

**George Tames**  
**Washington Photographer for the *New York Times***

**Interview #4:**  
**Competing with Television**  
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**TAMES:** The role of photographer, and photography in general, has been influenced by new techniques. There have been drastic changes in photography that have been almost unbelievable. Right now, the AP is experimenting with and has a very advanced transmitter that takes your negative and transmits it over the telephone lines to a computer in the AP bureau, which then goes on digital, on a tape. Then they can project that on a screen, and they can actually pick up, out of a 35mm, one tenth of a 35mm negative and make it an 8 x 10 print that looks as good, grain less, as a regular 8 x 10s shot today using full 35s. This technique is going to revolutionize photography, because pictures are going to be stored in computers, and they are going to be conjured up as needed, flashed on the screen, captioned there on the machine, push a button and they go straight to be printed. So there won't be any files. The photographer who shoots has then got to be very careful that the images that he has are not lost, in the sense that he doesn't have any permanent file. But he will have a memory bank, so to speak, and he can conjure up pictures years from now out of the machine, and make prints right off of it. That's going to be a big revolution in photography.

**RITCHIE:** The Library of Congress is preserving photographs now on video-discs.

**TAMES:** That's exactly the system that I'm talking about. And as fast as they do it, somebody comes along with a better system. I think that's going to be the way of the future. They'll only be having pictures on the walls when people deliberately ask for them. News photography is going to change dramatically.

**RITCHIE:** Speaking of changes in technology, I wanted to ask you about the impact of television on your trade. Did having TV cameras around make life more difficult for you?

**TAMES:** Very much so. It was a shock for me to discover all of a sudden that showing up at an event, be it political or social or an event of national importance, like a convention or a signing of a treaty, something involving national importance, where the *New York Times* usually was front and center, because we were the paper of record and the prestigious paper, and I had no trouble getting the positions that I wanted. And one day I showed up at a session and saw a TV camera and a man operating it in a roped off area. So I just ducked under there to get into the roped off area--and was ordered out by the officials, who were State Department, I believe. They told me this was a TV stand. I said, "Well, what about us?" "Oh, well, TV reaches more people and this is an event for the majority of the people." So they had decided to let TV have front and center and we just had to go up where

would could. That was the first time that I had felt the full impact of TV, although I could see it coming. There was no question about it.

At the time, everybody was shooting for the six or seven o'clock afternoon news. Today with [Ted] Turner's cable TV, when we have five waves of photographers going into the president's office to greet a dignitary, or to photograph a dignitary like Brezhnev with the president, after the first wave goes in, and when they come up each other wave has forty-five seconds in the room. By the time the last wave has gone through and has come out, they walk into the press room and it's already on CNN [Cable News Network] coming over the TV. The first wave just went to the wall and slapped a disc in without even any voice-over. Just zip, there it goes. The event only took place three minutes ago and it's already on TV. Instantaneous, you don't even have to wait for the afternoon news any more. Of course it made a tremendous difference.

Politicians are playing for it, and what's even more important, the discs and the satellites, which means that every TV station in the country--every TV station in the world--has the potential of receiving a signal for them alone from any part of the world. So whereas a Congressman or a senator who wants to talk to his constituency on any subject used to have to wait two or three days after he taped something or filmed something in Washington in the studios and then mailed it, or air expressed it to the local stations; now all they do is phone them and say, "Look, this is what I've got and it's coming at two o'clock, bouncing off the satellite." So they just tune into it and pick it up. So it's almost instantaneous. I don't object to that. I think that an informed citizenry is the only way that democracy can work. But I sometimes wonder whether we're getting too much of a one-sidedness of the issue. Naturally, if I was a member of the Senate I would give my view, and naturally my view is the correct one. Everybody thinks their view is the correct one. I've never known anyone who didn't think their view was the correct one. I've known generals who outnumbered their opponents ten to one and they still wanted more troops; they never have enough. The truth of course is how we perceive it.

Look at the Israelis and the Palestinians. In a way it's ironic that the Israelis can raid in Algeria and kill a Palestinian, who's the second in command of the Palestinian forces and say that it's part of an act of war and not terrorism. Yet the same Palestinians fly into Israel and kill five or six soldiers and it's terrorism. It's a different viewpoint. One man's terrorism is another man's heroism. One man's subsidy is another man's give-away. It depends on which side of the fence you're on, and it's amazing how values and viewpoints change. I have a friend who has had a very bad streak of luck. His hospital bills have run him down. He's always been a rock-ribbed Republican, able to take care of himself, and gung-ho for independence and free-enterprise. Then he ran into this bad streak of luck healthwise. He had to declare bankruptcy, he went through his whole fortune. He wasn't old enough to qualify for Medicare. Here's a man who's always been against the socialistic programs of the Democratic party now advocating national health insurance! So your viewpoints change. Isn't that amazing.

**RITCHIE:** Tell me, when television really began to make its impact, did you feel any pressure from

your newspaper to respond? Did they want more pictures, or different views? How did they approach the competition with television?

