

Philip M. Kaiser Oral History Interview – JFK#1, 09/02/1966
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Biographical Note

Philip M. Kaiser (1913 - 2007) was the United States ambassador to the Republic of Senegal and to the Islamic Republic of Mauritania from 1961 to 1964. This interview focuses on the Kennedy administration's foreign policy in regard to Africa and John F. Kennedy's meetings with President Leopold Senghor of Senegal and President Ould Daddah of Mauritania, among other topics.

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Philip M Kaiser– JFK #1

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Oral History Interview

with

PHILIP M. KAISER

September 2, 1966
London, England

By Joseph E. O'Connor

For the John F. Kennedy Library

KAISER: It's pretty hard to recall precisely, but I did meet Kennedy casually when he first came to the Congress. I was in the Labor Department. I was in the Labor Department then and. . . . He came when? In '46, did he come, or '48? When did President Kennedy come to Congress? '46? At that time I was in the Labor Department, and the Secretary of Labor from July 1948 was Maurice Tobin, who had been the Governor of Massachusetts and Mayor of Boston and obviously had ties with Kennedy. And I remember meeting Kennedy in that context, but only on a casual basis.

I also remember on one of my trips to London during the late forties when I saw Hugh Fraser, who was a classmate of mine at Oxford and was also an old friend of Kennedy, he suggested that I get in touch with the Congressman upon my return to Washington and convey to him Fraser's regards. I saw Kennedy after I returned from my trip to England and chatted with him a bit.

I then didn't make real contact with him until the late fifties. There was some contact in 1952, interestingly enough at the Convention, at the Democratic National Convention, and it relates to Tobin, who had a hard time--he had a very difficult time. He was a warm, friendly man, Tobin, by the way, and abused, I think, considerably and unfairly. But that's another story. I think the character who is supposed to be Tobin in The Last Hurrah is a gross caricature. Either consciously or unwittingly, it showed a complete misunderstanding of the man. But he was a very generous guy. And he had courage. He was the first man--people forget this, but Dean Acheson doesn't forget it--he was the first man in the [Harry S] Truman Administration, the first Cabinet member, to come out publicly against [Joseph R.] McCarthy. Now this took a lot of guts. You're a young man . . .

O'CONNOR: No, I remember that. Particularly . . .

KAISER: Took a lot of guts, particularly for a Boston Irishman.

O'CONNOR: Oh, yes indeed.

KAISER: And he was very loyal to Acheson. I was Assistant Secretary of Labor for International Affairs, and it was largely because of the relationship between Acheson and Tobin that Acheson and I became good friends. We have been friends down through the years. Well, at that Convention he was just baffled by . . .

O'CONNOR: Maurice Tobin was.

KAISER: Maurice Tobin was baffled by the whole situation. [Adlai E.] Stevenson, you know, just wasn't his kind of guy. And he was also disconcerted by Jack Kennedy's support of Stevenson--in '52 Kennedy vigorously supported Stevenson--disconcerted by what this might mean in relation to the situation in Massachusetts. I remember him telling me--I don't know if this is of any interest as an aside, but I remember him saying to me (Tobin) that, "God, look. We got a situation. . . .

Our ticket is going to consist of a divorced man running for president, a bachelor running for Governor ([Paul A.] Dever was a bachelor), and a bachelor running for the Senate in the state of Massachusetts." I also remember one day on the way out to the stadium--I think it was the day Stevenson was nominated--his turning to me very charmingly and saying, "He's not a Rhodes scholar, too, is he?" He wasn't a Rhodes scholar, too, and I just said, "No, he just went to Princeton."

O'CONNOR: It was almost as bad, I suppose.

KAISER: Almost as bad. Where did you go to school?

O'CONNOR: I went to Notre Dame.

KAISER: Notre Dame. I recall that.

It was very interesting, this business of Tobin and the Convention of 1952. Tobin was delighted that Kennedy was elected Senator, but I recall there was some anxiety as to what this might mean in terms of his own position in Massachusetts. Tobin died a year later. He was still a young man when he died. He was fifty-three years old.

The next time I saw, I recall seeing the Senator--I was away from Washington from '54 until '58--was in '59 when I brought Pepe Figueres [Jose Pepe Figueres Ferrer] to see him, the former President of Costa Rica. I was his host when he came to Washington for a visit of about a week or ten days, and one of the people I suggested he see was Senator Kennedy.

