

Schlesinger: Clinton a disappointment

But famed historian says president would win if he could run

By Jack Brammer
HERALD-LEADER STAFF BUREAU

DANVILLE — President Clinton easily would win re-election if he were allowed to seek a third term but he will go down in history as a disappointing president.

That was one of the political insights renowned historian and former presidential adviser Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr. of New York City brought to Centre College yesterday.

The Pulitzer-Prize winner was a special assistant in John F. Kennedy's Democratic White House in the early 1960s called Clinton "an endearing rogue ... who lacks self-discipline."

He also predicted that Democratic nominee Al Gore will defeat Republican nominee George W. Bush for the presidency in the Nov. 7 election because the national economy is strong.

"But it will be a very close election," he said.

The greatest American presidents were Abraham Lincoln, George Washington and Franklin Delano Roosevelt, Schlesinger said. "I see no resemblance of them with Gore or Bush."



Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr. was part of debate preparations at Centre College.

Schlesinger's visit to Centre was part of the college's preparations for the Oct. 5 vice-presidential debate on the campus.

His free public lecture last night in the school's Norton Center for the Arts initiated the O. Leonard and the Lillian H. Press Distinguished Speakers Series, a program recently endowed at Centre by a gift from Lexington philanthropist Lucille Caudill Little.

Schlesinger said that this year's candidates for president are ignoring several major issues, including the future of the U.S. Supreme Court, foreign policy, the widening gap between rich and poor and campaign-finance reform.

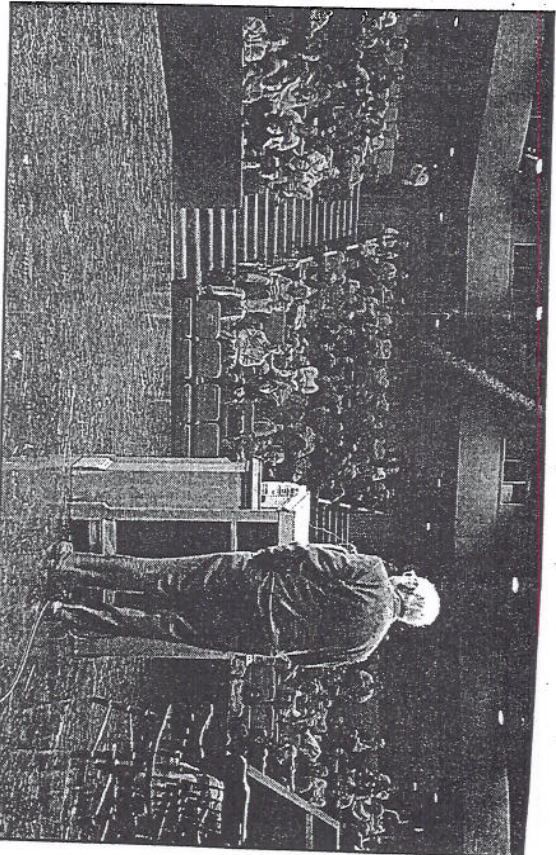
The historian noted that the United States is only one of three democracies in the world that does not provide free television time to presidential candidates. His call for campaign-finance reform brought the loudest applause of the night.

"I wish Mitch McConnell could hear that," he said, referring to Kentucky's senior U.S. senator who has opposed limits on campaign contributions.

Earlier in the day, Schlesinger, sporting a bright purple bow tie with his dark suit, led an informal discussion with about 200 Kentucky high school students from nearly a dozen schools.

He seemed to enjoy the give-and-take with the young people, often asking them their opinions with a show of hands.

When most of the students expressed



MARK CORNELISON/STAFF

Schlesinger spoke to a group of Kentucky high school students at Centre. He predicted a Gore victory; most of the students said Bush would win.

their belief that Bush would be the next president, Schlesinger asked them, "Is this because of tobacco?"

One student replied that Kentucky is giving more attention to industrial hemp and fish farming as a replacement for tobacco.

With a laugh, Schlesinger said, "No one wants to replace tobacco by marijuana. What a great reform program."

The students appreciated Schlesinger's intellect and blunt opinions.

"I'm excited to be here, to see and hear somebody so important in national politics," said Mindy Folsom, a senior at Shelby County High School. "I'm not that active in politics but I liked his views."

Adam Marshall, a senior at Frankfort High School, said he was impressed with Schlesinger's intelligence.

"He was a little bit conservative and a little bit liberal but he seemed honest and direct in expressing his opinions," the student said.