

Dean Rusk Oral History Interview – JFK#7, 5/13/1970
Administrative Information

Creator: Dean Rusk

Interviewer: Dennis J. O'Brien

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Biographical Note

Dean Rusk (1909-1994) was the Secretary of State from 1961 to 1969. This interview focuses on the role of the Cabinet during the Kennedy administration, the diplomatic corps in Washington D.C., and the State Department's role in civil rights actions, among other topics.

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Seventh Oral History Interview

with

DEAN RUSK

May 13, 1970
Washington, D.C.

By Dennis J. O'Brien

For the John F. Kennedy Library

O'BRIEN: Well, I wonder if we might start this morning with a discussion of the Cabinet as an institution and the way that President Kennedy used the Cabinet.

RUSK: President Kennedy did not use the Cabinet as a corporate body for important questions. We would have an occasional Cabinet meeting, and the historian will be able to check that, but there was very little discussion within the Cabinet about each other's business. President Kennedy tended to handle the problems of each department bilaterally with that department or with that Cabinet officer. On those matters where two or three Cabinet departments were intimately and directly involved, such as frequently the Department of State and the Department of Defense, he would meet with the two Secretaries of those departments and go over matters with them. But I don't recall that we had during the Kennedy Administration a freewheeling, broad, analytical discussion in depth of major Administration policies. Cabinet meetings tended to be reporting meetings or they tended to take up the

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legislative program or they tended to be the occasion for some announcement that the President wanted to make, but not business sessions for a review of each other's work.

We did do one thing during the Kennedy Administration that I thought was helpful. The Cabinet would have occasional lunches without the President. We would meet in my dining room or in the Attorney General's dining room or in somebody else's dining room for an occasional luncheon where we would have, well, a pretty good discussion of Administration policies. But that was without the presence of the President. It was, of course, with his full knowledge and blessing. Those informal sessions of the Cabinet I thought were good in helping Cabinet officers to get to know each other and to become reasonably acquainted with each other's problems.

But the Cabinet, as with most Presidents, was not a decision-making body. I think the historian will find that Cabinet minutes taken during that period would show a rather thin agenda. Now, this is probably built into our constitutional system because the Cabinet is the creature of the President and each member of the Cabinet is a creature of the President, and each President will want to deal with it as he thinks best meets his own needs. I think most Presidents shy away from the use of the Cabinet as a corporate body for the purpose of making decisions.

O'BRIEN: Were there ever any instances in which the President violated that and did use the Cabinet for general discussion of policies within a particular department?

RUSK: We had--on occasion we had sessions in which each Cabinet officer would be given a few minutes to talk about the main problems he had in front of him. As a matter of fact, I remember one Cabinet meeting in which each one of us went around the table and told what was most worrisome about our problems, and it reflected a rather serious and gloomy picture as to the many problems we had in front of us. And after a bit of this, President Kennedy simply laughed and said, "Why don't we close up shop and go home?" because in a discussion of that sort, the things that were going right were not touched upon. The Cabinet officer would use the few minutes that he had to talk about his problems, his unresolved problems in front of the Administration.

President Kennedy was asked once in a press conference whether he had been surprised when he became President by what he encountered, and he smiled and said, "Yes, I was surprised to find that things were as bad as I'd been saying in the campaign that they were."

But I don't recall, for example, a Cabinet discussion of the President's decision to put additional forces into South Vietnam. I don't recall a Cabinet discussion as to whether or not we should put troops in Laos and things of that sort. It just was not looked upon by President Kennedy as a decision-making instrumentality.

Now there's another reason for that, and that is that Cabinet officers are extremely busy people who are almost wholly preoccupied with their own affairs, and it was not easy for a Cabinet officer to become sufficiently acquainted with the problems in other departments to make a responsible contribution to the consideration of those problems. I doubt during my day that anyone other than the Secretary of Defense, possibly the Attorney General, really took much interest in what was going on in Southeast Asia. Similarly, I was not myself very much involved in what was going on in some of the domestic Cabinet departments, so there was a minimum of serious consideration in the Cabinet.

I felt later during the Johnson Administration that this practice in the Cabinet was unfortunate because Cabinet officers are out in the country making public speeches and answering questions, and we very frequently got questions about each other's business. And I think we could have given each other more support had we had more Cabinet solidarity and joint Cabinet consideration of major issues of policy. We got to the point where we circulated a good many memoranda and papers to each other outlining what our problems were, trying to give a sense of a general Administration policy, but there was not enough of that. I think the Cabinet can be used to better effect than most Presidents are willing to use it.

O'BRIEN: Yes. In that regard, this problem of Cabinet officers being called to speak on the affairs of other departments, did you have any major problems in the Kennedy Administration of Cabinet officers talking on problems of foreign policy in their travels around the country--or White House people, as far as that goes--that caused the Department major concern?

RUSK: When there were direct issues of foreign policy that a Cabinet officer or a White House staff member wanted to include in a speech, they would invariably clear that with the Department of State, so that I don't recall any instances during the Kennedy Administration when a Cabinet officer caused me some problems, for example, by speaking on foreign policy in a way that was contrary to Administration policy.

Another aspect of it was, of course, that several Cabinet officers had major involvements in foreign affairs because of the work of their own department--the Department of Commerce, the Department of Agriculture, and so forth. And there were times when they would, in describing their own responsibilities and their own problems--Food for Peace, for example--would in fact make speeches on foreign policy, so that there was no monopoly in the Secretary of State in the discussion of foreign policy matters. But where questions were not a part of the central responsibility of the Cabinet department, the Cabinet officer involved would usually clear those with the Department of State.

O'BRIEN: Well, in the last ten years the position of advisor on national security affairs has been held by three rather strong personalities. How do you see this, the development of this, in the way it will affect the management of America's national security affairs?

RUSK: When the National Security Council was first established at the end of World War II, the practice then was, during the Truman Administration, for example, that the National Security Council would take up only those questions which were assigned to it by the President or which were taken up by agreement among the Cabinet members of the National Security Council. There was no general involvement of the National Security Council in the conduct of foreign relations, but it was rather limited to specific ad hoc questions on which papers were prepared and circulated through government.