O'CONNOR: Was there any particular reason you suggested it?

KAISER: Well, the Senator was becoming increasingly important, interested in foreign affairs, the kind of fellow that Figueres would be interested in talking to.

O'CONNOR: Let me just stop you for a minute. I want to find out how much is being picked up of that noise out there and how much . . . [Interruption]

KAISER: I might say, to go back for a minute, that I recall the first person mentioning to me the possibility of John F. Kennedy becoming President was Tobin or Tobin's administrative assistant. One or the other said, "This is the man who's going to be the first Catholic to become . . ."

O'CONNOR: When in the world is that?

KAISER: About '52.

O'CONNOR: Oh, that early?

KAISER: Yeah, after the election. You know, after his election, or maybe even earlier, maybe even earlier. Very interesting.

Well, in any case, going back, I took Figueres in to see Senator Kennedy. Who else did Figueres see at that time? He knew [Paul H.] Douglas. He went to see Douglas. I took him to see Douglas. I took him in to see [Hubert H.] Humphrey. I don't remember whether I took him in to see Lyndon Johnson. But Senator Kennedy was not too impressive on that occasion. It wasn't one of his best performances. There wasn't anything like his performances--to take a sharp contrast--it wasn't anything like his performances when the President of Senegal and the President of Mauritania came to see him.

O'CONNOR: Yeah, I'd like to ask you about those later.

KAISER: We'll come to that, because there are some really fascinating little bits, I think, amusing and fascinating.

He was preoccupied when I brought in Figueres. This was '59. And he had a call--I remember this; it's interesting that I recall this--he had a call while we were there from [Clinton P.] Clint Anderson. We both offered to get up to go, and he said, "It's all right to stay," which probably was a mistake on his part. Quite obviously what Clint Anderson was saying to him, to Senator Kennedy, was, "I want your vote on turning down Lewis Strauss as Secretary of Commerce," and it was clear from the conversation we heard that the Senator hadn't quite made up his mind as to how he was going to handle this. He was stalling, really, asked for more information and said he'd think about it and talk to Anderson about it later. He did, by the way. . . . As a result of this phone call, I was particularly curious to see how he voted, and he did vote against confirmation, went along with Clinton Anderson.

Then I hardly saw him at all after that, not really until the--in the campaign I saw him just briefly, once or twice. I saw Bobby [Robert F. Kennedy] during the campaign much more often.

O'CONNOR: Were you involved in the campaign at all?

KAISER: I worked with the National Citizens for Kennedy. I was then a professor at American University in Washington. And I really didn't see the President again until I was nominated to be ambassador.

O'CONNOR: How did you become involved in the Citizens for Kennedy?

KAISER: Well, it was quite simple, really. Byron White and I are very old friends. We were at Oxford together. And he was appointed to be the chairman, and he asked me to come in and help. And that was the way I got to know Bobby.

O'CONNOR: Robert Kennedy.

KAISER: With whom I've always been really, really impressed--from the very beginning.

O'CONNOR: Well, that's surprising. People talk about being impressed now. Often they were impressed unfavorably in the beginning.

KAISER: I had a favorable impression, actually, the first time we met. Byron introduced me to him and had already told him, apparently, that he wanted me to be one of three or four top assistants to help him run the Citizens operation. I was one and [Joseph F.] Joe Dolan was another--you know, Bobby's administrative assistant now.

I really talked to Bobby at some length the first time in an airplane trip from Boston to Chicago very early in the campaign. They had organized a registration stimulation tour: Bobby, Byron White, Congressman [Frank, Jr.] Thompson were along, and [Lawrence F.] Larry O'Brien. The first meeting was in Boston. I was then trying to get some vacation in New Hampshire, Peterborough, and they asked me to come to Boston. Actually, I was put in charge of the organizing work for the Citizens in Illinois, then Wisconsin and Michigan. They asked me to go as far as Chicago where, after meetings with top Democrats in the Midwest, I was dropped off to help get things started in Illinois.

