numerous and paced with the content; additional candidate reactions were gained with shots of the candidates listening to the newsmen. Audio was without flaw.

## HEAT, LIGHT, AND NERVES

### Second Debate

Date: October 7, 1960, 7:30 EDST, NBC

Place: Studio A, WRC-TV, Washington, D. C.

Producer: Julian Goodman, Vice President, News, NBC, New York  
Director: Frank Slingland, NBC, Washington  
Designer: Hjalmar Hermanson, NBC, New York  
Lighting: Leon Chromak, NBC, Washington  
Makeup: Bob O'Bradovich, NBC, New York  
Timers: Elmer Lower, News Director, NBC, Washington; Russ Tornabene, News Supervisor, NBC, Washington  
Technical Supervisors: William H. Trevarthen, NBC, New York; John Rogers, NBC, Washington  
Moderator: Frank McGee, NBC  
Panel: Edward P. Morgan, ABC; Paul Nivin, CBS; Alvin Spivak, UPI; Hal Levy, *Newsday*  
Format: News panel, unlimited to subject matter, no formal statements; 2½ minutes to answer questions; 1½ minutes for rebuttal comment by other candidate

If there was tension bred of newness and unfamiliarity during the first debate in Chicago, it is probable that there was even more tension before the second because of the sensitivity of the candidates to the effects of the first debate on the voters and politicians. NBC drew the responsibility for production of the second debate, and key NBC personnel had observed the production of the first debate. NBC was determined to iron out the wrinkles that developed at Chicago. In two memoranda from NBC President Robert E. Kintner to William McAndrew, Executive Vice President, NBC News, the policy lines were carefully delineated. McAndrew was given complete authority for the production of the program, but he was instructed to yield to the candidates and their representatives on questions of lighting and make-up after first making the network's agreement or disagreement clear. McAndrew was advised not to yield to any persuasion concerning changes in the set unless his producer and director agreed.

The question of a change in the site for the second debate arose shortly after Howard K. Smith signed off the first debate on September 26. After the first debate, Julian Goodman and Frank Slingland, who had been assigned the roles of producer and director respectively for the second debate, went from Chicago to Cleveland and met with John Rogers of the NBC technical staff, Rod Clurman, Goodman's administrative assistant, and Hjalmar Hermanson, NBC set designer, in order to form a survey team to study the production problems a Cleveland origination might pose. Also involved in the Cleveland survey were Leonard Reinsch, the Democrats' TV coordinator, William

Wilson, in charge of Kennedy's TV appearances, and Edward Rogers, the Republicans' TV man.

Both practical and political problems were involved in the Cleveland site. It was first planned that this debate would be in New York, but campaign schedules dictated a change. The Republicans felt that since they had accommodated the Democrats on the site of the first debate, and since it was easiest for the Vice President to meet Kennedy next in a Midwestern city, the Democrats should accommodate them by accepting the Cleveland site.<sup>37</sup> This was accomplished without much argument in the early stages of planning. But the overriding problems at Cleveland were those of space. The NBC affiliate, KYW-TV, has adequate facilities for its own productions, but the main studio where it was proposed that the debate take place was considered small by the survey team.<sup>38</sup> The major difficulty with the facilities was the lack of space to handle the nonparticipants—the press and VIP's who would come to cover the debate. We saw that in Chicago CBS had planned for 200 reporters and 380 attended. The survey team believed that setting up the facilities for at least as many as there were in Chicago would have been impossible at KYW. Since there were compelling reasons, however, for holding the debate in Cleveland, the survey team, with the cooperation of Cleveland civic authorities, tried to find a proper place. One network official called it, "the battle of the hors d'oeuvres . . . it was a question of who had the best hors d'oeuvres for the press. . . ."

Working steadily for the better part of two days, the teams examined hotel ballrooms, an industrial plant, and a university assembly hall. In many instances they found adequate space and comfort, or people willing to make changes by removing chandeliers from a ballroom, knocking out walls at the TV studio, adding sound baffling material, and adding air conditioning equipment; but a main objection was that the program would have to be a remote broadcast if it originated in the facilities offered by Cleveland. The fears of adding the problems inherent in a remote broadcast to the already serious production problems were very large and real at the time. The best facility was at one of the hotels, but its main ballroom fronted on a busy Cleveland thoroughfare and Slingland worried that the sound of a siren on some passing emergency vehicle might leak through the walls during the debate. For these reasons, the NBC group left Cleveland on Wednesday, September 28, with the recommendation that the debate be moved to the NBC studios in Washington.<sup>39</sup> Nixon apparently agreed to the



*Photo courtesy of ABC*

*Home away from home:* The inside and outside of one of the cottages ABC constructed for the candidates in their New York studio. Decoration and painting were carried out completely. The interior shows even the pictures on the wall were originals; the fact that the pictures were not identical was commented on by several reporters during a preview.

*Photo courtesy of ABC*



switch, but didn't or couldn't communicate with adviser Fred Scribner, who was campaigning. The NBC production team had to talk Scribner into moving, and finally he "reluctantly" agreed.<sup>40</sup> Kennedy's advisers agreed quickly.

Station WRC-TV in Washington, where the second debate was to be staged, is a spacious, modern installation, equipped for color in addition to black and white production. A large scenic storage area was particularly important here, because it could be cleared and used to house the reporters, as the adjoining studios were used at WBBM-TV in Chicago. The new facility also included a complete and modern set of executive offices, so that adequate accommodations for the candidates and their parties were easily arranged, close to the studio.

Hjalmar Hermanson had participated in the discussions about the set design in Cleveland, at first based on the probable origination from that city, and finished his planning by Friday, September 30. These discussions were influenced by the opinions of NBC personnel and the candidates' representatives, who felt that CBS had oversimplified the set for the first debate. The candidates' representatives in concert with Hermanson felt that the set should be "warmer" with more texture in the flats and furniture, that the furnishings should be more solid as contrasted with the spindly quality of the Chicago set, and that the candidates' legs should be masked by desks when they were seated and by some sort of rostrum when they stood. Producer Julian Goodman felt that the rostrums should be more substantial, so that the candidates could lean on them while talking; again a contrast from the Chicago set, in which the rostrums were little more than severely designed music stands. The approach was obviously different from that of the CBS designers, who had designed and executed a "modern" set; the NBC set, for veteran performers such as the candidates, was more in keeping with what they had used before, and was designed to be more "comfortable." NBC wanted a backdrop which would be a bit darker and less reflective than the CBS set; with this change they hoped to avoid the extensive background changes that had been necessary in Chicago. To achieve these goals Hermanson designed a center desk with canted wings and podia which were kidney-shaped to provide a side arm rest with a ledge in front; these were to be covered, as was the background, with a medium brown grass cloth.<sup>41</sup>

Hermanson and the others involved in the set design, and even the candidates' representatives, imagined that the second debate would

be more like the NBC "Meet the Press" program than the first debate had been. The choice of Slingland as director seems to have been made on the basis of his four to five years' experience as director of "Meet the Press."<sup>42</sup> Most of the production details were carried out with this concept in mind. In fact, during the earliest discussions about the format, as we have seen, some of the candidates' representatives actually referred to the second debate as a "Meet the Press-type program."<sup>43</sup>