Now this changed. It changed, certainly beginning with the Kennedy Administration, and it possibly changed with the Eisenhower Administration--I'm just not sure. But when McGeorge Bundy became the Special Assistant for National Security Affairs we tended to eliminate some of the cumbersome machinery of the National Security Council, but we substituted for it a very

active flow of papers to and from the President and his principal Cabinet officers. McGeorge Bundy was the principal instrument through which that flow of papers occurred.

For example, the Secretary of State could not spend most of the day running back and forth between his office and the President carrying memoranda and papers for the President's perusal. We would send those papers over to the White House, and there would then have to be some staff member at the White House who organized those papers for the President's consideration and who brought them to the President's attention and who insured that the President gave a timely reaction to the papers that were sent to him, so that McGeorge Bundy's most important role was to manage the flow of business, and the flow of business was very large.

Now, he also tried to highlight these papers. I suppose he digested some of them; I suspect he underlined the key points in some of them to facilitate the President's consideration of them and would point out what the key questions appeared to be. And that preparatory work for the President was a very important function. He also helped the President in checking to see that decisions which had been made were in fact carried out. He was a follow-up agent to check in with the various departments on the execution of policy, and that was a useful role for him to play. He worked very closely with, for example, the Executive Secretary in the Department of State to be sure that decisions were promptly translated into department action.

I never had any impression that McGeorge Bundy or his successor, Walt Rostow, tried to come in between me and the President. If they had policy points that they wished to put forward, they would invariably make them known to me as well as to the President and would give me the chance to comment on them or make a judgment about them and tell the President what I thought of them. I think that the machinery would be impaired if a staff officer such as McGeorge Bundy or Walt Rostow were to interject themselves into policy issues on the side, on the quiet, with the President without letting the Cabinet officer responsible know what was going on because it's the Cabinet officer who controls the enormous flow of business in the Department of State. Now it's the Secretary of State who manages that procession of business. I think the very active personal Assistant for National Security Affairs can be extremely helpful and with tact and understanding can help

strengthen and cement relations between the President and his Cabinet rather than appear to be a divisive element or an interfering element in the process.

O'BRIEN: Well, this is a future question which is really in many ways ahistorical, but because of the growth of the Department and the problems and the involvement of American foreign relations, do you see a possibility of that becoming what sometimes has been called a little State Department within the White House?

RUSK: The great limitation on that possibility is that the staff in the White House does not conduct relations with other governments. It's the Department of State that transacts the business, so that even the staff in the White House has to translate its policy views into Presidentially approved action to be taken by the Department of State, and that gives the Secretary of State a full opportunity to participate in the process. So I don't see any likelihood that such a staff in the White House can substitute itself for the Department of State.

O'BRIEN: Well, passing over to a couple things in regard to the question of the Otepka case. Was there a problem--beyond, let's say, Otepka and Mrs. Knight--of parts of the State Department becoming too cooperative with other branches of government or, particularly, the Congress in, particularly in furnishing information, what's sometimes called bootleg information, as I understand?

RUSK: My problem with Mr. Otepka was a very simple one. President Truman had issued an Executive order which remained active, remained a part of the instructions for government, which did not permit classified information on personnel matters to be furnished to committees of the Congress without the President's own authorization of approval. This was an attempt to preserve the separation of powers between the President and the Congress, and it was designed to prevent witch hunts on the part of biased members of Congress or individual committees of Congress. It was to keep in the hands of the Executive departments the responsibility for policing their own personnel and making judgments as to their loyalty and security and questions of that sort. I think it was particularly important by the time I became Secretary of State that this Executive order be complied with because of the rough

experience of the Joe McCarthy period when some of the Executive departments, including the State Department, were intimidated by witch hunting activities on the part of one or another Senator.

Now, Otepka seemed to appeal to a higher loyalty in his own mind and provided information to one of the committees of the Congress which had not been authorized by the Secretary or by the President, and this led to great uncertainty, even fear, in the Department of State when this process became known. So I had to relieve Otepka of his role in the security evaluation business pending investigation, and I put him on other duties which were not involved with personal security matters.

I did myself arrange for a full examination, full investigation, within the Department of State of the cases which had been a matter of interest to Mr. Otepka to be sure that we were on sound grounds in making judgments on those instances on which he had raised questions. And I satisfied myself that, with one or two exceptions on which we took some action, that the judgments made by Secretary Dulles and Secretary Herter on these security questions were sound judgments and that those people who still served in the Department of State were men of loyalty and security and integrity and that the charges were insubstantial. But the sole issue between me and Mr. Otepka was compliance with the Executive order of the President, which forbade him to give classified personnel information to committees of the Congress.

O'BRIEN: Well, he had done this, as I understand, in the Eisenhower Administration as well; this was an ongoing practice on the part of Mr. Otepka.

RUSK: Yes, I think so. I think so. But when I became aware of it, I felt an obligation under my own responsibilities to break it up.

O'BRIEN: Well, did you . . .

RUSK: I testified before the Internal Security Subcommittee of the Senate on this matter. I consulted with them about it and, in effect, told them that if they wanted Mr. Otepka to work for them that he should resign in the Department of State and become a member of the staff of the committee but that he could not work for them while he was an officer of the Department of State serving the President.

O'BRIEN: Well, was Secretary Dulles or Secretary Herter aware of what Otepka was doing in regard to furnishing information?

RUSK: I once had a talk with Secretary Dulles while he was in office about this general problem--Secretary Dulles and I were personal friends, and I used to drop in on him from time to time, usually at his request--and I got the impression that Mr. Dulles wanted to handle this matter in a responsible and proper way with fairness extended to employees against unsubstantiated charges and things of that sort. But I also got the impression that President Eisenhower was rather unwilling to challenge the Congress frontally on these matters, and I think there were times when Mr. Dulles was overridden by President Eisenhower in particular cases. I just don't know. The historian might be able to dig something out of the Eisenhower papers on such a question.