At that time, you may recall, there was a good deal of concern about the Jewish vote so far as the Kennedy candidacy was concerned, mainly because of the old man and the reputation he had of being anti-Semitic, particularly during his performance here in London in his ambassadorial capacity. I had talked to Byron about this when we stayed up the night before just chatting about a variety of things. Byron said, "Why don't you talk to Bobby on the plane to Chicago about this"--the next day. And I replied, "Do you really mean that?" He said, "Sure. Talk to him about it." I'm Jewish, and it might have been a bit awkward.

O'CONNOR: Nothing like going to the source.

KAISER: I was particularly sensitive about this, not about myself but in terms of what other Jewish people were saying about their attitude toward Kennedy because of his father. I sat down next to Bobby in the plane and spoke frankly to him, and I was very impressed with his reaction.

O'CONNOR: Well, what was his reaction?

KAISER: Well, he defended the old man, but he was very hardheaded about it in the best sense. He said, "Yes, we're aware of this. What do you suggest we do?" I gave him a few suggestions, and we talked quite frankly about it. Bobby told me about contributions the old man had made to charity, to Jewish hospitals. Nobody ever knew about it. I said, "Well, is there any reason that it should be kept secret?" He said, "Well, no." I asked him, "How long ago?" That was important. He answered, "It was a respectable piece ago." And there were other things we discussed that might offset the unfavorable attitude of Jews toward the father which was affecting adversely the son's candidacy. Mind you, the old man was no angel, obviously.

O'CONNOR: No, not by any means.

KAISER: But it was impressive. It's not a nice thing, even if you're a tough-minded guy, for a son in a situation of this kind, when somebody is telling you, "There are a lot of Jewish people shaking their heads over Jack Kennedy because they feel your father is anti-Semitic," but Bobby took it very well. He recognized the problem was real, and was receptive to suggestions for dealing with it.

As a matter of fact, in my view the guy who ultimately solved the problem was Norman Vincent Peale, the Protestant minister from New York City.

O'CONNOR: Oh, really? Why?

KAISER: Well, when he made that ridiculous mistake of establishing an organization of Protestants in Defense of the Constitution (I don't remember the exact name) in order to stir up the anti-Catholic bigots, the Jewish people reacted exactly as you would expect. They found it easier to rally behind Kennedy, because the bigots were supporting [Richard M.] Nixon. The day after Peale announced the formation of his organization, Nixon should have bought out all of the TV stations, TV networks . . .

O'CONNOR: And disclaimed that?

KAISER: . . . and made the goddamnedest anti-bigotry speech that's ever been made in American history. All the bigots were going to vote for him anyhow. And he should have gone on TV and said, "Look, I don't want any vote from any bigot, and I disassociate myself from bigotry." It always surprised me that they didn't have the savvy to do something of that kind. What the hell did he have to fear? What was an anti-Catholic bigot going to do, go vote for Jack Kennedy? And, by the way, this is not retrospective; I said it at the time, I recall.

Well, I first saw John F. Kennedy after he became President before I went off to take up my assignment as Ambassador to Senegal and Mauritania. The President received four of us--four new ambassadors who were going out to our respective posts at the same time. And I stumbled as a result of the quick way in which his mind worked because at that time there was a very interesting issue involving, of all places, Mauritania. I don't know whether--there's no reason why you should know anything about Mauritania.

O'CONNOR: Conflict, you mean?

KAISER: No. No. I'll tell you about it in a minute. I'll tell you about it right now. There was a very interesting issue involving Communist China, strangely enough. Mauritania is a chunk of desert bigger than Texas and California put together.

O'CONNOR: What is it, 700,000 square miles or something like that?

KAISER: Something like that, yes. It has a population of about a million people.

O'CONNOR: Where is it?

KAISER: Eastern Sahara Desert. The southern part is the Senegal River bed, fertile land where the blacks live, and a lot of Moslems, too. Morocco still hasn't recognized it, claiming that it's a province of Morocco. Morocco was then one of the four countries, members of the Casablanca group. Those were the left, radical states in Africa: Mali, Ghana, Guinea and Morocco--Morocco, in spite of the fact that it is ruled by a king and is a pretty reactionary country. The Moroccans were playing that now common tactic of: You're a conservative domestically; you try to handle your left wing by being radical on foreign affairs.