Therefore, the area for the reporters' panel was also handled differently. The background behind the candidates was composed of 29 grass-cloth covered panels 2½ by 10 feet set up in a semi-circle of slightly more than 180 degrees. The reporters were positioned behind a gently curved desk approximately 10 feet long. Behind the reporters Hermanson designed a low wall, 53 inches high, to provide a background for camera shots of the reporters when they asked questions. On the first debate there had been no full-face shots of the reporters except as they were introduced, and the NBC concept of a "Meet the Press" program called for seeing the reporters as they asked their questions. A porthole was built into the center of the large background behind the candidates, approximately eight feet up on the wall, so that a camera could be positioned to shoot directly into the press panel. The entire candidates' set was placed on a one-foot-high kidney-shaped riser which was covered with a rug. Because of the shortage of time, Hermanson did not make working drawings of the set or furniture, but did construct a model set of balsa wood and cardboard which he took to a meeting with the candidates' representatives, Wilson and Rogers, in Washington, Monday, October 2. It was indeed fortunate that they approved the set, since its construction in New York was almost completed. Most of this production meeting was involved with discussion of "shooting" angles, one of which the NBC people kept secret until shortly before air time the following Friday.<sup>44</sup>

Hermanson's set was trucked to the WRC studios Wednesday, October 4. That evening Hermanson personally supervised the setup. One additional variation he had included was to design the candidates' and moderator's desk so that it could be taken apart into three units, and provide a feeling of separation, if desired. The candidates' representatives looked at the set, viewed it on camera late Wednesday evening, and all agreed it had come off exactly as they had planned.<sup>45</sup> With the set in place and approved, Leon Chromak, an NBC technical director on the Washington staff, who had twelve years of experience with many

of the political programs NBC originates from there, was brought in to light it.

The WRC-TV studio, despite its recent design, did not have dimmers included in its lighting control setup. Chromak, realizing the importance of the lighting, particularly the need for fine control of intensity, had six dimmers shipped in from New York. He took special precautions with his lighting plan. Contrary to the usual practice of suspending most lighting instruments from an overhead grid, Chromak mounted his key lights on floor stands so that he could make vertical and horizontal angle adjustments without the necessity of moving in ladders. On Thursday, Chromak "roughed in" his lights, set up spare instruments (using two assistants) beside the main light sources to protect against the failure of any one lamp, and set his over-all front light level at about 140 foot candles.<sup>46</sup>

Chromak said he lit for a modeling effect, with the key light a little to the left of center, fill light basically from the right, some low light coming into the eyes, and with set light and back light to finish it off. He said he had lit both Kennedy and Nixon many times before, and was familiar with their particular needs. He had, of course, talked with Slingland and accommodated all of the angles the director was going to use in shooting. By Thursday night, Chromak said, "I was 98 per cent ready, a little trim here and there, but even if I didn't trim I thought I was ready."<sup>47</sup>

But for the second time lighting changes started to become a part of the debate story. Wilson, Kennedy's TV adviser, saw the final light setup late Thursday evening, and told Goodman he wanted "blander lighting for Kennedy." Chromak and Goodman acceded to Wilson's request by adding scoop lights to fill in and give a more diffuse effect. Imero Fiorentino, formerly an ABC lighting director who had been hired as a lighting consultant for Nixon after the Chicago uproar, also viewed the light setup at about the same time and approved it. Although Wilson's request had added more lights to the Kennedy side of the set, Chromak told the authors he did not feel his light plan had been basically changed.

About 6:30 P.M. Friday, Kennedy arrived in the studio for the pre-show check, preceding Nixon by previous agreement. He was accompanied by Leonard Reinsch, his brother Robert, and Wilson. Shortly after Kennedy reached his place on the set, he walked over to the Nixon podium, then back again, and asked why there were more lights on his part of the set than on Nixon's. Robert Kennedy, standing in

Nixon's place, complained contrarily that there were more lights on Nixon's set. Both made several trips to the control room to view each other in the Kennedy portion of the set, carrying on a running discussion of the light with their advisers, demanding lighting changes replete with such comments as "did 'they' arrange our lights too?"<sup>48</sup> Chromak agreed to move one of the floor stand lights, and adjust the intensity of some of the other lights. Today he refers to it as a "psychological lighting change."<sup>49</sup> Whether it was a serious matter for the Senator, or whether he was just practicing "upmanship" as has been suggested by at least one of his advisers, will never be known, but again the candidate got what he wanted in what otherwise would have been a strictly routine lighting assignment.<sup>50</sup>

Kennedy forces, however, still were not satisfied with the conditions and raised a question about the temperature of the studio. No accurate record of the exact temperature of the studio was kept. Kennedy partisans say it was down to 64 degrees, and Kennedy himself commented, "I need a sweater."<sup>51</sup> In any case, the proper functionary was summoned, the studio thermostat raised, and everyone agrees that it warmed up during the program, whether from the words spoken, the TV lights, or the relief of the tension, no one will ever be sure. Nixon, in contrast to the first debate lighting squabble, agreed that Chromak's lighting was satisfactory for him, although his advisers recommended a slight raise in the intensity of the key light and back light, which was quickly done. The Kennedy party, with its nervous pacing, took about thirty minutes to get satisfaction; Nixon's few changes were accomplished in five minutes.

NBC, like CBS in Chicago, had brought in one of their top make-up men, Bob O'Bradovich, calling him down from a location job at Harpers Ferry, Virginia, to be on hand if needed. After the bitter argument over make-up in Chicago, Nixon had hired a professional, Stan Lawrence, to handle the job for the rest of the debates. Kennedy never used make-up; so O'Bradovich had nothing to do. Nixon wore a darker suit this time. Kennedy's was about the same shade as the one he wore in Chicago.

Frank Slingland, who had been an observer at Chicago, had the "Meet the Press" idea uppermost in his mind. Slingland ordered six cameras, dollies, booms, and other standard equipment. The only special consideration was having equipment which would lift the cameras high enough to shoot over the top of the low wall behind the reporters, and over the heads of the reporters themselves. The two main cameras

—those that would shoot the full-face shots of the candidates—were equipped with identical lens complements of 135 mm, 10 inch, 12 inch, and 17 inches. The camera located high and in back of the candidates was fitted with a six to one zoom lens.<sup>52</sup> The remaining three cameras had what would be considered a normal complement of lenses for a regular studio program. The longer lenses were dictated by the size of the set and Slingland's desire to take close-ups without having to move the cameras too close. A 35 mm lens was included in one of the camera complements, and it was used only twice for the wide opening and closing shots of the program.

Originally Slingland had planned to use the six to one zoom lenses on the main cameras. During one of the early production conferences the candidates' representatives raised a question about the sharpness of the zoom lenses. NBC's John Rogers said he felt that zoom lenses are a little "softer" than standard lenses, and so standard lenses of fixed focal length, similar to the complements used in Chicago, were agreed upon for the candidates.<sup>53</sup>

The innovation of Hermanson's design and Slingland's planning was the two-shot reaction shot. Slingland had told Goodman that he planned to use this shot, but had not shown it to anyone. He said: "This was something that Hjalmar and I had talked about and not looked at, because if we had looked at it, there would have been great discussion on both sides."<sup>54</sup> He rehearsed during the afternoon without using the shot, but about 5:45 P.M., one hour and forty-five minutes before the program went on the air, Slingland called up the combination reaction shots and showed them to Wilson and Rogers. When they were satisfied as to equal size and angle, both advisers approved use of these new shots. Again, unlike Chicago, where Hewitt used tight shots from very near the beginning of the program, Slingland saw his own early shot pattern as a series of pictures always moving closer to the candidates; but he refrained from using the special combination reaction shot until fifteen to twenty minutes into the program in order to add variety as the program developed. However, the Kennedy representatives in the control room, Reinsch and Wilson, began to ask for Slingland's combination reaction shot shortly after the program went on the air. As Slingland puts it, "I did feel breathing on the back of my neck, I think it was Reinsch."<sup>55</sup>

The Kennedy forces' first demand for more reaction shots—which they felt benefited Kennedy more than Nixon—was relayed to Slingland by the producer, Goodman, and Slingland turned it down. He

said he was trying to let the content of the program motivate all his shots and didn't feel that the reaction shots were called for yet. But Reinsch and Wilson kept up their demands and their second request was granted.

