

**Joseph C. Satterthwaite Oral History Interview – JFK#1, 3/02/1971**  
**Administrative Information**

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**Biographical Note**

Joseph C. Satterthwaite (1900-1990) served as the Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs from 1958 to 1961 and the Ambassador to South Africa from 1961 to 1965. This interview covers John F. Kennedy's interest in African affairs, the transition between the Eisenhower and Kennedy administrations, and Satterthwaite's time as the Ambassador to South Africa.

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Joseph C. Satterthwaite

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Oral History Interview

with

JOSEPH C. SATTERTHWAITE

March 2, 1971  
Washington, D.C.

By William W. Moss

For the John F. Kennedy Library

MOSS: Let me ask you, Mr. Ambassador, to tell us of your first contacts with John Kennedy when he was on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

SATTERTHWAITE: Well, Mr. Moss, my first contact was, I presume, early in 1959. The African bureau had been activated the previous fall. He was the chairman of the African [Affairs] Subcommittee of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee so I naturally asked to see him, and was given an appointment. I called on him in his large office in the Old Senate Office Building. He hadn't moved into the new one, partly, I assume, because he had such a large personal staff. He had lots of room up there. It was a very interesting talk; I think I was probably with him an hour. You probably know his method of work was a little unusual. The phone would ring, he would excuse himself, and I'd listen to most interesting conversations, one of which was with Jimmy Roosevelt [James Roosevelt], a long political conversation. He wasn't embarrassed at all, apparently, by my sitting there, and I was highly interested and amused.

MOSS: Do you recall the substance of that?

SATTERTHWAITE: No, I don't really. It was about California politics and Jimmy's role in the House. But in any event, the senator was interested in Africa.

MOSS: How did he express this interest to you? Do you recall?

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SATTERTHWAITE: Well, I knew at that time that his principal interest was in the problem of Algeria, this was one of my biggest headaches because the French had left Morocco and Tunisia by this time. But they had been for over a hundred years in Algeria and were determined that it was part of France, and they damn well were going to stay there. Of course, there was a very strong school of thought in the rest of Africa that they damn well weren't. At that time, one didn't see any possibility of persuading the French to turn over the country to the Algerians. In the first place, there were second and third generation Frenchmen born in Algeria, who considered it their home, in high positions in the government, and in the army more particularly. Well, in any event, we talked about Algeria, about South Africa some, but South Africa still was not one of my principal problems. That didn't occur until 1960.

MOSS: Do you recall anything that the then Senator Kennedy told you about his position on Algeria? What his feelings were?

SATTERTHWAITE: Well, I know that he had made a speech in which he was highly critical of the French position there. My position was that while I couldn't agree more, I didn't think that the speeches of this kind were helpful; in fact, somewhat counter-productive. I also, later on at his request, sent Bill Porter [William J. Porter] to talk to him about this because he was at that time the very able director of my Office of North African Affairs, and as Bill was from Fall River and had known the senator, they had a very friendly contact. Although he could have been an ambassador in one of the small African countries, he chose to be consul general in Algeria and then became the first ambassador there. But we're talking about President Kennedy.

MOSS: Let me ask you what John Kennedy's reaction to your approach to him was.

SATTERTHWAITE: Well, he was always very understanding and friendly. I don't know that I necessarily persuaded him; he didn't let on. And then, since we're talking about this, as far as I know he had only one meeting of the African Subcommittee. There may have been more, but this one was to my pleasure, completely off-the-record. There was no taping and no member of the staff present. If you'd like to hear about that...

MOSS: Yes, I certainly would.

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SATTERTHWAITE: I arrived a little early, as did Senator Wiley [Alexander Wiley], the only Republican who showed up, and he apparently didn't particularly look forward to being at the meeting under Senator Kennedy. Why, I don't know. But he said, "Well, he'll be late, you know, let's talk about Africa." We did. About the time Senator Kennedy showed up, he disappeared.

MOSS: Wiley disappeared.

SATTERTHWAITE: Wiley disappeared. Then it was a very interesting meeting. The senator who asked the most questions, aside from Senator Kennedy, the chairman, was probably Lausche [Frank J. Lausche] of Ohio. My recollection is that Senator Gore [Albert Gore] was present and curiously enough, Senator Wayne Morse, who wasn't a member of the subcommittee but apparently he thought he was.

MOSS: He reportedly has a habit of doing that.

SATTERTHWAITE: Anyway, they looked it up, and Senator Kennedy asked him to stay on. Just why he was there, since he had the Latin American subcommittee [Subcommittee on American Republics Affairs], I never knew, but he was interesting and asked some questions. This lasted maybe an hour. And again, we talked about Algeria.

MOSS: Do you remember the substance of positions taken?