O'BRIEN: You had a problem in regard to that as far as the way the evidence was gathered against Otepka, as I understand, some question of people being called before the committee rather quickly and the suggestion of even, perhaps, perjury. What action was taken?

RUSK: Well, I forget now the names of the individuals involved because I've had to try to remember so many names, but some officer in the Department set out to get the goods on Mr. Otepka, to accumulate evidence that could be used in bringing Mr. Otepka before a board. But they were too zealous. They went beyond the bounds of propriety in the methods of their investigation, and in one famous case, they had put a wiretap on Otepka and then denied that fact to a Senate committee. Well, I took the view that an officer of the Department of State is not entitled, in the first place, to lie to a Senate committee and that that was a dereliction of duty. I also took the view that using what was possibly illegal techniques without my authorization was improper conduct. So we removed two or possibly three officers of the Department of State for that kind of activity and, particularly, for not telling the truth to the Congress.

O'BRIEN: Do you get much in the way of pressure from the outside, particularly from conservative members of Congress, perhaps Senator [James O.] Eastland?

RUSK: I had some pressure from Senator Eastland and from some of the so-called right wing press on the Otepka case, but I took the view that I had an obligation to require that the Executive order of the President be complied with and simply resisted such pressure. I would get an occasional hostile question in a press conference about such issues, but since Mr. Otepka was under investigation for several years while I was Secretary, I tried not to comment on that case while it was under investigation because I would eventually have the obligation to make a judgment on the issues. So I tried to stay away from prejudicial comments while the matter was under investigation.

O'BRIEN: Well, passing over to the problem of African diplomats and the new African nations when they send representatives to the United States in the late fifties and the early sixties, you're involved with that problem, or it does become a problem for at least some parts of the Department of State very early? When does it first come to you, your--the first issue of . . . [Interruption] We had the question on tape. When did the problem first come on?

RUSK: I ran into that problem immediately upon becoming Secretary of State because there had been a great increase in colored--black, yellow, brown--diplomats in the diplomatic corps in Washington, and yet Washington was a city in which there was very considerable discrimination at that time. We had difficulty, for example, in finding houses or apartments for the staffs of embassies from African countries. Sometimes there was a difficulty even in finding an embassy itself for some of the new countries from Africa. And in terms of the facilities of the city, African diplomats did not know where they would go to have dinner without running into embarrassment, and one African diplomat told me that he didn't even know where he could go to have a haircut in Washington.

So we had to get onto that question straightaway, and I asked the Protocol Office to assume the major responsibility in trying to work out these problems in the city of Washington. Ambassador [Angier Biddle] Duke was, of course, in overall charge, but we got Pedro Sanjuan to concentrate on this problem, and he undertook to work things out here in the city of Washington.

But we rapidly discovered that you could not make serious headway on this problem unless there was general headway on the problem of discrimination throughout the city, that you could not expect a black man with a diplomatic passport to get privileges on the basis of his diplomatic passport which were not extended to other black people in the community, to Americans in the community. You could not expect an African diplomat to carry his passport around with him at all times to find a place to eat or to get a haircut and things of that sort, so the State Department threw itself very strongly into the business of eliminating discrimination generally in the city of Washington.

We worked with the real estate boards: we worked with the city government: we worked with the police authorities: and we worked with homeowners and apartment home owners and hotels and people of that sort, and gradually made some headway. I think that it took us about four or five years really to get this problem under reasonable control. Even after that there was the possibility of an occasional incident of some embarrassment, but, by and large, by 1963 and '64 we were beginning to make some real progress, and I think by about 1966 the matter became an insubstantial problem.

O'BRIEN: Well, you get a great deal of publicity about that within Life magazine and within the news media. How did you react to this?

RUSK: Well, there was nothing we could do, really, except duck our heads and take it because the criticism was unanswerable so long as acts of discrimination occurred. We had criticism in foreign countries as a result of such incidents. I might also say that we had the same problem in New York City with delegations to the United Nations, and our mission to the United Nations worked very hard on this matter, just as we were doing in the city of Washington.

As a matter of fact, at one time I think we found that the Soviet mission to the United Nations was working hard to find places for black diplomats. Sometimes the Soviet Embassy would arrange the lease and then turn it over to a black diplomat, and the Soviets then were gaining kudos and plaudits for their activity in this field. So we tried to straighten the matter out so that there would be no need for or opportunity for the Soviet mission to do anything about it.

I want to emphasize that you cannot provide proper hospitality for diplomats just for diplomats; you've got to eliminate discrimination in your society as a whole. And it was not until this matter was largely resolved in the city of Washington that we were able to bring it under control.

Now, we started early in trying to organize a place where diplomats of all kinds would feel comfortable and at home and easy, in terms of luncheons and dinners and things of that sort. The State Department strongly encouraged the organization of a new club in Washington, the International Club. Mr. James Wadsworth was very helpful to us on this enterprise. Some of the private clubs would not admit blacks. I'm not sure even today what the policy of the Metropolitan Club is toward admitting black guests, even though they might be ambassadors; it's my impression that they do not do so. But we felt that a good, reasonable, comfortable, active International Club would take much of the curse of this problem off of the city. And we were successful in bringing the International Club into existence, and it has survived and thrived. As a matter of fact, it is now moving into larger quarters because its facilities have been overtaxed.

O'BRIEN: Now, is this the same as, in 1961, what was called the International Social Center, or the movement for the International Social Center, or are they different things? That was [Robert D.] Murphy's thing.

RUSK: Yes. I think one led to the other. I think that these various efforts. . . . We tried a variety of things. We talked at one time about a country club. That never worked out, but we did get a downtown club in which all diplomats were welcome and where there was no embarrassment whatever, and many diplomats made an active use of it.

O'BRIEN: Well, when does the President become first aware of the problem?

RUSK: President Kennedy became aware of it very early, and he gave us full encouragement and support, for example, in dealing with the real estate authorities in the city of Washington about housing and things of that sort. He was very much concerned about this problem and gave his blessing to the efforts that we were making in this field. You see, the diplomatic corps is the President's corps; they're accredited to him. The Chief of Protocol in the Department of State is

also the Chief of Protocol of the White House, and so the President had just as direct and impelling an interest in this problem as did the Secretary of State.