The reaction shots led to another unusual action by Slingland. He kept a stop watch in his hand, and each time he took a reaction shot he timed its length on the air. He may have been under the impression, because of the discussion going on behind him, that the candidates' representatives were keeping track of the number and length of the shots. In the final analysis, Slingland's cutting point was dictated by the content, but he did take unusual care to provide "equal time." Otherwise, the timing on the program was controlled by Elmer Lower and Russ Tornabene from a post outside the studio, using the same cueing equipment as in Chicago.<sup>56</sup>

McGee, as moderator, explained the ground rules, introduced the news panel, and then provided transitions between questions and answers for the rest of the program. The order in which the reporters would ask questions had been agreed upon in advance. It was designed to provide for an equal number of questions for each candidate from each reporter, and to prevent any one reporter from questioning only one of the candidates. It was a simple 1, 2, 3, 4,—2, 3, 4, 1, etc., rotation, and McGee was in charge of seeing that it was carried out. There was no limitation on subject matter and the reporters gave no warning to the candidates in advance.

Again the responsibility and the desire to do the best possible job were felt by the technical people as well as by the NBC production staff. Six carefully chosen image orthicon tubes for the cameras were sent from New York, and the camera and tube combinations for all of the cameras at WRC-TV were tested until the best six were found. Care was also taken, while Slingland was matching his shots, to check the optical capabilities of the camera lenses, and in one instance a lens was changed. The eye level of each candidate was measured to within one-quarter of an inch and the cameras adjusted accordingly. The audio setup for the broadcast was carefully protected, with duplicate microphones for the candidates, and spare but "ready" microphones for the moderator and reporters in addition to those they used.

The program was fed to New York and from New York was fed to all radio and television networks. NBC used a special line to feed the program to New York, and backed this up with its regular round-robin lines.<sup>57</sup> With all the extra care, there was only one little hitch,

and although it came at a heart-stopping time, it had no effect on the air program.

Ten minutes before air time, a circuit breaker, overloaded because two extra cameras were being used, broke contact, as it should. This cut off the power to two of the camera monitors in the control room. NBC technicians found the breaker, reset it, and then ran another line into the control room to provide more power. The program went on the air with technician John Platt holding a plug into a socket until the new line was installed minutes later. Slingland was prepared to view the two monitors "around" Platt, and went on the air shouting, "Move over, Johnny, we're going to take that camera now!"<sup>58</sup>

The production efforts of NBC to achieve a "warmer and more comfortable" set were recognized by the public. Although they did nothing radically different, the lighting and make-up men were credited with "doing a better job." But there were still comments about Nixon's "stiffness," especially on the reaction shots. When answering he seldom looked at the people who asked him questions, and on the two-shot reaction shots—seen in this debate for the first time—he was often caught staring into the studio rather than looking at Kennedy.

A rising tide of comment also developed from the format. Arthur Krock commented: "The panel form prevents the debate from realizing the incisiveness that occurs only when candidates ask questions of each other. . . ."<sup>59</sup>

The argument over lighting and air conditioning during the pre-show checkout was widely reported in newspapers and magazines. However, its total effect on the production, the authors feel, was nil. The emphasis was shifting from the production aspects of the program to the content of the candidates' messages.

### *Second Debate: Program Analysis*

**OPENING:** On moderator Frank McGee in one-shot, including top of desk, at 00:30 pulls back to three-shot to include seated candidates at desk wings. Cut to long shot including backs of panel, rostrums, flags, and carafe tables, as McGee opening continuity continues. Cut to close-up of Nixon, then Kennedy, as they are introduced by name. Cut to McGee, who introduces panel as they are panned at table top level. Cut back to first newsman, Paul Nivin, for question to the Vice President.

**SHOTS:** *Candidates:* Shots start wide, including top of lectern, moving in to a mid-chest and then shoulder-level shot. In each sequence of question-answer-comment, shots are identical in size and angle.

*Newsmen:* Porthole in center of candidates' background permits head-on shots of the newsman. These are mostly a loose table-top shot, including name card of newsman.

*Reactions:* Both one-shot and two-shot reactions are taken. There are eight reactions of each, and in each case, the eight total exactly 1:42. There are five two-shots, and three one-shots in each case, the two-shots always with the speaker in the foreground. The first is of Nixon, a two-shot at 17:11. The first of Kennedy, also a two-shot, is taken at 18:24.

**CLOSING:** Cut from last speaker to a one-shot of McGee, which dissolves to a wide shot behind and above the panel. As this shot pulls back the lights on the panel area are turned off and the network identification graphics are superimposed across the lower portion of the screen.

**COMMENT:** Slingland's approach was systematic, with definite patterns in the shot sequences. He shot off the set, in the two-shot reactions, into a studio area which had been draped to cover this possibility. Later in the program he cut away from the newsmen to catch candidate reactions to the questions asked. Slingland's tightest shot was looser than Hewitt's. Audio was without flaw.

#### SEPARATE BUT EQUAL

##### Third Debate

Date: October 13, 1960, 7:30 EDST, ABC

Place: TV #1, ABC, New York (Kennedy); Studio A, Studio B, ABC, Los Angeles (Nixon and newsmen)

Producer: Donald Coe, ABC, New York

Directors: Marshall Diskin, Los Angeles, Controlling Director; Jack Sameth, New York

Designer: George Corrin, ABC, New York

Lighting: Everett Melosh, ABC, New York

Make-up: Rudy Horvatic, ABC, Los Angeles; Harry Burkhardt, ABC, New York

Timers: Donald Coe, Los Angeles, Controlling Timer; John Madigan, New York

Technical Supervisors: Robert Trashingner and Merle Woerster, ABC, New York

Production Manager: Fred Schumann, ABC, New York

Moderator: William Shadel, ABC

Panel: Roscoe Drummond, *New York Herald Tribune*; Frank McGee, NBC; Charles Von Fremd, CBS; Douglass Cater, *The Reporter*

Format: News panel unlimited to subject matter, no formal statements; 2½ minutes to answer, 1½ minutes to comment

Of all the debates, the third was truly the electronic debate. Because of different campaign schedules, an agreement was reached that television should bring the candidates together electronically. They could be on the same screen together even though they were three thousand miles apart—Nixon being in Los Angeles, Kennedy in New York. They merely had to go to ABC studios in each city, and with the aid of an elaborate technical exercise, they met, in ABC's terms, "Face to Face."<sup>60</sup>

Donald Coe, ABC director of special events and operations, drew the producing assignment shortly after Labor Day. Since they were responsible for the third debate ABC held some distinct advantages. There was an obvious disadvantage when they were also responsible for the fourth debate, only eight days later.<sup>61</sup> ABC profited greatly from observing the efforts of CBS and NBC; at least the jitters of the premier production had worn off and the smoothing out that took place during the second debate contributed to a calmer atmosphere. Coe was an observer at each of the two previous debates, and set design plans were started even before the second debate in Washington.