SATTERTHWAITE: Yes. Well, the Democratic position especially was – maybe also Wiley's but not so much so – why didn't the French see what was happening and get out, and, particularly, why the hell don't? ... Oh, excuse me.

MOSS: That's perfectly all right.

SATTERTHWAITE: Why don't you people in the State Department put pressure on the French? Well, I explained – and this, of course, was an off-the-record meeting – and this, of course, was an off-the-record meeting – that as long as the Pentagon and the President took the position that the soil of France was necessary for the defense of Western Europe – and this was still a very live issue in '59 – the pressures that we could put on France were limited. The pressures that the African bureau could put on the European bureau were also, therefore, limited because naturally, while we were all working for the same president and the same secretary of state, the Bureau of European Affairs took



the position that we couldn't put too much pressure on France, and so had Foster Dulles [John Foster Dulles]. I saw him off at the airport on one of his trips to see DeGaulle [Charles A. DeGaulle] – there was a little bit of confusion – but I had a last minute word with him. I was told afterwards that he had told someone on his plane flying over to Paris, “Does Satterthwaite really think that I'm going to talk to DeGaulle about Algeria with all these other things that I have in mind?”

MOSS: That's interesting, this last minute, last word thing. Who's the chap who's written a book on getting the last word?

SATTERTHWAITE: Really, I don't remember seeing it.

MOSS: One of the members of the Johnson [Lyndon B. Johnson] staff has written a book on the technique of getting the man's ear.

SATTERTHWAITE: Yes, and this was particularly true of, of course, I gather, of President Johnson. Maybe it is of others as well.

MOSS: Well, this is a bit off the subject. Let me move on then. Oh, let me ask you if you got any responding appreciation of your problem from the senators?

SATTERTHWAITE: Yes, I remember Senator Lausche, who was a bit, you know, complicated, but whom I had appeared before on the main committee a number of times – I don't remember Senator Kennedy being present at the meetings of the whole committee when I appeared – saying, “Well, I can see that it's a lot easier for you, isn't it, and it makes it more interesting for us, to have a meeting which is off-the-record than when you have that typing thing going on there.” What do we call those?

MOSS: Stenotype.

SATTERTHWAITE: Stenotype. Well, that's just of incidental interest. That was a very frank meeting and, of course, it was long ago. It was off-the-record, and as far as I remember, I kept no notes of it.

MOSS: Okay, fine. Let me move on then. You were still in the State Department there in the African bureau when Kennedy was elected.

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SATTERTHWAITE: Yes, and now let me tell you in that connection that I had a number of telephone conversations with him. I never was in his office again

after the time I've described, but soon after Congress convened in January 1960, I called him and offered my services. With the charm which he always had, he said, "Well, you know, you're going to see that I'm going to be a little too occupied with other matters this year to devote much time to African affairs." As far as I know, he didn't devote any time personally to them. He sent a number of his friends and people formerly in high position to make trips in Africa.

MOSS:                       Such as? I know Harriman [W. Averell Harriman] went later after the election.

SATTERTHWAITE:       That's right, yes. Harriman, among others, came to see me – the ones he sent, not all but some he sent to me for briefings either before or after or both.

MOSS:                       Who, for instance, did he send?

SATTERTHWAITE:       It's awful not to remember, but there was one person very high up, in the Truman [Harry S. Truman] Administration who went, but I just haven't been able to recall who it was. I know that some others went, such as his former roommate, who, I believe became senator from Massachusetts.

MOSS:                       Ben Smith. [Benjamin A. Smith]

SATTERTHWAITE:       Was that his name?

MOSS:                       Yes.

SATTERTHWAITE:       I didn't see him. But Kennedy never tried to cut me out, as he understood that I was a career officer and completely nonpolitical.

MOSS:                       Okay, now shortly after the election, one of the initial appointments that he made was Governor Williams [G. Menned Williams] as assistant secretary for African affairs.

SATTERTHWAITE:       Yes, it was the first one he made to a presidential position requiring confirmation by the Senate.

MOSS:                       Right. Do you recall how this was received in the Department?

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SATTERTHWAITE:       Well, I recall rather vividly since I was the first person displaced in the government, I was on my way down to appear before the House

African subcommittee, and I think it was “Skipper” White, who was the man who was with me – it might’ve been one of the others – who broke the news to me. Of course, I was most fascinated to learn that I’d been filling a position “second in importance, to none in the administration,” or if not importance, at least in influence, because no one had ever told me that during the two and a half years I’d been there. In any event, I wasn’t too concerned about my future because I was a senior foreign service officer, and I’d been there two and a half years, and I’d assumed that they would want someone new in the African bureau, which at that moment was very, if not hot, at least had great glamor and politically was attractive. So I wasn’t too surprised except at the appointment maybe, of the person who was selected. But in any event, I spent the morning at the subcommittee which was always very friendly – of course, it was organized by the Democrats – and Barrett O’Hara, the chairman, had been an especially good friend, and they all wished me well.