**TAMES:** Well, you were competing not only with your editor but you were competing with TV, because he sat up there on his fat butt watching it, and he was getting the whole thing from different camera angles, and you were in one spot, and you were just shooting singles of what you see. Previous to TV, the only way he had to judge how you did was what the wire photos sent him. So he'd have three wire service photos and your picture. Then he could say, "Well, Tames did a better job. He got a better angle." Now, with TV, we're really hustling. We're trying to get into situations where TV hasn't been. We're trying to get behind the scenes and trying to anticipate one day in advance of what the situation is going to be, what the report is going to be, who the senators are that are involved in an upcoming report.

Senator Baker, at the ceremony for me last month, when I was the [American Legion's] Man of the Year, spoke about our relationship, and friendship we had over the years in the Senate. He said I'd come into his office, and he'd say to me, "What am I suppose to do?" And I'd say, "Well, aren't you meeting with X, Y and Z, on X, Y and Z subject?" "George," he'd say, "I haven't even thought about that yet." I'd say, "Well, you'd better start thinking about it, because it's coming up." I'd say, "Are you going to see so and so?" He'd say, "Not today, but maybe tomorrow." So I would come back the following day and try to get something in anticipation of what was going to happen. Then TV would pick up on that. They'd walk into offices and say, "Look, you gave this to Tames, you didn't give it to us. We're catching hell from our office in New York." And when those men are making a hundred and fifty thousand dollars a year, they're supposed to produce. So then all of a sudden I found that some of the senators and members of the House, and the Speaker particularly, would say, "George, we can't let you in. If we have to let TV in, then we might as well not let anybody come in." So we all lost. That made me feel unhappy. I felt that not only I wasn't doing my job, but some of the flavor of politics was being lost.

I used to say that "this is historic, and you should let me do it." It's just like the day that President Kennedy was assassinated. I immediately grabbed my camera and rushed into the press gallery and leaned over the gallery and started taking pictures of the senators on the floor, milling around, and pointing, and shouting. It was turmoil on the floor, and unlike today it wasn't recorded on TV. The Capitol Police grabbed me and confiscated my film, which by the way I don't know what they ever did with it. We've never been able to find out what happened to that film. I tried to impress upon them that it was historic, that at least give it to some one who could keep it, rather than throw it down the toilet. But I don't know what happened to it. It would have been the only pictures of the reaction in the Senate. I did make a picture of Mike Mansfield. I was with Mike Mansfield when the story came through. I was in his office, and we had heard that the president had been shot, and was seriously injured, and was in the hospital. Since I knew Mike Mansfield for many, many years, and we're old friends, I went down to his office and we just sort of sat there and drank coffee and just started talking

about how we were going to operate with the president recovering and with Johnson taking over, and how the Senate was going to operate. We were discussing various methods, and he was telling me the feelings he had, and then the phone rang. It was Lyndon Johnson on Air Force One, telling Mike Mansfield that the president had died and that he, Lyndon Johnson, had just taken the oath of office, and asked for Mike Mansfield's help. Mike said yes, you can count on me, and put the phone down. And then Mike just almost broke down, and I have a picture of him. I picked up my camera and made a shot of Mike in that mood.

I'm wandering--because you know how my mind works--but TV has made a tremendous impact, so much so that I'm afraid that more and more it is becoming the news itself, rather than the subject. Because the human element comes in here, where the individual who is a correspondent for TV has got to come up with something. Literally, that's what they are doing: conjuring up confrontations. I saw them baiting [Michael] Dukakis the other day on this Persian Gulf situation. They had just announced that we were attacking the Iranians and had hit one of their ships, and they were firing some missiles at us. That was all that was released. Next thing you know they were poking the camera lens into Dukakis' face and saying, "What do you think of it?" I mean, he just heard about it! If he had been stupid and made some comment, they would have blown it all out of proportion. Then they started badgering the guy, because he wouldn't comment! He said, "I can't comment, I only know what you know. This is an ongoing situation, wait until we get all the facts in. Then we can come to some judgment on it." I guess they wanted him to say, "If I had been president, I would not." He's *not* president.

We have this confrontation-type of journalism that I call "red meat journalism." We've raised a whole generation of correspondents on it since Watergate. They saw how members of the media made their names, not through writing books, or writing thoughtful articles, but simply by exposing so-called corruption. They all want a big piece of this corruption, and there's not that much corruption out there. So they try to conjure it, or try to make something out of the littlest things. We used to think a reporter who was writing a story today for tomorrow's paper, was writing too soon and too fast after the event, and didn't have time to think. But here today, with television reaching so many millions and able to influence people so greatly, we are moving even faster. But I can't think of a good answer. If someone had a better way of doing it, I wish they'd come up with it.

**RITCHIE:** You said that because of television you were shut out of certain areas. Do you think that held back on the informality of pictures, the backdoor meetings, people at ease, and the rest of that?

**TAMES:** Oh, yes.

**RITCHIE:** And is television perhaps a moral formal recording of events?

**TAMES:** Well, when I used to go in on a one-on-one basis, or one-on-five with five senators in there really discussing very important events, I was able to slip around and make my shots and be almost

invisible, with a silent click of the camera. The most important thing was that I had the complete confidence of the members, who knew that if I heard anything I wouldn't say anything. And a photographer's ears usually are closed when you're working, because you're concentrating on a picture and what is happening. It's only after you leave the room or you leave the situation that all of a sudden your subconscious has picked up conversations and words, and you sit there and you wonder, "my God, that was pretty important."