The studios for the third debate were at the ABC Production Center in New York for Senator Kennedy, and at the Los Angeles ABC West Coast Center for Vice President Nixon and the panel of reporters. In both locations the studio facilities are excellent. ABC's New York studio TV #1 is 75 by 90 feet, one of the largest and certainly one of the best equipped television studios in the United States. It has an extremely modern lighting system and a control room complete with separate facilities for audio and video control and production. In Los Angeles two studios were set up—one for Nixon and one for the panel of reporters. Control of the program was in Los Angeles because more of the production elements were there. Obviously ABC had to arrange for twice as much equipment, crews, and production and technical personnel; as we will see, the concept for the third debate was an exact duplication of facilities, even to the most minute detail.

Set designer George Corrin worked under a general directive to make the candidates as comfortable as possible. This followed a line of thought that permeated ABC planning: do everything possible to prevent development of the kind of controversies between the candi-

dates' representatives and the production personnel which were so apparent earlier. The set for the third debate was a combination of warm-toned gold fabric and wood grained panels for the background, a large L-shaped standing desk for a podium—easily the most massive and substantial rostrum yet provided—and a floor-to-ceiling built-in bookcase unit to the side of the candidate.<sup>62</sup> Identical sets were constructed at New York and Los Angeles. Kennedy's set was, in a sense, the right half of the picture, and he faced in toward the center from the right. Nixon's set was the left half of the picture, and he faced in toward the center from the left—in both cases this was a conscious effort to maintain an east-west relationship between the candidates, their actual geographic orientation.

Set construction itself was not complicated, but an incredible amount of effort was expended to be sure that each set, studio, light unit, camera, microphone, and transmission element of the broadcast was absolutely identical. ABC bought the cloth for the background from the same mill run in an amount large enough to cover both sets. All of the paint used for both sets was mixed in New York. After the New York set had been painted, Fred Schumann, Director of Production Services for ABC, carried the same can of paint, by plane, to Los Angeles and delivered it personally to the west coast set painters.<sup>63</sup> At Los Angeles, the 80 by 90 foot studio was equipped with lighting instruments manufactured by the Mole Richardson company. The east coast studio had Kliegl Brothers instruments. Adhering to the equality dictum, the lighting director ordered the Mole Richardson instruments removed and Kliegl instruments, identical with those used in New York, installed in their place. An even more sophisticated refinement concerned the lamps used in the lighting instruments. The west coast bulbs, regardless of their wattage, were rated at a slightly higher Kelvin temperature than the bulbs used on the east coast. The lighting director ordered the bulbs in the east coast instruments removed and replaced with the higher Kelvin temperature units.<sup>64</sup>

The New York ABC Executive Offices would ordinarily have served as headquarters for the candidates, but since they are located some distance from the studio, the network decided to build a cottage in the studio for Senator Kennedy's use as a dressing room. This cottage contained a sitting room and office-dressing room, telephones, and a lavatory. In Los Angeles, Mr. Nixon used an office suite. The facilities on the west coast were more complex, because the panel of newsmen was there. Located in another studio building with the moderator,

they were seated at a slightly curved desk-table, with a background of the same design and texture as that used behind the candidates. Facilities for handling the press corps which covered both ends of the debate were similar to those for the previous debates. Two hundred reporters were accommodated at New York, 160 in Los Angeles.<sup>65</sup> The air conditioning problem was easily solved this time. Nixon's representatives had his studio in Los Angeles cooled to between 58 and 60 degrees, a "refrigeration" that didn't bother Kennedy this time, because he wasn't there.

The real story of the third debate was in the technical problems involved in originating simultaneously from both coasts. While this procedure was not being done for the first time, the whole television industry was really on trial to prove the electronic face-to-face technique could be brought off without a hitch. ABC felt the pressure. They had worked with the AT&T long-lines experts far in advance on several highly technical but crucial problems.

The program was controlled from Los Angeles. The Kennedy half of the program was sent from New York to Los Angeles, mixed there with the Nixon half of the program, and the combined picture and sound of both candidates were sent back to New York, where they were fed to all networks. Electronic signals travel at a very rapid rate, but not so rapidly that this double transcontinental relay, complicated by the fact that half of the picture and sound traveled 3,000 miles further than the other, could have been made without a noticeable lag in sound. ABC employed "carrier signal" facilities to handle the problem. Without the special precautions taken, the Kennedy sound and picture might not have been synchronized. As it was Kennedy lagged 1/38th of a second behind Nixon—a time lapse so short that it was not noticeable to the untrained eye.<sup>66</sup>

A second problem was that all program participants had to be able to hear each other without wearing head-phones. Special circuits and loudspeakers were used, and great care was taken in adjusting the sound levels to avoid "feedback." Internal communication between the coasts was maintained by full period talk circuits, and every major production and technical position could talk to its counterpart on the opposite coast. Program audio and video lines, all duplicated, were under constant surveillance for the better part of three days to insure flawless performance.<sup>67</sup>

In all, twelve cameras were involved, three times as many as those used in Chicago, and twice as many as those in Washington. On the

west coast Director Marshall Diskin had six cameras, three each in two studios, and a spare camera in each studio patched into a stand-by control room. The east coast used four cameras, patched into two control rooms, one of which was a standby. All cameras and image orthicon tubes were carefully checked. Each candidate's sound was taken from duplicate microphones, and fed through a battery powered console as well as the regular audio control board. Even if power had failed, the sound portion of the program would have continued without interruption.

Everett Melosh worked out his light plot with Imerio Fiorentino, Nixon's lighting consultant, and Wilson, Kennedy's TV adviser. He set up a complete duplication of each lighting instrument to avoid bulb failure. Each studio lighting plan was identical, down to the number, type, and size of instruments. Melosh placed his key lights to the right of center, shining downward at a 30-degree angle and his general fill and set lights on each side of the set. Every important instrument was on a separate dimmer. Each candidate had a floor-stand spotlight for his eyes. Again the light level was at about 125 foot candles.

The only change from Melosh's lighting setup was made twenty minutes before the broadcast when the candidates' representatives asked for a change in the background levels. The Kennedy forces wanted a darker background in New York, and the Nixon people a lighter one in Los Angeles; so slight changes in the set lighting were made. On the air, there were differences in the background tones. Melosh operated the light setup by watching the transcontinental monitor circuit and ordering changes over his private phone line.<sup>68</sup>

All these preparations were aimed at one thing: preventing any element of the broadcast from being affected by the 3,000-mile separation. ABC wanted to be certain that it did not have the Monday-morning quarterbacking that CBS had had. Starting the night before the broadcast, and continuing throughout most of the debate day, Marshall Diskin in Hollywood and Jack Sameth in New York matched the size of the shots, camera by camera, lens by lens, until they were identical in size and angle. With painstaking care they also matched the "split-screen" shot, so that the halves of the picture were identical. And there was a visual debate that was never seen—the "Lincoln-Cherney debate." Actor Dan Lincoln was hired to stand in for Senator Kennedy in New York because he has the same physical characteristics and coloring as Kennedy, and in Los Angeles, actor Richard Cherney

took the role for Nixon for the same reasons. These two men stood in front of the cameras for hours at a time, talking and acting as if they were the real debaters.