MOSS: Excuse me. Why were you surprised at the appointment of Williams? I can understand generally, but could you put it specifically?

SATTERTHWAITE: Well, I don’t know. Maybe I shouldn’t have been. But I suppose most of the surprise was that the first appointment in the State Department, or in the government outside of his own staff, President Kennedy should announce would be the assistant secretary for the African bureau, since one normally appoints a secretary of state first and consults him.

MOSS: Okay, now continue.

SATTERTHWAITE: Right. The rest has to do with Governor Williams so I won’t go into that.

MOSS: Well, this is one of the things we’d like to get into. I’d like to know, for instance, how Governor Williams came in and began to establish himself as the man in the department.

SATTERTHWAITE: If you want to know, it was quite interesting. He was my governor. I still vote in Michigan during all these years, and the Detroit papers, especially the *News*, had some fun looking up my record since my family came to Michigan in 1831, but that’s neither here nor there. But I had an

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official luncheon to attend. I was invited for luncheon by some bankers from Bank of America [National Trust and Savings Association of California] at the F Street Club and I had to go directly there from the House hearings. I was given an urgent message to call my secretary, Mrs. Geneil Maska, as soon as I got to the F Street Club. As I did. She told me, “Governor Williams has asked for an appointment to see you.” “Well,” I said, “all right.”

And she said, “I’ve given him an appointment for three o’clock.” So I said, “I’ve given him an appointment for three o’clock.” So I said, “That’s all right.” This luncheon lasted longer than it should have, and, of course, there was a certain amount of excitement.... Apparently, the whole State Department was quite interested in this appointment. Never before had anybody heard of an assistant secretary being appointed before the secretary of state or the under secretary either. Anyway, I got over there maybe five minutes to three – and perhaps you’d better take this off-the-record – but anyway...

MOSS: We can adjust it afterwards because we do send the transcript to you for your editing after we...

SATTERTHWAITE: Well, this is neither here nor there. You decide because it’s interesting. On my arrival Mrs. Maskasiad, “Well, you have another problem and I didn’t know what to do about it. Governor Williams is outside, and Clark Clifford has phoned to tell me that you mustn’t see Governor Williams before you talk with him.”

MOSS: Oh, oh.

SATTERTHWAITE: So I got him on the phone and recalled that we’d had some rather difficult conversations in the past over Palestine (when I was the director for Near Eastern and African affairs.) That was during the Presidential campaign of 1948. Anyway, he said, “You know,” – I won’t describe his language, by anyway – “Governor Williams, you know, should have consulted me about coming to see you since I have been designated to coordinate the foreign policy and foreign activities by the president-elect during the pre-inaugural period.” “Well,” I said, “you know, he’s here, and so I’m going to receive him.” He said, “Yes, I realize that but tell him that I talked to you and said it was all right.” Well, of course I did.

MOSS: It’s not like Clark Clifford to be left out of things.

SATTERTHWAITE: No. Well, anyway, it was quite a show. He wasn’t particularly interested in me. Let me explain.

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Governor Williams is a very colorful and likable character, but he’s a political being primarily. So naturally, the correspondents were there in numbers. We had a brief meeting, and then I said, “Bring your correspondents in.” And we had a three-ring circus because in another section of my office, I was awarding, as I recall, a tennis trophy to the winner of the diplomatic tournament. Anyway nobody understandably was paying much attention to me as they shouldn’t since I was a dead duck by this time. After that the governor wanted to see all of his new office, and it wasn’t very big as yet because, you know, when you start a new bureau, you have to get the funds. We were gradually building it up. Anyway,

I showed him around. It was all very friendly. He particularly wanted to take a trip to Africa (in the interim period before the inauguration.) I said I'd do what I could. That didn't meet with the approval of Secretary Herter [Christian A. Herter]. But I discovered afterwards that it was met with even less approval by the Democratic leadership because they said, "We can't quite see anybody going out before the President is inaugurated on a trip of that kind, representing the new administration." So it didn't work out. His appointment, of course, could not be sent to the Senate until after the inauguration on January 20, and he wasn't confirmed for ten days. Anyway, I offered after the inauguration.... I said, "Come on and take over my office anyway." But he very frankly said, "Well, Chet Bowles [Chester Bowles] tells me I'm having enough trouble with confirmation without moving into your office." So he didn't.

He and Dean Rusk and Bowles and others had been occupying a first floor wing of the new State Department. Then little by little, as confirmed they moved into our offices and we moved into theirs. By that time, we called it "skid row," where we were.