I think I can say--and I'm very proud of my record--I have been privy to a lot of information that could have been very, very detrimental, and also beneficial to our country, and I have never once opened my mouth. And for a guy who loves to talk, let me tell you that is something! I tell you I was right on the verge many times of saying something, but then I'd back off. I don't believe you will find *any* member of Congress who will say that George Tames leaked, or that George Tames heard something that he shouldn't have heard. Now, I have heard things, and I have typed them, and I have gone back to the individual members with the typed story and said, "Look, this is what I heard. I think this is good for you and good for the country." I did that with Eisenhower. And I've had them say no, and I've had them say yes. That's the way I work.

Now, with TV, it's impossible, because it's not only that they want the image, but they want the sound. They're picking up every word, and you can't say anything. It's almost reached the point of the old movie when individual senators and the president would actually carry on a very serious conversation when we were in the room, stills and newsreels, only to discover much later that there were people watching the newsreels who could read lips, and were actually picking up the conversation of the president and others. So they had to stop. It became a favorite trick by politicians like Senator [Arthur] Vandenberg, particularly--because I remember he started it--where the newsreels would ask him to talk to his visitor, and he'd say okay, and he'd go, "Walla, walla, wallawallawalla. Walla, wallawallawalla. Walla? Wah, wah wah." And that's all he'd say. The guest, unless he was in on it, didn't know what the hell was happening. Or if he was he would either laugh, or carry on in the same vein. It was just simply to keep the theater goers from reading lips.

Now the president can't even sneeze or an open mike will pick up any word. This particular president has almost a compulsion to be funny, to have his one-liners, and he has some good one-liners, and he is funny, but it's almost a compulsion to be continuously funny. He'll make cracks which are meant for just the inner-circle, that are not meant to go out on the air, and he'll get caught. It's the same way that Lyndon Johnson had a compulsion to tell scatological, Texas cowboy, bunkhouse jokes, which are great in the bunkhouse, and great bonding for cowboys, but by far and large are chauvinistic, degrading to women and minorities. You don't say these damn things out, except within the circle. I'm sure that the blacks and the Chinese and all the other ethnics have jokes they tell about us. In fact, I've told jokes to Mexicans, and they say, "Oh, no, we tell the same joke, but about Texans." You understand what I'm trying to say?

**RITCHIE:** One other thing I wanted to ask you about--especially about the TV cameras--in the Capitol it's common to see the press and photographers bunched together, say outside the Foreign Relations Committee room. Everybody's got the cameras set up, they've got the TV cameras and the still cameras, and they're all hovering around waiting for someone to come out. While looking through your pictures, I don't get a sense that you spent a lot of time in crowds like that.

**TAMES:** No, not in stakeouts.

**RITCHIE:** What was your reaction to that sort of situation? And why do photographers spend so much time on those stakeouts?

**TAMES:** One, TV has got to do it so they can get their talking heads. Still photographers do it because they're lazy. This is the easy thing to do. You show up, it's there, you shoot it. Nobody's going to complain that you didn't get anything good, or you didn't get anything different, as long as nobody else did. Let me tell you, a lot of photographers breathed a sigh of relief when I was no longer up there. Because their offices are not constantly hounding them saying, "Look what Tames got yesterday. Why didn't you have that?" Then off course, they reached the point where they used to say, "Oh, that's just a *New York Times* picture, no other paper in the country would want that, except the *New York Times*." So it's a *New York Times*-type of picture. Now you can justify not working. But basically I think that's the thing. They're going to get their salary, they've got something usable. They got the same thing that TV got, so they'll go with it.

I always want to go around the back. I always want to go in advance. I always want to make my pictures when the witnesses shows up, just as he sat down, just as he talked, do a few little things there, and then get out. Another picture of him gesturing and talking is just not worth it. Try to get him with the chairman in advance, try to get all these things done way in advance, that's the only way, anyway that I'm aware of, of doing the job. And of course, unless you're completely immersed in the news, and right up to date with events that are moving so fast, you lose your touch. It's taken me two and a half years but all of a sudden--although I still read the newspapers--I'm starting to lose the feeling that I've *got* to be somewhere, or that I'm missing out. I still get the feeling that I'm missing out. I'd love to be at the primaries, or following this guy or that guy, but then think of what a mob scene that's going to be, what a push and a shove it's going to be! I'm not six-foot-six, I'm five-foot-seven. I can't see over these monsters that are TV cameramen today, and they just block everything. Photography is a young man's game, I'll be seventy. Although I think of myself as being in excellent physical condition, I hope to God I know my limitations. I'd like to sit back and do what I want. I'll be shooting some stuff tomorrow, give my lectures.

I've never had any secrets as far as my business is concerned. If I found out a new angle, a new gimmick on a camera or a lens, I was one of the first ones that broadcast it. "Look," I'd say, "this is what you can do." "You don't have to do it this way, you can do this." And by and large I find the

majority of the good photographers are that way, because this business, like most business, still pays off on brains and imagination. It's flattering to have someone follow behind you and imitate you. There are very few, and you don't have to worry about them getting ahead of you, because they're always following you.