The Diskin-Sameth plan for the actual direction of the program put Diskin in the driver's seat. He would put up a shot: for example, Nixon from the waist up. Sameth would then punch up on the preview circuit an identical shot of Kennedy. At the appropriate time Diskin would take his shot on the air. In this way, as shot followed shot, they were always in pairs.<sup>69</sup>

The hot question of reaction shots was raised again, but the technical conditions in this case saved Diskin many arguments. The reaction shots had to be one-shots because the candidates were not physically together. Diskin said the candidates' representatives talked to him about reaction shots during most of the day. Diskin said, "I tried to put them together the way I thought it would be most agreeable to both." But he took only one reaction shot of Kennedy late in the program. It was easier to shoot the newsmen this time; they were in the other studio with the moderator and it was a simple task to get head-on shots of them in the order previously decided.

In all, the checking, doubling up of equipment, and great care taken with the production and technical details paid off. For although the split-screen shot was used only once during the program, in a split second it brought the two candidates together and gave the American public one of the most memorable pictures of the campaign. Technically, the broadcast went off without any trouble.

There was little or no comment about the production after the third debate. Visually, Nixon came off the best thus far in the series, primarily, the authors feel, because only one reaction shot was used, and that was one of Kennedy. Whenever Nixon was on the air, he was speaking, which eliminated the one element of production with which he had had the most difficulty.

There was another internal uproar in this debate, which, while it had nothing to do with the production, did involve the whole area of the agreements between the candidates on the ground rules. Nixon and his group raised a public outcry over Kennedy's use of notes during the debate. Before the program went on the air, Kennedy took some papers out of his pocket and put them on his rostrum. The ABC director in New York, Jack Sameth, saw the papers, and asked his floor director to tell Kennedy to put them away because he thought they looked messy. The floor director spoke to Kennedy, who seemed to be confused, and so Sameth rescinded the order just before the program went

on the air.<sup>70</sup> Nixon may have seen Kennedy with his notes over the monitor circuit before the program started. And he may have noticed that Kennedy looked down to read a quotation during the program. Kennedy had three documents with him: a photostat of an Eisenhower letter concerning United States treaty agreements in the Taiwan Strait; a photostat of a page from a book by General Matthew Ridgway; and a quotation from former Secretary of State Dulles.<sup>71</sup> Nixon was under the impression that there was a rule against the use of notes. In his acceptance telegram of July 28 Nixon said, "In general, it is my position that joint television appearances of the presidential candidates should be conducted as full and free exchange of views without prepared texts or notes, and without interruption. . . ."<sup>72</sup> There is no indication that Senator Kennedy accepted or acknowledged this as a rule, and Kennedy's aides continued to deny that there was any such rule.

### *Third Debate: Program Analysis*

**OPENING:** On moderator Shadel at desk; cut to split-screen shot with candidates facing toward the center of the screen; shot includes top of lecterns. The words New York and Los Angeles are superimposed at the bottom of each frame. Cut to wide shot of panel, and to individual shots of newsmen. Shadel introduces first newsmen, McGee, who addresses question to Senator Kennedy in New York.

**SHOTS:** *Candidates:* Four different shots are used, always in pairs: lectern level, middle-button-of-coat, handkerchief-pocket, and tie knot. In each sequence shots are always followed by identical shots, and the shot sequences become tighter as the program develops.

*Newsmen:* Two different shots, one close-up, the other at desk level. All are head-on.

*Reactions:* One reaction shot of Kennedy is taken at 47:05, and it lasts 20 seconds.

**CLOSING:** Cut from last speaker, Nixon, to one-shot of Shadel at desk, who explains there is not enough time for another complete sequence of questions. Shadel fills from 56:40 to 59:00 with material describing equal facilities afforded the candidates in the separate cities; cut to cover shot of newsmen with superimposition of network credits.

**COMMENT:** Diskin's approach was extremely conservative, but it was necessitated somewhat by the technical complexities of coast-to-coast switching. The split-screen shot functioned perfectly, but it

was used only once and then not in the body of the debate. The L-shaped rostrum encouraged the candidates to lean on one elbow, which resulted in some shots in which their bodies were slightly angled. Audio was without flaw.

## THE FINAL ROUND

### Fourth Debate

Date: October 21, 1960, 10 p.m. EDST, ABC

Place: TV # 1, ABC, New York

Moderator: Quincy Howe, ABC

Panel: John Edwards, ABC; Walter Cronkite, CBS; Frank Singiser, MBS; John Chancellor, NBC

Format: Foreign policy, 8-minute opening statements, questions and answers, comment, closing statement

Note: Since ABC also produced the 3rd debate, the production personnel were virtually the same. Jack Sameth was a standby director.

The final round of the Great Debates moved into New York. The networks had drawn for the order of the first three debates on the basis that each would do one, and then they drew for the fourth to see who would do the odd one. ABC, which brought off the trying and difficult third broadcast, drew the assignment. Again ABC had as its main goal equal treatment for the candidates. The same studio which had housed Senator Kennedy on the eastern end of the third debate was set up for the fourth for both candidates.

The studio, as we have said, provided excellent production facilities, but now with two candidates, ABC cottage builders went back to work and constructed an identical dressing-room-cottage for Mr. Nixon. These were completely and uniformly furnished in every respect, but the floor plan was reversed so that the doorways to the cottages were as far apart as possible. After several plans, ranging from "vine-covered honeymoon" to "contemporary-simple," a modified colonial exterior was adopted. They were air-conditioned and each had two rooms, one of which included a lavatory but no toilet. A special rest-room for the candidates, just off the entryway to the studio, was constructed out of concrete block, and fixtures were installed in it. The cottages' exteriors were completely finished.

The set for the fourth debate was completely different from that used in the third. Designer George Corrin ordered a seamless, painted

background in a wood-grained finish. He also designed new rostrums, which were similar to the L-shaped units used in the third debate.

Marshall Diskin all along had wanted the candidates to be closer together in the set, because it would be more natural, and would make it easier for him to obtain the two-shot reaction shot. Diskin and Corrin worked together on the design of the fourth set in order to achieve this. The rostrums were placed near the outside edges of a smaller platform. They were six feet apart and thus became the closest speaking positions of the debates. The news panel was placed behind four separate desks, on the floor opposite the candidates, with a low wall behind them similar to the setup for the second debate. The panel, however, was much closer to the candidates. The distance between them was only about twelve feet. The moderator, Quincy Howe, was seated in the middle of the panel.

The lighting again was routine and similar to that of the third debate; by this time, the floor lights had become standard equipment. Monitors with clocks were provided for Nixon and Kennedy. The candidates used monitors on the third debate and now requested them. Each candidate could watch only his opponent; his own monitor was turned off when he spoke.

Diskin used seven cameras during the program, four on the candidates, two on the newsmen, and a spare.<sup>73</sup> The cameras were mounted variously on pedestals, Panoram dollies and a Houston crane. More shot variations were possible in this debate than in any of the others. Not only did Diskin have a set that gave him a great deal of flexibility, but he also had the candidates closer together, and the large number of cameras and mounts for variation. The candidates' cameras had standard lens complements; zoom lenses were used on the cameras which shot only the news panel. He used both one-shot and two-shot reaction shots, and by this time either the candidates' representatives had learned to live with them, or had given up the fight, because there is no evidence that anyone mentioned them during the time the show was on the air.