Since I'd worked with Dean Rusk closely in the past, I was very glad that he was the new secretary of state. He'd been director of what was then United Nations affairs when I was director for Near Eastern and African affairs. I actually saw him during this waiting period a number of times; it took quite a long time for my new appointment to come up. But we really must get back on President Kennedy and Governor Williams. I was asked to carry on, and I did for those first ten days after the inauguration and attended the staff meetings. So I saw the new State Department leadership in its early days, which was very interesting.

MOSS: How did it strike you? What things impressed you in this transition period?

SATTERTHWAITE: Well, I just knew that with Dean Rusk there with his expertise and background, who would only be carrying

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out the President's wishes anyway, all would be well. And everything was fine. I was also highly impressed also with George Ball. Chet Bowles and I were neighbors when he was ambassador to India and I was ambassador in Ceylon, and he'd come down there, and I also had had friendly relations with him. I found the staff meetings exceedingly interesting with the new group. Of course, Rusk had attended so many by this time that all was fine.

My first trip back to Washington after I was appointed to South Africa was about a year later -- well, it was May of the next year. I went down to the staff meeting, and Dean Rusk signaled for me, and put me on his right, which he really shouldn't have. So there was a very friendly feeling all the time. As far as the career officers were concerned, there was no, you know, real problem. But I think that the only one of the assistant secretaries who stayed on for some time was Foy Kohler in European affairs. He was exceedingly able, and later went to the Soviet Union, as ambassador.

MOSS: How did the new team of Williams and Wayne Fredericks taking over look to you? Did you have much opportunity to observe this?

SATTERTHWAITE: Actually, my deputy, Jim Penfield [James K. Penfield], stayed on for some time. I told Governor Williams in our visit that foreign service officers, as part of our profession, were trained to be loyal to their chiefs. If they change administration, they needn't be disturbed. But Williams apparently felt he needed what he called a bridge between himself and the foreign service, and he brought Wayne Fredericks in. As long as Jim Penfield was there, Fredericks was a special assistant. But Jim realized, I am sure, that Governor Williams wanted Wayne, who was a very fine and able man, incidentally, as his deputy. So Jim was appointed ambassador to Iceland. From then on, Wayne was for a long time the deputy; all the time, I believe, that the governor was there.

MOSS: Now, how did your appointment as ambassador to South Africa come about?

SATTERTHWAITE: Well, that was the last place I expected to be appointed to because after Sharpeville, in January 1960, under instructions to be sure -- but, I think, the South African embassy with some reason assumed I had the responsibility for the wording -- we issued a statement which went somewhat beyond normal diplomatic usages.

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MOSS: It was certainly a distinct departure from the previous being very careful with South Africa.

SATTERTHWAITE: Yes, that's right. As a result, perhaps, my agrément was delayed. Well, in any event it was quite a long time before I learned I was to go to South Africa. In the meantime, I was technically special assistant to the secretary, because they had to find a means of paying us, you know, those of us career officers who were waiting new appointments.

MOSS: Did you have any functional responsibility?

SATTERTHWAITE: No. No, I was in touch with the bureau, but I didn't attend their meetings or anything of that kind. So I was highly surprised when Chet Bowles called me up and said, "Joe, we've got a good post for you, South Africa." Well, I won't go into that, but, anyway, I told Dean Rusk that if the South Africans had any questions about my appointment, please not to send my name in for the agrément, but he did. The South Africans did in fact question the appointment, and it was held up for some weeks.

MOSS: Excuse me. You're using a term that I have not come across.

SATTERTHWAITE: The agrément is a diplomatic term. Before an ambassador can be appointed, you always request an agrément. I don't know why we use the French word for agreement; that's all it is.

MOSS: Ah, okay, fine.

SATTERTHWAITE: You always ask for the agreement of the other government before the name is sent to the Senate and before, hopefully, any publicity comes out. Anyway, in my case this didn't leak. In the end, in spite of my pleas, Dean Rusk apparently told the South Africans that it was take me or no one.

MOSS: Do you know the motivation for this?

SATTERTHWAITE: Yes, well, it was because of the developments after Sharpeville and also testimony they had heard me give. I assume they were present understandably when I appeared before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee to discuss South Africa and I'd taken a rather strong line on one or two of those occasions.

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MOSS: I'm asking about the motivation of Rusk and Bowles in insisting that you particularly take the appointment. Was this designed to put pressure on the South Africans, or what?

SATTERTHWAITE: It was that, perhaps. But also I think that Rusk and maybe President Kennedy, may have felt that I would be able to be a stabilizing influence.

MOSS: In what way?

SATTERTHWAITE: Well, between the pressure to take an extreme line against the South African government and the pressures to try to persuade them to change their policy.

MOSS: I note that you were approved by the Senate on the seventh of April, and on the twenty-fourth you had a meeting with the President and Governor Williams.