Today I lectured to the Smithsonian Institution Associates, there were about fifty of them I guess who came from all over the country for a one week seminar here. It's part of the Smithsonian Associates program. I found it pretty stimulating, as I usually do. One of the photographers was showing me some of his work, and he told me that he thought it was as good as mine. I agreed with him, it was "as good as," it wasn't better. I said, "Son, are you familiar with the Caine Mutiny?" He said, "Yes." I said, "What was the trigger word that made the captain go nuts, when he was finally exposed as being a psycho?" He said, "Strawberries." I said, "The words that trigger me are: as good as." When I hear that word, bam. I had a person call me on the phone and tell me: "Mr. Tames, I was walking by and I saw some of your guttering needed work. We're a small firm, but we're as good as the big firms." I said, "Whoops, right there, don't go any further. You ain't got the job." [Laughs] If there's anything that I've ever heard in my life that really sets me off it's I'm "as good as" you as a mechanic, or as a writer, or as a runner, or as a photographer, or any other profession. If you are as good as I am, just keep your mouth shut. If you're better than I am, you let me know, and you show me, and I'll be the first one to pat you on the back.

I *still* do not fear any of these guys out there. And they should be making me feel old and out of it, but they're not. Now, this new technique, with the disc cameras, I'll have to get into that. There's a complete new era we're getting into, and the young guys using this medium might come up with something. It will sure make news photography a lot easier, but then you become mechanical, you become a technician. You're just simply recording instead of interpreting. You've got to get the feel of it. You just can't go sit on a stakeout and make another head shot of [Barry] Goldwater today or Tip O'Neill tomorrow, and get by. Then when they say, why didn't you give us something different, you say, "Oh, they won't let me in." That's the easy way. You have to convince somebody that what you're doing is not only important, you have to play on their ego.

When I say I'm from the *Times*, those are pretty powerful words. I never make any bones about the fact that I'm a member of the *New York Times* company. I'd be lying if I said it didn't make any difference. It does make a difference.

**RITCHIE:** You mentioned before about not being six-foot-six. But we looked at two of your pictures, one of the looking at Joe McCarthy through the door of a very crowded hearing room during the Army-McCarthy hearings, where you were obviously standing up on the railing, or someplace high to get the perspective, and the same thing was true looking over the railing down into the Rotunda during Eisenhower's funeral. I gather that a good photographer has to be agile, and couldn't be afraid of heights.

**TAMES:** Oh, yes. I've had photographers go up with me to the Capitol dome and hug the wall, literally hug the wall, and not walk over to the rail and look down much less get up on top of the railing like I did and lean over, you know, to get that angle. Oh, I think about some of the things I did! I could have fallen down and I would have joined Eisenhower--parts of me would have, anyway. But you don't think of the danger, you just do it, and then later you might shake a little bit thinking about what you've done. But not in the excitement of the moment. You have to have good balance, and know what you're doing. I always try to show something that showed the whole thing, the feeling of a hearing, the feeling of an event, in sort of an abstract way. You can record any event, but at the same time, it's an artistic view of what is happening. It can be used again and again, like some of my stuff has.

I'm still very flattered when somebody asks for something. When I was at Western Kentucky, I took about four of these posters I have [of an exhibit of Tames' photographs], made for me by the *Times*, and I said, "I have these four posters," and my God the hands went up before I could even say I'd give them away if they wanted them. Then I said, "If you really want them, you can write down your names and I'll ship them to you." Well, I had twenty-seven names! My wife and I packed up twenty-seven posters, which I signed individually, and I shipped them out. It cost me forty-four dollars. But I'm flattered that somebody would even want my work. People say, like you and others, that you're doing great work, this is historic--I do have a sense of history, no question about that, because I don't think you can go to any other photographer's house in Washington and see what we've got here.

**RITCHIE:** I noticed this picture of Hubert Humphrey. It's an uncharacteristically solemn-looking picture of Humphrey.

**TAMES:** Yes, this picture was made shortly after word came of the assassination of Martin Luther King. We were at a rally at a hotel, I think it was the Sheraton Park, I could be wrong, but at a political rally and Hubert Humphrey was speaking. When the word came, Humphrey got up and made the announcement and then he asked for a minute of silence for Martin Luther King. This was taken then, and the juxtaposition of LBJ's portrait in back, I composed that. I think this is in color and in black-and-white.

Then I left the hotel and went to the White House. All the way down Connecticut Avenue I could see this black smoke, just beyond the White House and to my left, and up Fourteenth Street. When I got to the White House, there on the lawn by the fountain in the center of the White House north lawn was the whole press corps, standing there looking towards Fourteenth and F Street, where the fire was burning that close to the White House, just two city blocks away. This smoke just kept building up, and building up, and building up, and getting worse. I went to the Capitol and took some pictures around there, the troops in their positions. I went into the predominantly black sections of the city, and automobiles were burning in the street, and buildings were burning, and the police were coming and tear gas was very much in evidence. I just couldn't believe it was happening to my city. I came home and had dinner, and then insisted on going back. Fran, my wife, objected. She said "You have five children, you don't want



to get killed. You just stay here." I said, "I've *got* to photograph this, at least as much as I can, but I promise that I will not go too deep into the riot." I made a few pictures of the burning and stayed away from the actual rioting. I figured I'd leave that to the younger ones. Yes, that was a very dramatic time. I never thought that I'd ever see a reaction of that type in this city. And it could happen again.