O'BRIEN: What kind of role does Soapy Williams play?

RUSK: Soapy was very good on such matters. He helped out a great deal. He helped Pedro Sanjuan deal with the problems of housing and things of that sort. He tried to smooth over the feathers of the diplomats who ran into incidents. He did so with full apologies and expressions of regret on behalf of the United States government, and he helped take our lumps on incidents that did occur. But he threw his full weight behind this kind of activity and gave it great help.

O'BRIEN: Well, the State Department gets involved in relations with the states in this as well. Did you at any time have any contact with then Governor [J. Millard] Tawes or Governor [J. Lindsay, Jr.] Almond, particularly, or any of the other state governors in regard to restrictive legislation that they had?

RUSK: We had many relations with state and local authorities on the same matter because these diplomats would travel around the United States and ran the risk of running into incidents in other parts of the country. One thing we did was to strengthen the hospitality committees in many communities around the country. These were volunteer associations of citizens who tried to anticipate any problems that might arise and to insure that visiting diplomats would be adequately and well treated. They performed a great service without remuneration, without public plaudits, and helped a great deal.

We had one incident very early in the Kennedy Administration involving Miami. A diplomat of color came through the Miami Airport on his way to the United Nations, and when the passengers on the plane were taken out of the plane for a luncheon stop, the white passengers were taken into a lunchroom to be given a lunch, and this diplomat was put on a little folding canvas stool in a corner of the hangar and brought a lunch in waxed paper. Then he went on to New York where he encountered Mrs. [A. Eleanor] Roosevelt throwing her full weight behind human rights.

Well, we jumped on that one straightaway and told the Miami Airport authorities that unless they got this matter straightened out immediately that we would have to move the port of entry to some other place, maybe Puerto Rico or some place like that, and that we just could not tolerate the acts of discrimination for diplomats of color moving to and from the United States or the United Nations. Well, Miami responded very quickly on that and got it straightened out and arranged for no discrimination in the facilities at the airport and arranged with downtown hotels for accommodations for travelers coming through who had to be there overnight and that sort of thing. And so we got that under control and relieved that problem.

O'BRIEN: Well, a number of the diplomats want to travel into the South, and as I understand it, there are some difficulties encountered in this. Are you getting much in the way of pressure from conservative Southerners, particularly in the Congress, in regard to restricting or encouraging these diplomats to stay in Washington or to stay out of the South?

RUSK: No, I don't recall that we got any pressure from Congress on that subject. What we tried to do was to take care with local authorities that the itinerary and the plans for diplomats visiting in the South were worked out in complete detail before the trip occurred so that there would be full and adequate hospitality for the diplomats during a visit to the South. And that meant that some local citizens would make themselves responsible, they would entertain diplomats in their private homes or they would make arrangements with a local hotel, comfortable hotel, to take the diplomat. But for a while there it did mean that meticulous care had to be used in insuring that in the comings and goings of diplomats in other parts of the country everything was carefully planned so that incidents did not occur.

O'BRIEN: What's the role of the Vice President in this? Does he ever become involved in . . .

RUSK: I don't recall that he ever became involved during this period, and by the time Lyndon Johnson became President the problem was well on the way towards solution. And, of course, President Johnson's strong attitude on civil rights relieved any tension between President Johnson and the diplomats because they greatly appreciated the tremendous urge that President Johnson put behind the civil rights action in this country.

O'BRIEN: There are a number of other things that come up, not particularly relating to civil rights--I'm thinking of the behavior of diplomats in Washington, traffic tickets, things of this sort. How do you look at the diplomats during the Kennedy Administration and the time that you've been Secretary of State? Has their general behavior as guests been within reason?

RUSK: In general, the diplomatic corps behaves pretty well. Under general international practice in international law, those with diplomatic immunity are not subject to arrest and trial and fines and things of that sort, so that a great deal depends upon the voluntary cooperation of the diplomatic corps with the rules and regulations of the city. As far as the United States is concerned, we require our diplomatic personnel abroad to comply with local regulations, and it's a very serious black mark on a man's record if he gets himself in trouble with local authorities over traffic regulations or parking prohibitions and things of that sort.

We had a good deal of trouble for a while with parking tickets in the city of Washington because there's a great shortage of parking space. The diplomatic corps does not have adequate parking space around their embassies or chanceries, and they're inclined sometimes to park in no parking zones when they go downtown to shop, and things of that sort. Our principal recourse was simply to inform the embassies that persistent violations of parking regulations could be the basis to ask for the recall of a particular diplomat. And, by and large, we gradually got that pretty well cleaned up. I think on the whole the diplomatic corps acts pretty well, given the fact that they're not subject to the ordinary penalties of our law.

O'BRIEN: The problems of diplomats and the incidents in which diplomats get involved in things, as I understand it, were kept very, very quiet. I've heard the figure somewhere that of a hundred and eight incidents only four or five made the press. Was this, in a sense, a deliberate policy of the Department of State to provide a very low silhouette for the diplomats in that sense?

RUSK: We tried, as far as the Department of State is concerned, to handle all of these matters as quietly as possible. Once in a while some diplomat would get offended and would say something to the press about a particular incident, but I think that it was our general effort and policy to try to work these things out smoothly and quietly with a minimum of publicity, partly because we did not want to stir up any backlash from people in the city about what we were trying to do and partly because we did not want to upset the diplomatic corps by publicizing every incident that occurred. And, in general, the diplomats were reasonably cooperative in trying to handle these matters with a minimum of publicity.

O'BRIEN: Did you ever consider in the Department creating a post of Assistant Secretary for Minority Affairs?

RUSK: We considered that, as far as the diplomats were concerned, the Chief of Protocol was the Assistant Secretary in charge of those problems. The Chief of Protocol ranks as an Assistant Secretary.