SATTERTHWAITE: Yes, and that's most interesting. As soon as my appointment went to the Senate, I knew there'd be no trouble about confirmation since I'd

appeared before the foreign relations committee many times and had good relations with the senators of both parties. An appointment with the President was asked for me by the bureau, but apparently the department didn't include Governor Williams' name with the request, I don't know what happened. But anyway, knowing Senator Kennedy, I assumed he would want to see me, I was somewhat surprised when I didn't get the appointment. The day before I was to leave, I saw Governor Williams at luncheon. He said, "I'll fix it up." It appears -- and this is not being critical of him -- he had apparently told the White House that none of his new ambassadors should see the President without his being present. Well, I was very happy to have him present, and we had an exceedingly interesting meeting. Again, the phone rang and the President carried out interesting conversations without any embarrassment. Naturally, the substance of our conversation was about South Africa except when he was talking about other things to Governor Williams.

MOSS:                               What sort of other things was he talking about to him?

SATTERTHWAITE:       Well, let me tell you one interesting thing. With his charm he said, "Oh, by the way, Mennan," -- he called him Mennen -- "will you tell Chet [Chester Bowles] that

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Jim Michener [James A. Michener] would like to be an ambassador. Perhaps being more used to such things, when Governor Williams didn't react, I commented, "And I assume somewhere in the Pacific." Well -- I probably shouldn't have told this, but since I have -- later on in August, Governor Williams had a meeting of chiefs of mission in Lagos, Nigeria, which I attended. Two of the top career people in the department, who would've known if any steps were ever taken to appoint Michener, were there, and they'd never heard of it. I refrained from asking both Williams and Bowles -- Bowles had a meeting right afterwards -- so I refrained from asking them even though I had luncheon with the two of them, what happened about this appointment because I was never sure that Governor Williams had told Chet.

MOSS:                               That arrow may never have landed.

SATTERTHWAITE:       Well, in any event, that meeting with the President was exceedingly interesting. For me, the most important was that Kennedy, with Governor Williams present said, "You can tell the prime minister of South Africa that I'm not sending you out there to point your finger at them, (the South Africans) but that they must realize the problems we have with their racial policy and especially with the other African states and also the Latin American states."

MOSS:                               All right. Now on the business of your position as ambassador to South Africa, as I read the files and the books on the period, I see



great activity at the United Nations, particularly with respect to the apartheid and the treatment of the Indians and the question of the old mandate for South-West Africa and the things that it centered on.

SATTERTHWAITE: Those are perennials from the early days of the UN.

MOSS: Right. You have Governor Williams in the State Department and Governor Stevenson [Adali E. Stevenson] at the UN, taking a very sympathetic view from the black African's point of view; you have, on the other hand, the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Defense Department taking a rather conservative view...

SATTERTHWAITE: I see you've done your homework.

MOSS: ... and I wondered where this put you?

SATTERTHWAITE: Well, it put me in the middle.

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MOSS: Of course. And how did it feel?

SATTERTHWAITE: Well, and furthermore the Department of State was divided. Governor Williams understandably had strong personal feelings on the injustices of separate development or apartheid. Wayne Fredericks also had strong feelings, but he was a little more pragmatic. Wayne, Governor Williams' deputy, had been with the Kellogg Company in Battle Creek, and had helped Governor Williams in some of his gubernatorial campaigns in Michigan. But he was a topflight businessman apparently, and he opened up the very big Kellogg [Corn Flakes] Company business in South Africa, established a factory, in spite of which I could never get him to come back there. He made many trips to Africa. He even once was at the airport at Johannesburg when I was in Cape Town because, you know, we have two embassies and move back and forth.

MOSS: Pretoria and Cape Town.

SATTERTHWAITE: But I never could get him to visit me, which I very much wanted him to. But my big problem was, you see, that I arrived in South Africa in Cape Town toward the end of May, and a week later they had Republic Day in Pretoria. This was undoubtedly a watershed in the history of South Africa because the Afrikaners in the Nationalist government were not at all sure that they would win the vote on whether or not to leave the commonwealth -- oh, no, they already had -- and become a republic.

MOSS: I didn't realize it was that close.

SATTERTHWAITE: It was close, yes. Before I got there, the vote was taken: they were leaving the commonwealth, and they were to become a republic a few days after I presented my credentials.

MOSS: I was going to say, did this cause a problem in adjusting your credentials?

SATTERTHWAITE: Well, not really. The man who had been governor-general and who was to become the first president, nice old Blackie Swart [Charles R. Swart]. He was called Blackie; and was a most colorful man. Anyway, he'd been an extra in Hollywood among other things, earning his way through college in the United States. He had to resign as governor-general one month before it became a republic so he could be appointed the president. So I presented credentials to be the Queen of England through the acting

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governor-general who was the chief justice. When I left Washington they hadn't quite determined what the new name would be: whether, let's see, the State Republic of South Africa or just Republic of South Africa, but, I think it was State Republic in the end. So I also had to have credentials sent out to the new president. And after the ceremonies on Republic Day, all of us, the old ambassadors (and I was the newest one,) had a formal presentation in the President's house in Pretoria with the President. My new credentials had arrived, but they were just handed to the chief of protocol. They made no point of it.