**RITCHIE:** This picture was also taken while Humphrey was running for president, and you mentioned that if had been elected you would probably have become the White House photographer.

**TAMES:** Oh, yes, I would have become the White House photographer because Hubert Humphrey and I were very good friends. I was privileged to call Hubert Humphrey my friend. We talked about it several times, that I would become the official photographer. I would have, and probably you wouldn't be here today taking this down, because I would have ended my career, at least the type of work that I'm doing, after his term, probably in '72 or '76 or thereabouts, and who knows what I would have done after that. I wouldn't have had the continuation of the presidents. Or maybe I would have. Who knows? I would have gone in and had the confidence of Hubert Humphrey and I would have been able to do the type of work, and record his administration in a way that was not possible say under Carter.

I got a request unofficially, sort an inquiry as to whether I'd be interested to be Carter's White House photographer, but you see, Carter did not have a White House photographer. He campaigned against the Imperial Presidency, and he didn't think that it was necessary to have an official photographer. He was perfectly content to let the photo office work the way it does without the title or designation. So as far as I was concerned, I would just as soon stay at the *New York Times*, which gave me a variety of assignments, instead of taking a chance and going over to record the Carter presidency, where I knew that I would be restricted in my access. So that never came off. Carter never had any official photographer.

When Reagan came in, he had Mike Evans to be his official photographer. We knew that was going to happen. Mike had been hanging around him and photographing Reagan for eight years, for *Time* magazine. Every time there was something involving Reagan, he'd go and do it. So he got to know him, and Reagan got to know him, and then he became the White House photographer. But Mike only stayed four years, and when he left they never replaced him. The staff is still there, they're still functioning the same way, but they don't have the title. And I have enough of an ego to want that title, even though it doesn't mean that much. But still you would just be *the* top photographer in the country, at least in title if not financially. So it never came about. I think that not so much my own personal disappointment at not becoming the photographer, but I think the country would have been better off if Humphrey had become president. We would have gotten out of Vietnam a lot earlier.

**RITCHIE:** What sort of person was Humphrey, especially when you knew him as a young senator in the '40s and '50s?

**TAMES:** I first met him in Philadelphia at the Democratic Convention of '48, at which time he was mayor of Minneapolis, and he gave a civil rights speech. His ideas on where the country, and the thrust of the Democratic Party, made me fall in love with him in a moment. I had never met him, and then I met him. What really cinched it was when he started speaking, the Dixiecrats, headed by Senator Strom Thurmond, got up and walked out of the convention and formed the Dixiecrat Party, of Southern Democrats, nominated their own presidential candidate. So you had the regular Democrats, the Dixiecrats, then you had that left-wing group of Democrats that were headed up by former Vice President [Henry] Wallace, and I think a cowboy named [Glen] Taylor, who was a senator. He used to strum his guitar on the steps of the Capitol. I'll never forget, when he first came he got his guitar out and started strumming, "Oh, give me a home near the Capitol dome," or something like that. But he ran as the vice president on that ticket. So the Democrats were split three ways that year.

I met Hubert then, and then he came to the Senate and we became fast friends. I always followed his career and tried to help him in any way I could, promoted him. He was a very good senator, I used to say. I made some very good friends. We were all young, we were all about the same age, and we all had the same ambitions and same dreams. I was absolutely convinced that American was going to be a helluva better place to live after World War II. I never thought we'd be in this race with the Russians, and the armaments. I thought we'd be lifting the whole world out of poverty and ruling the show down there. But I've always been sort of a mystic and a dreamer.

**RITCHIE:** Humphrey had that streak of idealism.

**TAMES:** Yes, he did. Maybe that's what appealed to me, that this is the way you do it. And if you had Humphrey it could be done. He reminds me of Jesse Jackson, with the type of programs he has, and the enthusiasm he evokes. But Jesse Jackson is just all talk, whereas Hubert at least had this record as a mayor, his record as senator. Jesse Jackson right now would be giving Dukakis a helluva run for his money if Jesse Jackson had been governor of South Carolina. Jesse Jackson won the primary in South Carolina, he should go back and run for governor. Amass a record and then come back. He's still young. But you're never going to become president of these United States based on just what you *think* you can do. Anybody can project what they would do, it's just when they start asking questions about your record. Jesse has the magnetism, he grabs people, he's got enough of the mystic in him--more so than Hubert, in the sense that he can bring in the religious and evoke emotions in people.

I myself don't believe that Mr. Jackson is going to do anymore than what he has done already, and as of this recording today he's just lost in Pennsylvania, which I think is about what he's going to do from now on. Of course, the blacks have every right to vote for him. I get a big kick out of the fact that some of the whites say that the blacks are voting for Jackson only because he's black. I want to say, "Why are you voting the way you are?" They never think of the fact that they are subconsciously are voting white. That's okay. I think the blacks have every right, also the Irish or the Catholics did to vote for Kennedy, or anyone else to vote for anyone. If you can get enough votes, fine, do it.