Beyond that, we had our own Equal Opportunities organization in the Department of State. Mennen Williams was chairman of the Equal Opportunities Committee for a number of years and served very well in that capacity. We tried to deal with these problems inside the Department by anticipating them and trying to take action before major problems developed. We tried to upgrade a good many of our black employees; we tried to ferret out qualified blacks who might join the Foreign Service; we worked specially with some of the universities to try to find competent blacks to come into the Service; we appointed some black ambassadors, a few of those.

One of our problems was that if you came across a black man who was qualified to be an ambassador, there were forty other jobs waiting for him; he was in great demand. And we invited considerably more blacks to become ambassadors than were willing to accept. We had a good many refusals because these blacks had other important opportunities opening up to them. There got to be a premium on a qualified black as the civil rights movement moved forward.

Then the Department of State threw full weight behind the civil rights proposals of President Kennedy and President Johnson. I myself, for example, although I was Secretary of State and presumably responsible in the foreign field, I testified on behalf of the civil rights legislation, and we put our full weight behind the domestic steps that were being taken in this direction.

O'BRIEN: Well, the question of chanceries and the location of chanceries comes up in those years as well. Does this have any racial undertones at all?

RUSK: I think that there might have been some racial implications to some of the resistance to the building or the enlargement of chanceries in Washington, but I think a good deal of it was also based upon normal zoning type considerations. Senator Fulbright, for example, strongly resisted the desire of the French Embassy to build near him because he did not want the additional traffic and the additional parking and the additional inconveniences of a busy embassy in his own immediate neighborhood. He lived very close to the French Embassy.

I took the view that the provision of adequate chanceries and embassies was a primary obligation of the national capital. The city of Washington was invented to be the national capital, and one of the overriding requirements of a national capital is to provide embassies and chanceries for foreign diplomats. But Washington, D.C., had gotten to be a city of its own, and there were a good many citizens of Washington who wanted to act in Washington as though they might in St. Paul or Omaha or some other city, and they tried to insist upon rather restrictive zoning regulations that made it difficult at times to find adequate space for embassies and chancelleries. My view was that this was just as high a priority as finding space for federal buildings and that the city of Washington has an obligation to give a very high priority to the requirements of the diplomatic corps. That's what a national capital is all about.

O'BRIEN: Well, you and the Department both push very hard to get the area--I believe it was the Bonnie Brae estate--rezoned so that the Soviet Union could move there. What went into that reasoning?

RUSK: We and the Soviets both wanted new and better facilities for our respective embassies in Moscow and Washington. The Soviet Embassy on 16th Street is very crowded, bad traffic, no parking space, too small, and our facilities in Moscow got to be quite inadequate and needed enlargement. So we tried to find a substantial plot of land on which the Soviets could build their chancery and the residence for their Ambassador with parking space built into the actual site itself so that they would be relieved from that difficult problem they have on 16th Street. But zoning problems and some nervousness about having the Soviets as neighbors and questions of that sort came up. We lost the vote on one crucial site--I forget now which one it was--before the Planning Commission by a vote of three to two, but before I left office as Secretary of State we eventually found quarters both in Moscow and in Washington for new embassies.

O'BRIEN: Well, in regard to the one major party that you have here that's involved in the questions of African diplomats--and I'm thinking of Sanjuan--Sanjuan runs into some difficulties not only in regard to the civil rights question but also the problem of, as I understand it, rezoning the Soviet Embassy, that he gets in that as well. What's basically his problem?

RUSK: I think Sanjuan over time had to break so many eggs and thump so many heads that he built up gradually a backlog of enemies around town. To do the job that he was called upon to do on my behalf, he had to press very hard, and sometimes on very unwilling people. And he was not perhaps the most tactful man in the world because he was a driver. So he generated sparks and eventually got himself into a position where he was no longer useful in that particular job because he was no longer persuasive, he ran into too much resistance, and so his job was changed.

O'BRIEN: Is there any resistance in the Department to him?

RUSK: Well, he might have been looked upon by some in the Department as somewhat undisciplined because he would try to break through the bureaucratic channels and he would try to get the job done, and I think he made some people in the Department mad. But I never myself had any negative feelings about Sanjuan. But over time he built up resistance and therefore was not the man who could carry on the job.

O'BRIEN: Well, in regard to the Foreign Service and the presence of minorities in the Foreign Service, this is, I understand, a real concern of yours and the concern of people in the Department in the early sixties. Is there a resistance in the Foreign Service as you see it in 1961-62 to the recruitment of blacks, to the recruitment of other minority groups?

RUSK: I think the resistance came from those who feared that the standards for entry and for promotion in the Foreign Service would be lowered on behalf of blacks and that this could lead to a deterioration in the quality of the Foreign Service. I myself personally on one occasion went through a good many of the Foreign Service examinations, the written examinations, to try to have some judgment as to whether these examinations were culturally biased against the black, whether they were geared to the elite Ivy League colleges, and whether the blacks that came in from, say black colleges would find the examinations distorted in some way. And I asked my colleagues to study that problem rather carefully, and I think some changes in the examination were made as a result of that inquiry.

But we had a problem that was bound to come up, and that is that if you are too relaxed in the admission standards for blacks into the Foreign Service, you run the risk of admitting some people who are not going to be able to perform and who will, in fact, fail on the job. And the failure of a black on the job is likely to be attributed by him to his blackness rather than to his inability to perform up to standard. So it was a very delicate problem to try to work on.

We found, for example, that--one year, I remembered, in taking the written examinations that no graduate of a Negro college passed the written examination. The few Negroes who passed it were Negroes from Harvard, Cornell, Berkeley, Chicago, elite institutions of that sort. Now, I must say

also that when a black passed the written examination, he was almost a surefire appointment because there was such a premium on blackness that a black would pass the oral part of the examination usually very promptly. We eliminated very few blacks, if any, in the oral examination. My guess is that more and more blacks will become qualified as the better institutions of learning are opened up to them and as they go through that experience in larger numbers.