Relieved that the third debate was a success, ABC technicians set up the fourth debate giving the same attention to equipment used, duplicate channels and lines, and backstopping of the signal delivery to the telephone company.

Diskin used almost the same amount of rehearsal time for the fourth debate as he had for the third. He rehearsed with stand-ins for approximately eight hours, including some time on the day before the debate.

He worked with the news panel members in their places for an hour, and allotted twenty minutes for the candidates during the final pre-show check.

The attention to things small and large was universal. Because ABC realized that their building was old and not as attractive as some of the other debate sites, the order went out to clear and repaint the ramp area where the candidates would enter the studio. Special covers were made for equipment that could not be moved; part of the outside of the building was painted; coveralls and smocks were provided for the stage hands; and the crew members were instructed to wear suits. With a rambling facility such as ABC's Production Center, the security was a little more complicated than it had been elsewhere; so the measures started early. The morning of the day before the debate the buildings were carefully zoned off.<sup>74</sup>

After the program the public comment, and that of the political pundits and TV reviewers, was retrospective, and returned to the major theme that the format was still a limiting factor, and that the content was repetitive. One Washington columnist said: "The debates are probably over, and the Washington feeling is that it is none too soon. The candidates have been highly repetitive in their answers, and the feeling here is that it may not be in the national interest to get into strategic plans for dealing with Cuba, Quemoy and Matsu on a presentation of this kind. . . ." <sup>75</sup>

#### *Fourth Debate: Program Analysis*

**OPENING:** On a shot of moderator Quincy Howe from a side angle; cut to wide shot of candidates, full figure standing in the set; cut back to Howe, who introduces Nixon for opening statement. Panel introduced after Kennedy's opening statement in a series of two-shots, which pan to show each at table-top height.

**SHOTS: Candidates:** Shots are almost identical with those used in the third debate, and taken in a similar matched order within question sequences. Shots are tighter as the program progresses.

**Newsmen:** Zoom lenses permit a tightening of some shots as panel members ask questions. Shots are from slightly off center, particularly of the moderator, who is located in the center of the panel.

**Reaction:** Both two-shot and one-shot reactions. There are five shots of Kennedy for a total of 25 seconds, and four of Nixon for a total of 31 seconds. Kennedy has two two-shots and three one-shots, Nixon two of each. The two-shots are similar to those in Wash-

ington, with the speaker in the foreground, but the proximity of the candidates brings them to more nearly equal size on the screen.

CLOSING: From one-shot of the last speaker, Nixon, to two-shot of the candidates, full figure in the set; cut to Quincy Howe for closing wrap-up; cut to high overhead wide shot including set, panel, and candidates, for network identification superimposition.

COMMENT: Audio to Quincy Howe was cut as he cued Kennedy's response to a Nixon comment at 21:35, and the first word or two of Kennedy's answer was "up-cut." Direction again was straightforward, but candidates' mannerisms during the reaction shots were the most vigorous seen in any of the debates, and the candidates talked directly to each other numerous times. Just before the time for the closing statements Nixon was observed talking to Kennedy during a reaction shot, but since his microphone was closed, no sound was heard. Howe interrupted Nixon to announce it was time for the closing statements.

#### THE FIFTH DEBATE

The number of debates was settled early in the negotiations between the networks and the candidates. While it is apparent that the Democrats always wanted more debates than the Republicans, when it came to deciding whether there should be a fifth debate, the political considerations in the argument seem to have overwhelmed the two camps.<sup>76</sup>

The idea of a fifth debate was brought up publicly by Democratic Senators Pastore, Monroney, and Magnuson on October 8.<sup>77</sup> The trio had sponsored the legislation permitting temporary suspension of Section 315 of the Communications Act, which made the debates possible. Consequently, when they telegraphed the networks that they favored a fifth debate closer to election day, the Senators received immediate consideration. The networks implemented the idea immediately, and Senator Kennedy wired a blanket acceptance two days later, on October 11.<sup>78</sup> The Nixon reply the same day was not quite as all-inclusive, but he did accept the idea of more time. His proposal was to extend the fourth debate (which had not yet taken place) to two hours, with the second hour to be taken up with questions phoned in by the public.

The situation developed into a barrage of public statements in which the candidates accused each other of not wanting to go ahead with the

fifth debate idea. Kennedy, in all his public pronouncements about the fifth debate, kept hammering away at the idea that the fourth debate was too far from election day. And he flatly accused Nixon of being afraid to meet him again after October 21. Nixon's television representative, Fred Scribner, continued to request an extension of the fourth debate to two hours. He proposed that telephone calls with questions from the public be handled by a moderator, and that each candidate have three minutes to answer. This is essentially what Nixon himself did in a nationwide TV marathon answering session from Detroit the day before the election.

On October 19 Scribner called for "immediate meetings" in order to discuss the extension of the fourth debate to two hours, and Kennedy replied that he was agreeable to an extension, but that it was "in no way a substitute for another joint appearance in the final days of the campaign."<sup>79</sup>

On the day of the fourth debate Kennedy wired Nixon again, urging a fifth debate, and perhaps more. He challenged Nixon to announce his acceptance of a fifth debate on the program that night. His wire said "In fact I believe that more than five debates would be helpful if the record were to be corrected properly."<sup>80</sup>

Nixon seems to have been worried about his tactical position in all this. There is evidence that on the day of the fourth debate the Nixon camp had decided not to become involved in a fifth debate if they felt Nixon was ahead in the campaign at the end of the fourth.<sup>81</sup>

The Nixon strategists did, however, hold open the possibility of a fifth debate, if Nixon came off second best in the fourth.<sup>82</sup> Nixon also proposed turning over the fourth debate to the vice presidential candidates, and held out the possibility of a fifth debate if Kennedy agreed to this.<sup>83</sup> In a 1,000-word telegram on October 23, Nixon renewed the idea of putting the vice presidential candidates on for at least part of a fifth debate, and suggested that the whole time period be devoted to the question of Cuba, and what to do about Castro—an issue which had been touched on briefly during the fourth debate. Nixon's long wire devoted much more space to his views on Castro and Kennedy's point of view on the same subject than it did to arrangements for the fifth debate. Kennedy's reply, on the same day, was similar, since it was primarily an attack on Nixon's point of view, although it was shorter. But Kennedy rejected the idea of limiting the subject matter of the fifth debate to one item.<sup>84</sup>

By October 25 the idea of a fifth debate seems to have been given

serious consideration by both sides. Scribner and Reinsch met in Washington to discuss it once more, and the network committee—McAndrew, Mickelson, Daly, and Keating—met in New York to work out a format. They wired Scribner and Reinsch, suggesting a return to the original network proposal—one more try for a real “Oregon Debate.” The wire read: “We urge that you consider reverting to the original format; a face to face appearance without a panel, but with a moderator to preside and to provide for a fair division of time.”<sup>85</sup> The network representatives also suggested another modification of this plan—that the candidates present statements on subjects previously stipulated and that they reserve some time for direct questions. Reinsch and Scribner reached no decision on the 25th and met again on the 26th. On the 28th the network committee met again, and must have been convinced that there really would be a fifth debate. John Daly withdrew ABC from the production of the fifth debate, since ABC had already presented two, and CBS drew the assignment with the probability that it would originate in Washington on October 31.