My own personal feeling is that Jesse Jackson is doing a valuable job for this democracy of ours, because he is a sort of a stalking horse. He is stalking out a position and making it possible for black politicians who will follow him to be creditable candidates, particularly Reverend [William] Gray in the House--he's also a reverend--who's staking out a record as a very good Budget chairman. A lot of people were voicing doubts because he's a reverend and a black to head up a committee. More of these stereotypes are dropping, more and more, the same way they are about women. Before long we're going to be voting for people strictly on the basis of their record, and not on race or religion or anything else. I think that's a beautiful thing. Jackson is doing us good in that. He is making it possible.

In an ironic sort of way, he has suppressed any kind of racist remarks that might be made about Dukakis. Whereas it has only been a short, short twenty-five years when my brother went to Roanoke, Virginia, to work, as a young stock broker, and was denied admission into one of the exclusive clubs because he was a Greek, and they did not allow "people of color," as it was put to him, to be members of the club. In this particular club they had designated all the Mediterranean nations as "people of color," so the Spaniards, and Italians, and everybody else were not eligible, and they maintained that. It's been such a short time, I keep trying to tell some of the Greeks. In fact, some of the Greeks themselves were raising the question in that period in the sixties, about racism and whether the Greek Orthodox Church would admit blacks. I was pointing out to them that the blacks a great portion of the Greek church in Africa. Oh, the Orthodox church has the Russians, and the Syrians, and the Armenians, so we're all in the same boat. But we can't seem to see it. Everybody's got their own opinion, and if you've got any problems, just blame it on the other race, don't blame it on yourself.

**RITCHIE:** You obviously think very similarly to the way Hubert Humphrey thought.

**TAMES:** Oh, yes.

**RITCHIE:** And that would have made you sympathetic to him as a photographer. Could you have been official photographer for a president with whom you weren't sympathetic, say a Nixon or a Reagan?

**TAMES:** Yes. Yes, I could have, because I have enough pride in my work, and also I have had the experience of working with people that I didn't necessarily agree with. Some of the people that I have photographed were to the right of Ghengis Khan! You know Pat Buchanan, for example, I told Pat Buchanan that other than mother I think I've probably read more of his columns than anybody. I hate him--I mean, I don't hate him, I just don't agree with his views, but I read him, just like I read [Jeane] Kirkpatrick, and her views. I read them because I want to find out what the hell they're thinking. But it's hard going for me.

I would have done a creditable job, depending on how much they felt about me. See, also you have to feel at ease with the person. I don't know how Reagan felt about me. Nixon, though, he was not above

putting his arm around my shoulders and talking on a very close basis, because I knew him since he was a member of the House. Many a time he'd say, "It's not you, George, it's the *New York Times*." No, in my heart I believe I could have done so, because unlike writing, where you can shade your opinions, photography is pretty straight forward.

It's only now, under the new techniques, the digital stuff, my God you can conjure up pictures. You can take the head of one person and put it on the body of somebody else. I've seen cover pictures on *U.S. News and World Report* of Mrs. Reagan and Mrs. Gorbachev sitting there, and they're looking like they're talking to one another, yet one was made in Moscow and one was made in Washington and the digital machine put the same background, put them in the same chairs. One of the great photography books, *A Day in the Life of the United States*, and the cover picture was a digital composite, where there was a shot of a cowboy coming across a ridge in the moonlight and they were too far apart, so they just simply put them in the digital machine and brought them together, so they were able to fit the format. They used to say that we were conjuring up pictures and we were recreating, or faking. I used to say, "No, we don't fake anything, I recreate." If I see a scene and I can make it better, I shoot it. If I think I can make it better by moving the subjects into a spot within the area they are, just to get a better light, or dramatic light, I'll use it, because I'm controlling the situation. Now, with this digital mechanics you can enhance something, you can correct it. Joe McCarthy did a very sloppy job of splitting a picture of Stalin and. . . .

**RITCHIE:** Millard Tydings.

**TAMES:** Tydings, remember that thing? He made it look like Tydings was cocking his ear and listening to Stalin. And it was so poor, because you could actually see the line. Yet the implication was there. Today you can do that and put him in his pocket. Talk about propaganda potential.

**RITCHIE:** Because people, when they see a photograph, think that it's real.

**TAMES:** Oh, of course.

**RITCHIE:** Because a photograph doesn't lie.

**TAMES:** It doesn't lie, but it does lie. And I think it's going to be doing a lot more of it. We have to be very careful with what we're doing, computer enhancing, computer this and computer that, everything is computer.

**RITCHIE:** Going back to the official photographer idea, is it the job of the official photographer to make the subject look good, or is it to give an honest rendition of what's going on?

**TAMES:** Both. First and foremost it is to record an honest photographic history of the presidency, and

if while you're doing this there is a beneficial fall-out for the president, say if he's running again and he wants to use your pictures, of course. You always shoot with that in mind, also: does it look good? Does it show how the president very forcefully did this, or was very emotional in doing that? Sure, it works both ways. But I approve of the idea of an official photographer. Just think if there had been an official photographer for Lincoln, what a wonderful series of pictures you would have of that man and what he went through.