I think one of our problems was that the black was not at all sure that the Foreign Service offered a real career for him, that he would run into discrimination and reluctance in the Foreign Service and that promotions would be hard to come by. So we had, on the one hand, to convince the qualified black that there was place for him in the Foreign Service and, at the same time, try to bring about more applications from blacks around the country.

We had at one time a grant from the Ford Foundation under which we could select a limited number of blacks and put them through a special year of training at one of the best graduate schools hoping thereby to qualify some who might not otherwise be qualified. That did not produce as many new candidates as we had hoped, and the Ford Foundation felt that the cost of the program far outweighed the actual harvest at the other end, so that particular effort was abandoned.

O'BRIEN: Well, this suggestion that you made that, you know, there was an Ivy League bias--well, over the years there has been the charge that the Foreign Service has had an Ivy League bias. Do you find this in the 1960's in either recruitment or in the process of promotion?

RUSK: I think that you will find that during the 1960's the base of recruitment of the Foreign Service expanded pretty widely throughout the country. We have hundreds of different colleges now represented in the Foreign Service, and there got to be a pretty broad geographical distribution around the United States of new entries into the Foreign Service. So I think the State Department has come a long way toward relieving itself of any Ivy League bias. I think the statistics will show that the Foreign Service is pretty broadly based now, from states and from many different types of institutions.

O'BRIEN: It's also been suggested that in terms of recruitment for high-level policy positions in the Department as well as the rest of government that there is an over-reliance on people out of the international law, international business community, particularly of New York. I guess Richard Ravere at one time wrote an article that summed it up in a tongue in cheek way, the so-called "Establishment." How do you react to this?

RUSK: I think there has been some element of truth in this charge that the State Department, and particularly at the higher echelons, has relied too heavily upon the Northeastern seaboard, but I think that changed to some degree during the sixties, perhaps didn't completely remove itself as a problem. You see, finding talent is a very difficult thing to do. Registers and lists of people and catalogues aren't really very satisfactory in turning up people who can do jobs. The way in which most people are recruited into government, particularly into the higher echelons of government, depends upon personal knowledge, acquaintances, experiences that those who are already in office have had with people outside. So it was natural that Secretaries of State would turn to institutions like the Council on Foreign Relations or the Foreign Policy Association or to the Ivy League or to others because those are the people they knew and those were also people who had had a good deal of interest in and experience in international affairs.

My own view is that, beginning in the Kennedy Administration, is that we are in danger of having a vacuum of people who have experience and knowledge of international affairs who can take positions of leadership. At the present time, for example, we are now losing a full generation of distinguished Americans who have taken an active part in foreign affairs over the last twenty-five years--I'm thinking of people like Robert Lovett and Jack McCloy and Averell Harriman and Ellsworth Bunker and Llewellyn Thompson and Chip Bohlen and others of that sort--because the years pass, and age simply takes care of it.

BEGIN SIDE II TAPE I

RUSK: We don't have a strong second generation of leaders in foreign policy matters ready to step in and take their place. You do have a few people like Cyrus Vance and Nick Katzenbach and Elliot Richardson and a few who

have been brought along. I think one reason for this is that during and immediately after World War II we gave heavy responsibility to relatively young men, and we developed, therefore, a generation of people who were experienced in the conduct of affairs. But then we stopped recruiting young men for heavy responsibility.

During the Kennedy Administration I remember sitting in the Cabinet Room with some of my colleagues and the President thinking about somebody for a particularly important job. One name came up, and the objection was raised that he was too young. Well, at that moment the individual was older than the President of the United States. So during the fifties and sixties we got out of the habit of recruiting young people for heavy responsibility, and so therefore we do not have a substantial body of forty-five to fifty-five-year-olds who can move in and take on in a natural kind of way heavy responsibilities in the conduct of foreign affairs. So President Nixon is having to recruit almost from a fresh generation, and it isn't easy.

O'BRIEN: Well, passing back over to your appearance before the Thurmond subcommittee in 1963, I understand you had a rather bitter exchange with Thurmond in regard to civil rights questions and some of the things that you were suggesting in regard to, particularly, the Russians taking advantage of some of the civil rights difficulties. What do you recall of that? [Interruption]

RUSK: I tried to make clear in my testimony that the foreign relations aspects of our civil rights problems in this country were secondary to the constitutional and domestic impact, that we should move on civil rights for our own domestic reasons to give effect to the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution. But then I went on to add that how we handle this problem did have a considerable bearing upon our relations with the rest of the world, that the white race was in the minority in the world and that the white race had to come to terms with the various colored races if we're to live at peace with other nations. I did point out, I think that the Soviet Union, despite its own lack of many civil liberties, made a great deal of propaganda out of the fact of discrimination in the United States and that we ought to relieve ourselves of that burden.

As a matter of fact, I've been generally surprised and pleased that these civil rights problems in the United States have caused us a minimum of difficulty in our relations with other nations. I think there are two reasons for that. One is that people elsewhere understand that the President, the Congress, and the Supreme Court are trying to do something about these civil rights problems in the United States. We're not in the position of South Africa with an official policy of apartheid; we're not in the position of Rhodesia, deliberately eliminating a very large part of the population from the political process. We're trying to do something about it, and I think there's been a general worldwide respect for the fact that we are trying to find answers.

Then I think there's a second factor, and that is that wherever there are races there are racial problems, and discrimination is by no means limited to the United States. Today in East Africa, for example, the blacks are trying to displace the Indians and are creating real problems with the United Kingdom over that fact. I remember a study--and I've never been able to find this study again, although I've looked for it--I remember a study that I think was made by the International Labor Organization on the subject of discrimination in employment on the basis of race or religion or national origin, and that report indicated that there was discrimination in every member state of the International Labor Organization. So I think that there has been a little restraint of international criticism because discrimination in fact is so universal a problem.

O'BRIEN: Well, during those years Martin Luther King is quite active, and I understand he makes an appearance in 1963 before the Human Relations Commission of the United Nations. Did you ever fear during those years or did you see any possibility of the civil rights problem in the United States becoming international or being taken to the United Nations?

