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THE WASHINGTON POST
4 February 1982

Logs Are a Tantalizing List of Names of the Era

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The Kennedy tapes, an extensive electronic evocation of a crucial era in American life now come to light a generation later, are certain to become a preeminent historical source—and another political controversy swirling around another president.

Even in their fragmentary form, the logs of John F. Kennedy's secret recordings are riveting both for what they indicate and for what remains unknown.

They list, in stark chronological fashion, the leading personalities and the great issues that were being discussed during Kennedy's fateful last 16 months in office.

What they fail to relate remains even more tantalizing—what was actually being recorded in both phone conversations and personal meetings, many of which dealt with then highly classified subjects.

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But some of the most intriguing items, for the curious if not for the scholars, may be personal items. On March 4, 1963, the president and his brother, Robert, discussed "press reports and press gossip," along with "[then CIA director] John McCone's testimony on the [Cuban] missile crisis."

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