**RITCHIE:** By contrast to the official photographers in the White House, the official photographers on Capitol Hill are sort of reduced to doing what they call "grip and grins"--photos of senators shaking hands with their constituents.

**TAMES:** That's correct.

**RITCHIE:** Why do you think the two jobs are so different?

**TAMES:** Well, for one thing, Lyndon Johnson is responsible to a great extent for the official photographers being on the Hill. He wanted pictures of himself with some of his constituents, and he set up the Senate photographers. Then of course the Republicans, not being dumb and observing what a good thing this is, went along with him. It's all being paid for out of the federal treasury, and it's a set-up where they are photographing individual members as part of the advantage of being on the in. And of course, "grip and grin" type of pictures are the meat and potatoes of this business of ours. They're the type of pictures that are going to be used by the local media. So they are doing a job. They are not paid to be creative or innovative. Their job is to make the senator or member look as good as possible, and then to take into consideration how his constituent looks when you make that "grin" shot. But as far as actually recording history, no. It's an almost impossible job. Not an impossible job, but a difficult job, particularly the staff that they have. They literally would have to have twenty-five photographers call clicking away at a terrific pace, with a staff backing them up, so they could file some of this stuff that they were conjuring. A lot of it would be superfluous.

**RITCHIE:** You mentioned before about photographers being cut out, and losing the flavor of things. It strikes me that Congress and the Capitol are so diverse, there are so many corridors and back rooms. The people who aren't on Capitol Hill don't really get the flavor of it, and it's very hard to capture it in general. But I found this one picture in your files which to me has a wonderful feel of Capitol Hill, the man in the chair in the corridor. It's a very different shot, and I wondered how that came about?

**TAMES:** Well, I was walking by the Senate and heading toward Minority Leader Baker's office, and I spotted this man sitting in one of those overstuffed chairs just off the Senate floor, smoking a cigar, puffing away very contently. I recognized him for a lobbyist, so you literally he was stalking, waiting for a member to come by, at which time he was going to buttonhole him and make his little pitch. I've forgotten who he was lobbying for, but it was pretty prestigious, and it was not something to be

ignored. I have his name somewhere. Either way, I caught it and I just shot it. I thought it was a very interesting type of picture.

**RITCHIE:** Well, you hear the expression the "corridors of power," referring to politics, and here's the corridor with the marble statues of famous senators of the past, and the Minton tiles on the floor, and the overstuffed chair and a very well dressed man just waiting for the powerful to come down the corridor. Somehow that picture just expresses what I see walking casually through the Capitol Building, that you don't see in the newspapers and the magazines.

**TAMES:** No, no. The good lobbyist doesn't advertise himself. He didn't pose for me. He was there waiting and it just the juxtaposition of the sunlight, everything there just blended into this picture and gave me something out of nothing. I shot it with the idea that if I ever needed a picture of a lobbyist, this would be a good one.

**RITCHIE:** There are certain things in the Senate that portray themselves readily, you can portray a filibuster with someone speaking, but lobbying is a difficult art to capture. It's hard to distinguish a lobbyist from anyone else.

**TAMES:** And also lobbyist has become a dirty word. I don't agree with that. If someone is expressing his viewpoint, or is representing a group's views, that's fine, even if I disagree with him. I think the tobacco lobbyists are some of the most aggressive and well-informed and innovative in fighting issues and blocking issues that would be detrimental to their industry, smoking. Yet I don't object to them doing their thing up there. Sooner or later everybody's going to realize that what they're proposing is wrong. It might be available for a while but sooner or later it's going to go down. In this democracy, it takes a while for consensus to develop on most any subject. I heard somewhere that there's nothing more powerful than an idea whose time has come, and I've seen this in various ways on the Hill, where issues that have been thwarted for years and going nowhere, all of a sudden, wham, they're through. Like LBJ and the Civil Rights Act and Voting Rights Act. They'd been hanging around for forty years, and all of a sudden he grabs it and whamo it goes in. He couldn't have done it four years earlier. The time had come, the people were ready. I think this applies across the spectrum.

**RITCHIE:** Did you find that lobbyists were good sources of information as to what was going to be happening? Were there any who were helpful to you?

**TAMES:** Only the ones who wanted publicity for their own projects. The right-to-lifers, say for example, made a point of calling me up or passing the word down by whispers or gestures that they were going to do something grisly, like have a fetus in a jar and leave it in a senator's outer office, someone who was a proponent of abortion, as a demonstration against abortion. Or they were going to try to present him with a fetus, those type who have been lobbying the Hill have come around. And of course the potato lobbyists, the lobster lobbyists, the navy bean lobbyists who once a year would serve

free bean soup to the members of the press. Right along with your lunch you got a bowl of bean soup, whether you asked for it or not, and every senator got one in the Senate Restaurant. Or, like Senator [Allen] Ellender used to once a year have a luncheon for the press of crayfish gumbo, that he made himself, which was very tasty. He was promoting Louisiana. That's lobbying. Of course, he was a senator, he could do it.