MOSS: So it was a general thing.

SATTERTHWAITE: Yes, a formality, yes.

MOSS: Well, let me get back to the original question and ask you what kind of difficulties in this thing... What particular difficulties do you recall that this split between the African bureau and the European bureau in the State Department and so on....

SATTERTHWAITE: Well, first let me say that the fact that they knew that I knew that they had raised questions about my appointment actually facilitated my work with the government.

MOSS: The South African government.

SATTERTHWAITE: It was with the South African government. Once I got there they went out of their way to be cooperative. Now I did have some

problems. Of course, a great many. Not so many in the early days, but my worst problem occurred the minute the South African parliament adjourned maybe at the twentieth or twenty-fifth of June, and I made my way up to -- by car -- to Pretoria with my wife and daughter. We spent the night in Bloemfontein, and I had a telephone call waiting for me from Glenn Wolfe, who was the counselor and my deputy and had flown to Pretoria. He said, "I have some news for you. Dr. Eric..." -- gosh, what's happening to my memory. Anyway, "The foreign minister wants to see you tomorrow."

MOSS: Louw [Eric H. Louw]? What, L-O-U-W?

SATTERTHWAITE: Dr. Eric Louw, of course.

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MOSS: Louw it is. I wondered how you pronounced that, Louw.

SATTERTHWAITE: L-O-U-W, who was one of their real old-timers, a combination of politician and professional. He'd been in parliament, but he'd also been a diplomat for years. "Well," I said, "I can't make it tomorrow, but I'll see him the next day." What he wanted to see me about was that Governor Williams was making his first trip to South Africa, and one of the places he wanted to come most, I assume, was South Africa. The gist of Dr. Louw's message when I saw him was that officially we were to tell Williams "it's not convenient for us to receive him now because we're having elections" -- which they were, but they were several months away -- but the real reason was all these speeches he had made, and Louw had them on his desk. Well, I protested. I said never before that I knew of had an assistant secretary of state been refused a visa by a government. After all, isn't it to your advantage to receive him? But they wouldn't budge. So I had to dash back and send off a high priority message to Williams not to release his itinerary to the press which was coming out in a few hours: you know, "Message follows." Then I gave the full explanation. He never got to South Africa. I think that Governor Williams felt for some reason that I should have succeeded. I couldn't have, I know. When they make up their minds, that's it, these Afrikaners.

MOSS: I imagine the famous "Africa for the Africans" statement really set them on edge.

SATTERTHWAITE: Well, that was the particular one; yes, that's right. So he had to revise his itinerary. He never again asked me directly to help him get a visa. I understand he went through other channels, Governor Williams, but they ever gave in. I told them time and again this was a great mistake. They should've let him see South Africa. They could have shown their great Baragwanath Hospital to Mrs. Williams, who's been interested in public health. It's the biggest hospital in Africa for blacks. But it didn't do any good. I think it was Eric Louw personally, who made this decision, and perhaps with the support of the prime minister.

MOSS: I noticed that things begin to get rather sticky towards the end of 1963 particularly. Let me begin this with the fact that I note you came back to Washington in July of 1963 and there was a meeting that included George Ball, Harlan Cleveland, Governor Williams, Burbeck [William H. Brubeck],

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both Bundy's [McGeorge Bundy and William P. Bundy], Frederick Vreeland, yourself, and the President.

SATTERTHWAITE: And Wayne Fredericks was there.

MOSS: Was he?

SATTERTHWAITE: I don't think Bill Bundy was, but I recall that "Mac" Bundy certainly was.

MOSS: Bill Bundy's on my list, on the White House appointments book.

SATTERTHWAITE: No, I don't think he was there.

MOSS: He may not have made it.

SATTERTHWAITE: But I can't be sure. I know Bill well. I think I'd have remembered. Bill was the assistant secretary for international security affairs (in the Pentagon.)

MOSS: Deputy assistant, yeah. Nitze's [Paul H. Nitze] assistant.

SATTERTHWAITE: Deputy, that's right. I don't recall his being there. But the purpose of this meeting was to discuss Julius Nyerere's visit. This was on a Friday, I'd just arrived on home leave, and the White House meeting was to discuss the visit of Julius Nyerere. Well, somebody -- maybe everybody -- realized that Nyerere's principal pitch to the president would be, "Why don't you make South Africa change it's racial policy?" Well, I was there -- since I've been telling tales out of school already -- I was out on a debriefing session at CIA [Central Intelligence Agency] when I got a message that morning that I was to attend this meeting in the afternoon. So I finished my meeting and came back. At luncheon I got a message that George Ball wanted to see me, and I went right down, and he asked me if I'd seen the briefing paper which the President was getting. I hadn't, and I saw a few, two or three things, I would've like changed. "Well," he said, "Here, you're the ambassador to South Africa and haven't been shown this?"