The next twenty-four hours must have been the wildest in the entire debate series as far as the network committee was concerned. Mickelson’s personal memoranda on the debates include a complete record of the activities.<sup>86</sup> While the network committee was meeting in Mickelson’s office in New York, Reinsch and Scribner were meeting in Washington. Faulty communications resulted because all sides were firing off telegrams to each other, and releasing the texts of the telegrams to the press before they were received at the other end.

Scribner and Reinsch compromised on a format. First, they decided that the two vice presidential candidates, Lyndon Johnson and Henry Cabot Lodge, would each make a ten-minute statement at the beginning of the program. The presidential candidates would then work with a panel of newsmen as they had in the second and third debates, with the exception that the answers and comments would continue for five minutes. An additional two minutes would then be given the first speaker for “surrebuttal.” Since twelve and one-half minutes were necessary for each complete sequence, time for only three questions would remain after the vice presidential candidates finished. Reinsch was less in favor of using the vice presidential candidates than Scribner, but a call from Scribner later in the afternoon indicated that he and Reinsch had agreed they would appear on the program.<sup>87</sup>

Somewhere along the way, the Republicans suggested that cameras be set up in New York’s Central Park, so that the candidates could

answered questions from anyone who wandered by—a truly soap-box approach.<sup>88</sup> The networks pointed out that such a plan might attract a mob of 100,000 persons or more, and that it was impractical from the points of view of security, production, and engineering.

Reinsch and Scribner both asked that the network committee come down to Washington the following day, October 29, for a meeting to work out production details. Mickelson agreed that he and McAndrew would go to Washington for the meeting, and it was scheduled for 11 A.M. at the CBS Washington headquarters. Reinsch promised to call back to confirm the meeting, and it looked as if a fifth debate would materialize.

However, early in the afternoon of the 28th, Reinsch sent a wire under Kennedy's name which Scribner took as a personal affront. Scribner felt that the wording of the wire accused him of bad faith, and tried to make it look as though the Republicans were resisting the fifth debate. Furthermore, he pointed out later, Reinsch released the text of the wire close to the time he and Scribner were meeting to discuss the final details of the fifth debate.<sup>89</sup>

Reinsch did not call back, but sent word to Mickelson late that evening that some sort of hitch had developed.<sup>90</sup> Mickelson could not tell from Reinsch's message whether there would be a fifth debate; he and McAndrew went to Washington the following morning. Mickelson made contact with both camps. He found Scribner very upset about Reinsch's wire. Scribner read Mickelson the text of his reply to Reinsch, in which he said that until Kennedy apologized for charging bad faith and withdrew what Scribner believed was an ultimatum, there could be no more negotiations, and there it ended.

## CONCLUSIONS

Despite arguments over four debates or five, studio temperature, lighting and make-up, color of the background or design of a chair, the programs as seen by the millions came off in the way they had been planned. The competent network people did their jobs even though they were subjected to the most elaborate and often unnecessary pressures, some of which they brought upon themselves. According to standards of the industry, the debates were well produced public affairs programs. On the living room side of the TV set, the programs appeared as straightforward presentations of the candidates. The viewer saw little or nothing of the pressure-packed atmosphere

which surrounded and shaped the production elements of the programs. In the studios these influences and pressures at many times also shaped the decisions of everyone involved.

*Format:* From a production point of view the formats facilitated a simple air show. However, they sharply limited the length of time the candidates had to answer questions, and put a premium on the candidates' ability to appear to answer a question in a short period of time. The formats did achieve equality of exposure for the candidates. The candidates and their representatives dictated the formats to the networks. The networks, though they tried to have a different format, were more concerned with assuring that the broadcasts of the debates would take place.

*Staging:* The scenery and lighting introduced no innovations, because the networks obviously were trying to prevent the staging from distracting the viewer. The networks were right in this approach, and while there were many influences at work trying to modify and control the staging, no one suggested radical departure from the existing scenery and lighting.

*Directing:* The directing was the implementation of the format. It was simple in approach, and carried out with skillful restraint. While the directing was basically objective, the reaction shots were admittedly subjective. The reaction shots gave power to the director to reveal the candidates in a more candid way than the vast majority of the audience could otherwise have seen them.

*Technical:* The technical elements were subservient to the production. The great care taken was a symptom of the networks' concern that the debate programs should take place without any failure which could be attributed to them.

*Make-up:* If the candidates chose to use make-up, they should have used professional help. Even so, the do-it-yourself make-up applied to Vice President Nixon in the first debate did not affect his appearance as much as his physical condition did.

*Candidates' representatives:* The traditional broadcast industry relationship between the "product representative" and the program producer was maintained. Nixon and Kennedy were the products to be sold. Scribner, Reinsch, Wilson, and Rogers were the "account executives" who constantly scrutinized the production elements and attempted to influence them in a manner that would favor their man. The basic policy agreements between the candidates and the networks permitted this partisan activity.

In the usual sense of the word the networks did not *produce* the programs—they had no choice concerning the talent, and did not choose the time, place, date, or script (format). They provided the very best facilities and personnel for the programs, and while they accommodated both sides, they were scrupulously fair. The networks came out second best on the formats for the programs, but this, to them, was not as important as having the programs on the air.

It is to the everlasting credit of the television networks that the debate programs were presented in the 1960 campaign, but the evidence is overwhelming that they relinquished essential control of the programs to do so. In only a few instances did the networks assert their independence of action.

If this investigation can be used as a guide for future debates, it is clear that one of the major decisions which must be made concerns the division of responsibility between the networks and the political parties. The one thing that both have in common is a duty to the voters. If the content and form of the programs are to be dictated by such external considerations as the industry's strategic position vis-à-vis government regulation, or the candidates' views of how best to present themselves, then ultimately the public is the loser. If, on the other hand, they use the experience gained to develop equitable ground rules formulated with the intent of informing the public in the best possible manner, then many of the production and policy difficulties will disappear. Certainly our sympathies are with the networks in their endeavor to have the debates on the air, and with the candidates for their courage in participating, but many of the pressures inherent in such a new venture must be removed so that the content is shaped only by concern for the best interests of the public.

## NOTES

1. The authors shared equally in both the research and the writing of this study, which was supported by a grant from the Indiana University Faculty Research Division. Much of the material was obtained through personal interviews, recorded in New York, Washington, and Chicago between March 1 and May 1, 1961. The authors wish to recognize the help of the corporate vice presidents of the three TV networks, the candidates' representatives, Leonard

Reinsch and Fred C. Scribner, and many of the program principals, who threw open their personal files and helped with the record in a most candid and understanding way.

2. For a full account of the differences between the 1960 arrangements and those for the Lincoln-Douglas debates of 1858 see *New York Times*, Sept. 26, 1960, p. 25.