RUSK: We were at times a little nervous about this possibility because there were a few--I think they were a very small minority--in this country who felt that this matter should be brought to the attention of the United Nations. But I think the thing that saved us from the experience of South Africa, for example, or Rhodesia before the United Nations

was the fact that it was the public policy of the United States to eliminate discrimination, that the government of the United States was trying to do what it could to answer these problems, and that for that reason there was no real steam behind the idea in the United Nations that the United Nations itself should take it up. I think that the efforts made particularly by our Presidents, deflated that possibility very effectively.

O'BRIEN: Did you ever talk with Martin Luther King at all about racial problems?

RUSK: I've talked with him only casually on two or three occasions. He and I were on the same platform once at a meeting somewhere and I exchanged a few words with him, but I never sat down and had a real talk with him.

O'BRIEN: How about other black leaders in those years, either more traditional black Negro leadership at that time, as well as civil rights advocates? Let's say Roy Wilkins . . .

RUSK: I personally have had talks with Roy Wilkins and Whitney Young and some others, but I must confess that most of my conversations were with whites who were trying to do something about it. But I was never waited upon by delegations of blacks, for example, who wanted to see me on this subject. I did meet on two or three occasions with groups of blacks who were interested in our policy in Africa and discussed that with them and also met with them to discuss equal opportunity matters in the Department of State, the matter of the treatment of blacks in the Department of State, but I did not have regular consultations with the black leadership on civil rights questions.

O'BRIEN: Is there a concerted effort that begins in the Kennedy Administration, in terms of clerical staff and some of the other positions in the Department, to recruit blacks for those from the Civil Service rosters?

RUSK: Yes, I think so. One of the problems we had was that in the lower echelons of the Department, in the lower grades, we had a disproportionately high number of blacks. Our problem was to try to upgrade blacks in the Department and to appoint blacks to some of the more senior jobs. I had one situation in my own office. I had two messengers while I was there, and I noticed that the messengers around the seventh floor were all blacks. I thought it would be a good idea to demonstrate that this rather low status was not reserved for blacks by appointing a white man as a messenger. And we did, and we found that that white man was pretty well frozen out by his black colleagues and was not able to perform successfully as a messenger.

I also tried to upgrade some of these people. I had a messenger that I tried to promote, but he was not able to pass the Civil Service examinations for promotion. He went just as far as he could go up the ladder in the absence of success on Civil Service examinations. I tried to get him to take outside schoolwork so that he could prepare himself to pass these examinations, but he was unwilling to do it. He had a family, and he was just too busy and didn't feel that it was worthwhile.

So the problem of upgrading is a serious one and I think can perhaps only be dealt with in the long run by finding people who have gone through a good educational experience before they come into the Department of State and start them somewhat higher up the ladder. It's very hard to move up the ladder from inside without educational qualifications.

O'BRIEN: Well, during the Kennedy years and shortly after, how are black ambassadors and black officials of other governments reacting to you and telling you in regard to things that are happening in the United States concerning race? I'm thinking of things like the University of Mississippi and the Freedom Rides and the huge play of publicity which is showing racial discrimination within the United States.

RUSK: In general, I found a rather warm and positive attitude toward the steps that were being taken to meet these problems in the United States. I think it made a deep impression, for example, when the United States Army was used to insure the admission of one black man to a state university in the South. This made a tremendous impact upon Negro diplomats in Washington. I think that the very fact that we were on the move was very well appreciated by the non-white ambassadors and made a deep impression on them.

O'BRIEN: Can you see any impact of the rather active role on the part of the State Department in working for black diplomats and in civil rights questions? Is there any repercussions from that on, let's say, appropriations in the Congress that you can see in those years?

RUSK: No, I don't think so. I don't recall at any time in any meetings I had with committees and subcommittees of the Congress any criticism coming from Congress in this direction. I think our work on behalf of colored diplomats was accepted as a perfectly normal and proper role for us to play here in the nation's capital. And we had the cooperation of Southern governors and Southern mayors and other officials with these various hospitality committees that were organized around the country, so that I never encountered what might be called "political opposition" to the effort of the Department of State to resolve this problem here in Washington or, indeed, in other parts of the country.

O'BRIEN: Is there opposition from any quarters that is directed at you, that you feel in those years?

RUSK: Well, I have no doubt that there were local citizens who did not like what we were doing, but I never heard from them, and they never came to see me, and I never felt any pressure from them.

O'BRIEN: Well, in finishing up then, I think the next place we should go is to the assassination, and I think the logical question is: What were your impressions when you were informed? You were on your way, as I understand, to Japan at that point.

RUSK: Yes. Several members of the Cabinet, including myself were on the way to Japan for a joint Cabinet meeting with the Japanese Cabinet. We got our first message when we were about one hour west of Hawaii. The first message was simply to the effect that President Kennedy had been shot, and there was no indication as to how serious it was or what the problem was. This was a news ticker picked up by our crew from a news broadcast. Well, we had telephonic communication with the White House, and so I immediately called the White

House to confirm the accuracy of this report. And it was confirmed by--I forget now with whom I talked--but it was confirmed, and I made the decision to turn the plane around and start back to Hawaii.

Then, before long, came the message of President Kennedy's death. It was, of course, the deepest kind of shock to all of us on board. We communicated with Dallas as to where President Johnson wanted us to come; we didn't know whether he might want us in Dallas or whether he wanted us in Washington, and he gave us the instruction to return immediately to Washington. So we stopped in Hawaii and refueled and made a nonstop flight from Hawaii to Washington in order to get back as quickly as possible.

But the greatest concern on my mind at that time was the question as to whether or not this assassination had international ramifications, whether it was the result of a conspiracy involving the Cubans or the Russians or anybody else, so that we made the most intensive search through the CIA and through the FBI to try to determine whether this was a conspiracy or whether it was the case of a man acting alone. And every piece of evidence that might have pointed toward a conspiracy was run down to the very end in order to ascertain what was involved because had a foreign government been involved in this situation, the matter would have been very serious indeed. It might even have been a question of war or peace.