MOSS: Was this the Rostow [Walt W. Rostow] thing, the big Rostow study on South Africa?

SATTERTHWAITE: No, no, no. It was just a briefing, a routine briefing paper. Every time that you have a meeting of that kind, a briefing paper goes to the President

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from the bureau involved. Well, let's recall that this was really Bill Leonhart's [William Leonhart] show -- he was the ambassador to Tanzania -- not mine so maybe it's understandable they didn't put in so much about South Africa. But in any event, it was because of this that George Ball decided to go over. George was there. Governor Williams also, of course, it was his meeting, but a good deal of the time was devote to South Africa. I got the impression that President Kennedy, who was always interested in South Africa, maybe devoted more time to South Africa than Governor Williams would've desired.

MOSS: What sort of things were you discussing about South Africa?

SATTERTHWAITE: Their racial policy.

MOSS: This was the racial policy primarily.

SATTERTHWAITE: Principally, of course, what to do about it and to what limits could we go to.

MOSS: And what sort of conclusions would you come to?

SATTERTHWAITE: In the meantime, you see, I had just given the first multiracial Fourth of July reception in Pretoria. The treason trials were going on in South Africa and this was the reason why pressures had got so great. I assume that I took the usual position I had in my telegrams that, yes, we could make all these protests, but we're not going to get anywhere by these extreme resolutions at the United Nations. Nevertheless, we did go ahead in August with a resolution cutting off our supply of arms even though we had a confidential agreement with them.

MOSS: Well, this was what I was going to ask you. Certainly the confidential negotiations on the submarines must have complicated your resolution.

SATTERTHWAITE: That's right. Now, I was the negotiator, and while that was only confidential, there was a supplementary exchange of notes which

were secret. Governor Stevenson, of course, made the statement at the U.N. As things got more difficult, I think his position.... I think he had a better understanding of my position than Governor Williams did, actually.

MOSS: I note that on the eighteenth of September you fired back a cable that had a series of very hard

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questions that you wanted answered. Are we really abandoning our strategic interest in South Africa for the mileage we can get out of the UN?

SATTERTHWAITE: Well, I see you've had access to material which I don't have now without going into the State Department to look it up, because I maybe have been too cautious. Many of my colleagues haven't carried out the regulations in this respect, but I kept none of these papers myself. But it's true, I did send out a telegram.

MOSS: I wondered how this complicated your life as ambassador.

SATTERTHWAITE: Well, I had a rough time for two or three months toward the end of '63 because of the conflict within the State Department and at the United Nations. But on the whole, I had the feeling that Governor Stevenson was more realistic than Governor Williams about the facts of life out there. Incidentally, while I was still assistant secretary, I was asked to have a meeting to brief Governor Stevenson and Governor Williams and to introduce them to my staff which they were inheriting. Governor Williams asked me if I'd mind if Governor Harriman would attend since he wasn't very busy. I was delighted; I'd known him very pleasantly in the past. So this was quite an interesting meeting, Governor Harriman and Governor Stevenson being present. I had arranged it so Governor Williams would be co-chairman, but he came in a little late. But in any event, it was a very interesting meeting. So I did have this one briefing session at which Governor Stevenson was present.

MOSS: One more item I notice here that I'd like to get your comment on particularly. I note that Foreign Minister Louw protested to you rather vigorously about Robert Kennedy's receiving Patrick Duncan. Do you recall this occasion?

SATTERTHWAITE: This wasn't very important.

MOSS: I wondered whether it was important or not...

SATTERTHWAITE: No.

MOSS: ...because from the cable it sounded as though Louw was really steamed up.

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SATTERTHWAITE: He was, but I was used to this.... He was a real old curmudgeon, but we got along together well.

MOSS: Did you feel that, for instance, Robert Kennedy should not have done this?

SATTERTHWAITE: Well, I explained he's a United States senator; he can.... No, no, he was attorney general; oh, that's right.

MOSS: Attorney general, right, right.

SATTERTHWAITE: Well, it was a little unusual. Anyway, I...

MOSS: And since he had been heavily involved in the civil rights activity in the United States and so on cast another aspect of.... I wondered what advice you sent back on the basis of...

SATTERTHWAITE: I can't recall, but, of course, it didn't do Patrick any good because he went into exile shortly afterwards. It would've been better for him not to have played this game if he really wanted to stay in South Africa and try to influence events. You see, his father had been governor-general. He was from a great family, very likable, a very fine man. I had a number of meetings with him.

