

MEMORANDUM

9 September 1968

TO: Bill Connell
FROM: Rufus Phillips

Rufus

SUBJECT: Afterthoughts on Our Conversation

1. After my talk with you and Ted, I have some reflections to offer. They are given in the knowledge that you cannot be the Renaissance Man of the campaign and do everything, including write the Vice President's speeches.
2. Because your political instincts are sounder, in my opinion, than most I hope you will somehow be able, in the welter of campaign detail, to keep an eye on what the Vice President is saying. My impression is that the American public has had a belly-full of platitudes, glibness and sophistry from its politicians across the spectrum, and what it is looking for is sincerity and heartfelt conviction, on whatever issue.
3. I think the campaign, if it goes well for the Vice President, will become essentially a personality contest in which he will win if his personality does not become blurred by an apparent lack of conviction and consistency on basic issues. The independent, swing vote will go for "the best man", the man they feel they can trust. What HHH says becomes important then, not in itself so much as in its relationship to his personality and his basic convictions. Is what he is saying consistent with what he has said he believed in the past? If not, then he ought not to say it, even if by saying it he can score some temporary debating points over Nixon.
4. I think frankly that if the Vice President tries to win votes by attacking Nixon's record on Viet-Nam he is bound to come out the loser. Nixon is not really vulnerable on this issue. You have to face up to the fact that it was the present Administration who put 500,000 troops into Vietnam, not Nixon, no matter what Nixon might have proposed 14 years ago. The average voter doesn't give a damn what happened 14 years ago, except maybe to remember that there

were eight years of peace under the Republicans. Ted Van Dyke read me some Nixon Viet-Nam statements he had compiled for use against Nixon. Frankly, I recommend against using these statements (although I see the one about putting in troops in 1954 has already been used) because I don't think this kind of one-upmanship enhances the image that the Vice President is trying to project, and it makes him vulnerable to having some of his own more recent, optimistic statements quoted back at him.

5. Viet-Nam is not just another issue like Medicare. If the campaign debate, instead of illuminating the Viet-Nam issue for the voters, turns them off even more, thereby further cutting into public support for the effort needed to achieve a lasting peace there, what will have been achieved? Whoever wins will have to pay the piper by having to try to achieve peace in Viet-Nam as President with even less public support than President Johnson. I'm sure that this is not what the Vice President wants, but it could happen if the wrong tone gets set about Viet-Nam. Maybe, as you say, there won't be much of a debate on Viet-Nam. But if it starts, I hope the Vice President can set a positive, non-defensive and non-recriminatory tone in what he has to say.