Then, as Secretary of State, I had a considerable responsibility for seeing to the arrangements for the distinguished people who came from all over the world to attend the funeral. And I met a great many of them at the airport. And we had to work those arrangements out with the family and with President Johnson.

I was struck by one thing during that period, a rather minor thing, but we had many chiefs of state and chief of government, high officials here, royalty, others, and there could have been impossible problems of protocol in handling so many VIPs at the same time. Well, we had to work these arrangements out in a rather informal and helter-skelter way because the time was so short, and not one single question of protocol was raised by any of our visitors. They seemed to accept the circumstances and did not make any difficulties for us in any way. And I greatly appreciated their thoughtfulness in that, because otherwise it could have been a very difficult problem indeed.

O'BRIEN: Those of you that were on the plane going to Hawaii, and yourself, did you fear at that point any major problems besetting the United States government as a result of the assassination? Was there any speculation, particularly if there was an international conspiracy? Did you take any immediate actions at that point to insure that a peaceful transition of government would ensue if it was an international conspiracy?

RUSK: Now, that responsibility was, since we were in a sealed tube thirty-five thousand feet in the air, there were very severe limits on what we could do about it from the plane. But that sort of thing was the pre-occupation of the Under Secretary back in the State Department, who was acting Secretary, and Secretary McNamara, who was back here, and President Johnson. No, we did not try to take action from the plane because any action needed coordination with those who were on the spot exercising the real authority of government.

It was my practice when I traveled abroad to leave my seals of office at home; that is, I would expect the Under Secretary to be the Acting Secretary of State, and I always instructed him not to look over his shoulder at me if matters came up requiring him to act or take decisions. This was General Marshall's practice, and I never tried to run things in Washington when I was in distant parts of the world. I would be consulted by cable regularly when I was away, but I made it clear to the Acting Secretary that I expected him to be Secretary of State in every sense of the word. Indeed, when I was abroad, I followed General Marshall's practice and on occasion asked for instructions from the Acting Secretary of State because he was in Washington in charge of the Department with all his colleagues in the Department to assist him, he had access to the President and could consult the President, and so I regularly looked upon myself more or less as an ambassador at large when I, as Secretary of State, traveled into foreign countries.

O'BRIEN: Were there any real problems in this transition between the Administrations that came to you as Secretary of State in terms of policy in any geographic of political-economic area?

RUSK: The most important task we had was to insure that there would be an orderly succession of authority and that this be apparent to the rest of the world. It was very important that President Johnson take over immediately and make it clear that the government of the United States continued to function and that the nation still lived. So in our meetings with the high officials who came here for President Kennedy's funeral, we did on a number of occasions talk about important matters of policy with them while they were here and tried to convey the impression that President Johnson was President in every sense of the word and that there would be a continuity of policy and action on the part of the United States despite this terrible tragedy through which we were going.

I think that worked rather well; I think that succeeded. President Johnson, for example, met with all of the Latin American ambassadors during the first week in which he was in office and pledged to them his full support for the Alliance for Progress and other joint undertakings here in the Western Hemisphere. We immediately confirmed all of the ambassadors, of our own ambassadors, in their posts and tried to insure continuity by settling them down so that they would know that they were expected to continue to serve.

President Johnson went out of his way to try to continue in office as many of the Kennedy appointees as were willing to serve. He kept President Kennedy's Cabinet; he kept the ambassadors; he kept almost all the Presidential appointees, and indeed, the personal staff in the White House, until some of them for their own reasons decided to leave, so that he was determined to create both the fact and the appearance of continuity. And I thought he did so very effectively.

O'BRIEN: How do you see the assassination of an American President, and if you want to link that to other acts of violence, particularly assassination, in the United States, how do you see this as the way that its impact on America's image in the world, the way the rest of the world looks at America and follows America, particularly in the questions of foreign policy?

RUSK: I think we have suffered significantly as a nation in the eyes of the rest of the world through the series of assassinations we've had in the last ten years--President Kennedy, Robert F. Kennedy, Martin Luther King, Medgar Evers, things of that sort--because that creates far-reaching questions as to what kind of society we are, what kind of people we are, whether we can in fact organize our national life and operate it in an orderly fashion. I think our friends abroad grieved with us over these events because they clearly weakened the nation. I don't think our enemies tried to make much capital out of these assassinations; I think this would have been counterproductive from their point of view. As a matter of fact, I was told that Chairman Khrushchev burst into tears when he heard of the assassination of John F. Kennedy.

But there is no doubt that this has been a deep tragedy for the United States and that the history of these years has been a sad one. I think that when you look to the alternatives, I mean if John F. Kennedy had not been assassinated and could have worked out his full term and perhaps a second term and we had not had these assassinations, the mood and the health of the country would be much better than it is today. I think these assassinations have inflicted a grievous injury upon us.

O'BRIEN: Well, we've talked about a number of things today, and certainly in past interviews. Is there anything that you would care to add at this point that we perhaps skipped over?

RUSK: I think there's one comment that I feel compelled perhaps to repeat as I look back over the Presidency of President John F. Kennedy. The historian will want to be careful to draw a distinction between John F. Kennedy as President and what in later years were put forward as the Kennedy point of view. The historian will want to assess President John F. Kennedy on the basis of what he said and did while he was President of the United States and not confuse that with the views later expounded by Robert F. Kennedy and Ted Kennedy and some of the personal staff of John F. Kennedy who went back into private life, because President John F. Kennedy was a man who wanted nothing more than peace, but he was faced during his short term with some major crises. It was his fate to live through some very difficult periods, and

he had to take some tough decisions on the Berlin crisis of '61-'62, the Cuban missile crisis, and matters of that sort. He found the world in which he lived a pretty difficult and dangerous world, and he had to respond with courage and decisiveness and commitment to freedom, so that his record as President is one thing; the so-called Kennedy view of the late 1960's and early 1970's is quite a different matter. John F. Kennedy was a unique man, and he should not be confused with those who later call themselves Kennedy people.

O'BRIEN: Well, thank you, Secretary Rusk, for your thoughtful interviews on the Kennedy Administration.