MOSS: Did you have advance notice of Duncan's calling on Kennedy?

SATTERTHWAITE: No, not that I recall. No, I hadn't recalled this, but this is certainly true. And it was an interesting episode. You see, I had been concentrating on President Kennedy, not on those aspects of my work.

MOSS: Let me ask you this. We're drawing to a close on the things that I wanted to get particularly; I think the rest of it is pretty much on the record either in the cables or in what's just been written and so on. Let me ask you if you have any other things that you want to add or any impressions that were taken from that period, should be on the record.

SATTERTHWAITE: Well, my impression was that I knew who was whom in the department. Of course, Dean Rusk, I'd known well. Let me put it this way. Occasionally, when

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I got instructions which I thought were unwise, I would send a cable marked for the secretary. Sometimes I won out and sometimes I didn't. If you're confronted with this position and you're a career man either you carry out your instructions or you should resign. Well, there was no occasion for that. I carried out my instructions. On one occasion at least, the events proved that my advice was good, but we won't go into that. I carried out these instructions. I know at times from background that the things were taken to the White House. I always had a feeling that I had an understanding friend in President Kennedy at the White House on my problems -- let's put it that way -- and I think the events bore it out. His death was a great tragedy. I was giving a dinner -- remember the difference in time in South Africa -- for the former ambassador of South Africa to the United States. Wennie du Plessis [Wentzel D. du Plessis], on that twenty-second of November, was it, 1963. The phone started ringing. The first call was from the Belgian ambassador who had been listening to BBC [British Broadcasting Corporation]. My deputy Ed Clark took the call. So then the calls kept coming in. Naturally, my guests were highly puzzled. One of the justices of the supreme court was there, a number of diplomats, and old friends of du Plessis. My wife didn't know at the other end of the table what was going on. So I told Ed Clark that we wouldn't make any announcement until it was confirmed that President Kennedy was dead. Well, that came in just before the dessert course. So I made this announcement and some of the guests started crying. The South African officials really had a great respect for President Kennedy. I tried to persuade them to have some dessert, but they wouldn't and left. Then from that minute, I had no rest. I immediately got my staff together. We started making arrangements for a memorial service later and what to do the next day. Telegrams started flowing in. So it was not only a sad occasion but a hectic one.

We had a very fine memorial service in the Catholic cathedral. The apostolic delegate, unfortunately, Archbishop Joe McGeough [Joseph F. McGeough] an American was absent. (He and I were onomasticos in Spanish). We had the same first name so we used to celebrate the nineteenth of March, St. Joseph's Day, together. He was a wonderful man, and he'd been very close to Pope John because he'd been with him all during the war in the Vatican. Unfortunately, he was out of the country. His very fine number two an Italian Monsignor carried on the service. The fly in the ointment was that in spite of the fact that the Russians and the French -- even DeGaulle, had gone to Washington for the funeral -- President Swart did not attend our memorial service. The senior member of the government, Paul Sauer, was sent to represent the government; Eric Louw came representing the foreign

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office. Then Louw left Pretoria. This was the time of year when they started moving to Cape Town and Louw was from the Cape. He disappeared. So I made an informal but very strong representation about this, off-the-record, to the prime minister and informed the department. (Of course -- I mean off-the-record in the sense that it was never publicized.) Prime Minister Verwoert said he was very sorry about this. But what hurt me most was that Louw issued a



statement -- the English language press was highly critical of this without my taking any steps -- in Afrikaans and the translation got mixed up. There was a transposition of a common. It should have read, "After all, everybody knew what President Kennedy's attitude toward our racial policy was." But it got mixed up and came out much stronger than was intended. Well, this I accepted when they showed me in Afrikaans what he'd actually said and the mistake that had been made. But as a result, I didn't go to say good-bye to Louw when he was retiring after all these years. I was so upset by this that I did not pay a farewell call on him. Much later on, he wrote me a cordial note and I replied in this vein. But I never saw him again. So this was a rather sad end. As far as the South African government was concerned, they'd made a mistake in judgment. It was probably because of Dr. Louw, but it might have been the prime minister himself. Also, of course, what might have had something to do with it, although I can hardly believe it was that the service was held in the Catholic cathedral.

MOSS:                         With the Dutch Reformed business.

SATTERTHWAITE:       The Dutch Reformed business. Well, this isn't a very pleasant note on which to end, but let me say again that I was very pleased to serve as ambassador under President Kennedy. He'd given me instructions which I thought were sound, and I always felt that if we ever came to a kind of crisis in which he would need to intervene that he would take an understanding position. Actually, things were always worked out, so far as I know without his having to take a position. I don't recall his making speeches, if any, that embarrassed me. Your record may show it more than mine.

MOSS:                         Well, thank you very much indeed, Mr. Ambassador.

[END OF INTERVIEW]