The question before the U.N. [United Nations] at that time, one of the questions before the U.N. coming up that fall--this was July; I'm now talking about July 1961--was Mauritanian admission to the U.N. The Moroccans were violently opposed to it because this would give Mauritania the imprimatur of independence. The Moroccans turned to the Russians, the Soviets, and asked them to veto the Mauritanian application in the Security Council. The Russians played the Moroccan game the year before, if I recall correctly. What I'm about to say I recall very clearly because I was involved in it. The Russians vetoed it the year before, but then there was quite a hostile reaction on the part of a lot of the African states, particularly the black African states who wanted Mauritania admitted. [Moktar] Ould Daddah, the president of Mauritania, is a Moor, but his country has a fairly large black population, and Moktar has political ties with the twelve Francophone states, the twelve African states that were carved out of the former French territory. And the Russians began to get a little uncomfortable about this spot they were in, and, cleverly, they came up with the proposition that "We will not veto Mauritania if you, the United States, or anybody else does not veto Outer Mongolia."

O'CONNOR: Oh, yes. I do remember that now.

KAISER: So when I came into the president's office he was in that, you know, that bouncy mood that was so typical of him: his mind was moving ahead of his words. He went through all four ambassadors and had a pertinent question for each of us. He turned to me and said, "Now, of course, you've got this question of Outer Mongolia." And I sort of slipped. I said, "You mean Mauritania." He didn't articulate it as clearly as I just have, but he mumbled something about Mongolia. He didn't say Outer, and I thought he was confusing. . . .

O'CONNOR: Mauritania and . . .

KAISER: . . . Mongolia, but I was wrong. I was really embarrassed because he was really. . . .

O'CONNOR: He was skipping a step.

KAISER: He was skipping a step in his mind, which was right. The only thing important about Mauritania at that particular moment . . .

O'CONNOR: Was the vote.

KAISER: . . . was the Outer Mongolia link at the U.N., and he knew what the problem was. And then he spelled it out a little bit, clarified it.

Actually, we got Mauritania in. We got President Kennedy to have the U.S. abstain, and we got (which was more difficult) the Nationalist Chinese to abstain from vetoing Outer Mongolia. There was quite a tug of war there for a while. Taipei didn't want to veto at first, but then these twelve African states, Francophone states, put the pressure on us by saying, "If you don't abstain, and if you don't get Nationalist China to abstain as well, we'll vote for admitting Red China." And so this became the basis for . . .

O'CONNOR: A large tug of war over the country of Mauritania, the Republic of Mauritania.

KAISER: But it was a big issue.

O'CONNOR: Sure.

KAISER: The vote on Red China. And I remember, incidentally, it was one of the fun things about being accredited to two presidents [Leopold Sedar] Senghor and Ould Daddah, who had ambivalent feelings about each other. I had to be careful because they often talked to me about each other.

O'CONNOR: You mean Senghor and . . .

KAISER: Would talk about Ould Daddah and Ould Daddah would talk to me about Senghor. And on this particular issue, after we got Ould Daddah into the U.N., I received a report that Senghor was weakening on his commitment, was thinking of abstaining on the vote on admission of Communist China. I talked to Ould Daddah about that, and he said, in that wonderful Arab way, when a deal has been made, "Look, don't worry. This deal was made, and we'll have all the votes." He was right. Senegal voted against Red China's admission. He has since changed, Ould Daddah.

O'CONNOR: What do you mean?

KAISER: Well, he's thrown out the Nationalist Chinese and he brought in the Chi Coms [Chinese Communists], which is part of the design to prove to the rest of Africa that he's not a client state of France, that he's independent. Well, so that was that first--I don't know whether I'm going into too much detail on this.

O'CONNOR: No, I'm enjoying this.

KAISER: Or how useful it is. Then, the next time when I really had a good visit with President Kennedy was in October of '61. I went to Dakar in July and. . . .

O'CONNOR: How did you happen to be chosen, by the way, as ambassador? How did that come about?

KAISER: Well, I think it was [Chester] Chet Bowles' idea that I go to Dakar; it was Bobby's idea, I think, that I become an ambassador. And I was a little baffled at first about the choice of Senegal, but Chet did very well on these ambassadorial appointments, as Arthur Schlesinger points out in his book, A Thousand Days. Bowles had flair and imagination about these things. He realized that Senghor was an intellectual and an old French socialist. And he put this together, and he said, "Well, now, let's send him Phil Kaiser. He speaks French. He's had all this experience in the international labor field. He can talk to Senghor in Senghor's language. He knows about French socialism." (I used to have long discussions with Senghor about [Jean] Jaures and [Leon] Blum, who were his two heroes, and it really worked. We developed a very interesting and fruitful relationship, as will emerge when we talk about Kennedy and Senghor).