Then you had ice cream lobbyists, and one to beat all lobbies as far as I was concerned was the pasta lobby, who had about ten cooks. They took over the House Caucus Room, and they were conjuring up spaghetti, linguini, spinach pasta, you name all the pasta dishes. They had pasta with lobster, pasta with fish, pasta with everything including--and this really turned my stomach--pasta with chocolate. They had this chocolate spaghetti type of dish. It was soft and they dipped strawberries into it and topped it with cream and gave it to you on a dish. Well, my stomach can take most anything, but this was one that I could not quite get down. But I will say that I enjoyed their pasta New Orleans, and they had hundreds of people going through, senators, congressmen, all sampling. That's a good example of lobbying.

The National Association of Retired Persons has got a very strong lobby, and is becoming stronger all the time. There are altogether about twenty-seven million people who they represent, I'm a member, because of their cheap insurance and so forth. They are expounding the views of the Social Security set. Of course when I was not on Social Security I was against raising Social Security, but now that I'm a beneficiary, I like some of the things that they're saying. But I'm also realistic and I believe that the budget should be balanced and that we should make an effort towards it, and I'm willing to have my benefits cut percentage-wise to the overall cuts, so we may go down that path. We're all lobbyists after our own fashion. One of the things that I discovered over the years is that the number of people who consider themselves right-wing, upstanding, free-enterprise, gung ho for the American way, and so forth, are the biggest receivers of subsidies, who are sucking harder on the public tit than any other person. Yet when you point this out to them, they recoil in horror. Of course, my subsidy is necessary for our way of life to continue; the other people should be cut. From your own point of view, everything looks so different.

When I was very young, I was always looking at these old reporters hanging around, hardly doing their job, I would say, "These old folks should be retired." Until I reached their age. Then I suddenly realized, oh, my, no, I'm too valuable to go. So it's a different view, it depends on which perspective, which angle you look at things, which end of the telescope you use.

**RITCHIE:** The definition of a special interest is it's always somebody else.

**TAMES:** That's right. It's always "special interests." I'm honestly amazed at the various organization that keep springing up in this town. It's reached such a point that every member of the House and Senate, particularly the Senate, has to have an aide who focuses on one primary problem. Abortion, he has a specialist on abortion and right-to-life who answers all questions regarding that. Then he has one

on labor, foreign policy. And all of these people feed into him. It's becoming more and more complex to be a member. That's why I keep favoring this "don't repeat" reform: go in, do what you can, make your pitch for what you think is good for the country, stay twelve years and go home, we've done your bidding. Let the next person come in. Well, they say, "you're advocating a very inefficient form of government." I say, "show me a more inefficient form of government than a democracy." If you want an efficient form of government, then you'd have fascism. I would say communist, but I think they're worse off than we are. I mean, the fascists, the Germans and the Italians made the railroads run on time, and you never lost your baggage at the airport, and you got your checks. Of course, you couldn't think. If you like that type of life, and human beings can adapt to anything, after a while you like what you're doing, you don't have to think. You just go home and plunk yourself in front of the TV, or your walk around the block.

**RITCHIE:** Have you noticed in the years that you've been covering Congress that lobbyists are more open about what they do now?

**TAMES:** Yes, very much so. For one thing, they can't conceal it. They have to register. They have to list their expenditures, their contributions. Wasn't it a lobbyist who coined the phrase that an honest politician is one who stays bought when you buy him?

**RITCHIE:** Now, you mentioned that you took this picture of a lobbyist in part so you would have a picture. Do you think in terms of categories, that you want to cover your bases in case a paper or magazine wants a certain picture. . . .

**TAMES:** Sure. You're always thinking of new stories, and constant stories, and they keep coming up. After all, news by and large is what is dug up or conjured up by the reporter or the photographer. If you see something that makes a picture, you shoot it, then you submit it. It could go as a floater with no story with it, like this could go as a floater, you just set it up as a floater.

**RITCHIE:** Or do you get requests from the paper from time to time that say, we're running a piece about lobbying and we need a photo?

**TAMES:** Oh, yes. Many times. I'll say, "I have something in the files I think will do that." I'll tell them what it is, that way they'll go back and get it. And invariably it would be much better than what I could go out and shoot immediately. Then, of course, other times I see this, and I say, "Well, if I'm going to do a lobbyist, a particular lobbyist, I will then remember a pose that I saw them in, or a lobbyist, not necessarily the same one. I'll say, "Did you ever sit in that box by the window there, that comes down very dramatically in the Reception Room of the Senate, sitting over there with a senator like I've seen others do? Go over there and sit down." He'd go over and sit down and I'd make a picture of him. Either by himself going through some papers, or with a senator, it makes a very interesting shot.



Yes, you copy constantly. They say, "We're doing a story on the Speaker." Okay, you've made the Speaker four or five times, then what do you do? I brought in Tip O'Neill one time into the Rayburn Room, with that big, beautiful painting of Rayburn in the background. I made a picture of Tip O'Neill, with his big face and with this big picture of Rayburn sort of leaning over him, to get the feeling of Rayburn and to get something different. You're constantly thinking.

See, the easiest thing to cover is a war. You just try to keep yourself alive and watch what's happening. You get pictures of destruction, and you've got good stuff. Look what's coming up out of Israel with the Palestinians. The Palestinians are reacting to their dead, and you get good pictures of wailing women, and bodies all over the place. That's about it. You've got more stuff than you know what to do with.

**RITCHIE:** We're getting a good story here.

End of Interview 4.