3. See articles by Becker and Lower, Sarnoff, and Stanton, above.

4. The offer by NBC for eight weekly hour-long broadcasts of "Meet the Press" was made by NBC president Robert Sarnoff on April 21, 1960 in a speech before the Academy of Television Arts and Sciences in New York. The offer by CBS of eight hours of prime evening time between Labor Day and Election was made by Dr. Frank Stanton in testimony before the Subcommittee on Communications of the Senate Interstate and Foreign Commerce Committee on May 17, 1960. He proposed a variety of program types. ABC president Oliver Treyz, in testimony before the same committee, proposed that each network set aside eight hours of its regular programming, picking the most-listened-to time periods, and pre-empting the regular programs for special programs by the candidates. Sarnoff used the term "The Great Debates" in a wire to House Speaker Sam Rayburn in urging House passage of the Senate resolution.

5. Kennedy's advisers told the authors they felt it was very important to be the first to accept, and thus "challenge" Nixon to the debates. The decision was quickly reached during a luncheon at Hyannisport, Mass., July 28.

6. Not all of these people attended every meeting; the composition of the meetings varied depending on what was to be discussed and other considerations such as travel schedules.

7. Leonard Reinsch told the authors that the most difficult part of the negotiations was arranging schedules.

8. McAndrew told the authors that both sides had been working on formats between the August 9 and August 31 meetings, and that he felt the candidates had virtually agreed on what they wanted before the August 31 meeting.

9. Text of the telegram from Nixon to the networks is in the networks' files; the ellipsis indicated is that of the authors.

10. Interview with McAndrew, New York, Apr. 6, 1961, also "Ground Rules," memo adopted at August 31 meeting.

11. For a fuller explanation, see "The Oregon Plan of Debating," *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, XII (April 1926), pp. 176-80.

12. McAndrew, Mickelson files. Stanton testimony before the Senate Interstate and Foreign Commerce Committee, Jan. 31, 1961, and interview with Reinsch, Washington, Apr. 4, 1961.

13. Letter from Fred C. Scribner, Apr. 9, 1961.

14. Interview with Reinsch.

15. Text of wire from Sarnoff to Representative Harris.

16. Interviews with Lou Dorfsman, CBS Creative Director for Advertising and Sales Promotion, and Don Hewitt, CBS Producer-Director, Apr. 5, 1961.

17. See note 16.

18. CBS floor plan provided by Dorfsman; interview with Bob Link, WBBM-TV Production Manager, Mar. 10, 1961.

19. WBBM-TV production services records.
20. There was considerable disagreement among the principals involved in these developments as to sequence of events. However, it must be said that much of this can be attributed to their reluctance to place this responsibility on the highest executive level. Dr. Stanton closely supervised the entire operation.
21. Interview with Rogers, Apr. 6, 1961.
22. Interview with Barry, Apr. 5, 1961.
23. Interviews with Barry and Miss Arvold, Apr. 5, 1961.
24. Interview with Leonard Reinsch, Washington, Apr. 4, 1961.
25. Interview with Hewitt.
26. See note 25.
27. Interview, Al Pierce, WBBM-TV technical supervisor, Chicago, Mar. 10, 1961.
28. Interview with Hewitt.
29. Interview with Rogers.
30. Interview with Wilson, Apr. 7, 1961.
31. Sig Mickelson, personal files memorandum, Sept. 15, 1961.
32. Interview with Virgil Mitchell, WBBM-TV Press Information, Chicago, Mar. 10, 1961.
33. Interviews with Hewitt and Link.
34. Interview with Pierce.
35. *Chicago Daily News*, Sept. 29, p. 1, Sept. 30, p. 4.
36. Interview with Rogers.
37. Interview with William McAndrew, NBC, New York, Apr. 6, 1961.
38. Interview with Frank Slingland, NBC, Washington, Apr. 3, 1961.
39. See note 38. Also interview with Julian Goodman and Hjalmar Hermanson, NBC, New York, Apr. 6, 1961.
40. Interview with McAndrew.
41. Interview with Hermanson.
42. Interview with Slingland.
43. McAndrew's hand-written notes of meetings between the network committee and the candidates' representatives, read to the authors, Apr. 6, 1961.
44. Interview with Slingland. Also interview with Elmer Lower, NBC, Washington, Apr. 3, 1961.
45. Interviews with Slingland and Hermanson.
46. Interview, Leon Chromak, NBC, Washington, Apr. 3, 1961.
47. See note 46.
48. *Life* magazine, Oct. 17, 1960.
49. Interview with Chromak.
50. Wilson said he had suggested to Salinger that some political hay might have been made out of the fact that Nixon had more television advisers than Kennedy. Wilson feels Salinger communicated this to the Senator, who chose the Washington occasion to bring the matter out into the open.
51. *Life* magazine, Oct. 17, 1960.
52. Hermanson's personal sketches, NBC set floor plan, shown to the authors.
53. Interview with Slingland.

54. See note 53.
55. See note 53.
56. Interview with Russ Tornabene, NBC, Washington, Apr. 3, 1961.
57. Interview with William H. Trevarthen, Vice President of Technical Operations, NBC, New York, Apr. 6, 1961.
58. Interview with Slingland. Also interview with Keith Price, technical director, NBC, Washington.
59. *New York Times*, Oct. 9, 1960, p. E-11.
60. ABC in all of its inter-office communications, press releases, and other public references to the third and fourth programs referred to them as "face-to-face" or "joint appearance," avoiding the term "debate."
61. Interview with Donald Coe, ABC, New York, Apr. 7, 1961.
62. Interview with George Corrin, New York, Apr. 7, 1961.
63. Interview with Fred Schumann, ABC, New York, Apr. 7, 1961.
64. See note 63. Kelvin refers to the color temperature—degree of "whiteness"—of a light source.
65. Letter from Ell Henry, Director, TV Network Press Information, ABC, Los Angeles, Apr. 21, 1961.
66. Interviews with Merle Woerster, ABC, New York, Apr. 7, 1961.
67. Interview with Ralph Drucker, Technical Director, ABC, New York, Apr. 7, 1961.
68. Interview with Everett Melosh, ABC, New York, Apr. 7, 1961.
69. Interviews with Marshall Diskin and Jack Sameth, ABC, New York, Apr. 7, 1961.
70. Interview with Sameth.
71. AP dispatch, date line New York, Oct. 13, 1960.
72. Text of Nixon wire to Robert Sarnoff, NBC president, July 28, 1960.
73. In this production, Sameth manned a spare control room as the ultimate precautionary measure.
74. Records provided by Michael Foster, Vice President, Press Information, ABC, New York, Apr. 7, 1961.
75. James Reston, *New York Times*, Oct. 22, 1960, p. 9.
76. In his letter to the authors dated June 9, 1961, Scribner stated that he felt strongly that the series was to consist of only four debates and that it was a violation of the rules for either side to challenge the other to a fifth debate.
77. AP dispatch, date line New York, Oct. 11, contains the sense of the wire to the networks.
78. Text of telegram in Mickelson's personal files.
79. Exchange of wires between Kennedy and Scribner, Oct. 19, 1960.
80. Text of Kennedy wire to Nixon, Oct. 21, 1960, CBS files.
81. Mickelson files.
82. See note 81.
83. See note 81.
84. CBS files. Texts of exchange of telegrams between Nixon and Kennedy, Oct. 23, 1960.
85. Text of wire to Scribner and Reinsch from McAndrew, etc., Oct. 25, 1960, CBS files.

86. Mickelson memorandum dated October 31, 1960.
87. See note 86.
88. McAndrew hand-written notes read to authors, Apr. 6, 1961.
89. Text of telegrams exchanged between Scribner and Reinsch, Oct. 29, 1960, CBS files.
90. See note 86.