When I came back in October, it was to accompany Senghor during his visit to Washington. It was a one day visit, and it was fascinating because I really saw President Kennedy in action with these African chiefs of state for the first time. And he was superb. I'll give you . . .

O'CONNOR: That's what everyone says, but I've yet to see some specific . . .

KAISER: I'll give you something as an example.

O'CONNOR: I'd like to hear that.

KAISER: Senghor, of course, was very excited about the prospect of seeing Kennedy for all the reasons you know, but for the additional one that he himself was a Catholic in a 90 per cent Moslem country. He had a warm feeling about this young, vigorous man who'd caught the imagination of the Africans. It all began with that Algeria speech.

O'CONNOR: Yes. I was just going to ask you why had he . . .

KAISER: Well, because Ould Daddah mentioned that to me, I'll get back to it. Arthur Schlesinger has it in his book.

O'CONNOR: Yes, he mentions that specific thing, but I wondered if there were any other reasons or . . .

KAISER: Well, the youthfulness, the sense of world concern and, most important, on the policy level . . .

O'CONNOR: Angola vote or something like that?

KAISER: What?

O'CONNOR: The Angola vote.

KAISER: No. The most important factor on the policy level was--and this was really a basic change, wasn't it--was the acceptance by Kennedy, in contrast to [John Foster] Dulles and [Dwight D.] Eisenhower, that genuine neutrality was perfectly fine for us.

O'CONNOR: Well, how had they been able to sense that that was his feeling?

KAISER: Well, you know, they read his speeches. And then when they began meeting him; they saw this to be the case, that he meant what he wrote. And they also saw it in terms of our aid program. You see, we weren't asking anybody to sign on the dotted line, to commit themselves politically to everything we wanted to support, for example, every policy we pursued at the U.N. or anywhere else. And this was terribly important.

And then there was the personal thing, the fact that they really felt that President Kennedy was concerned about them, because he had this marvelous. . . . Well, he had this great curiosity, and it was genuine. There was nothing phoney about it at all; otherwise, he wouldn't have spent that much time on Africa. On the other side, one should mention that in America there was a great wave of interest about Africa at that particular period among the intelligentsia, among the liberals, among the Negro elite. And there was a feeling that the Eisenhower Administration hadn't handled it right, so that there was a natural vacuum to fill.

Now the first thing about that Senghor visit, which was amusing, was that I had cabled ahead that it would be a good idea to get Harvard to invite Senghor to give a lecture . . .

O'CONNOR: And read his poetry.

KAISER: . . . and read his poetry, because he's a very distinguished poet, very cultivated. He has done an interview for the Kennedy Library Oral History. I'd love to hear it. He has done an interview on his relationship with Kennedy. You probably know it. Have you seen it? Have you read it?

O'CONNOR: No, I haven't read it.

KAISER: And what had happened was that there was a person called--what's his name? Melady? Do you know him? He works for a Catholic group interested in African affairs, and he had worked out a deal for Senghor to receive an honorary degree at a special convocation at Fordham. I received a positive response to my request about Harvard, but rather late, about two days before Senghor left, and he was only going to be in the States four or five days. And when I brought up the Harvard visit, mentioned the fact that it had now been fixed, he said, "I can't do it. My schedule is full." And I reported that back to Washington. I didn't particularly care at that stage whether he went to Harvard or not. This is a non-Harvard man talking.

I got a reply back, "But this is impossible." Probably Arthur drafted it. I've never asked Arthur, but undoubtedly Arthur Schlesinger arranged the Harvard meeting. "It's all set up. I have all the French professors lined up to listen to his lecture, all the students who speak French. It's the President's university. Senghor must go to Cambridge for this meeting." So at the airport when I said good-bye to Senghor, I pulled him aside, and I said, "You really have to go to Harvard. This is the President's university, and Harvard means a great deal to President Kennedy, and it would be très embetant pour le président if you didn't turn up at Harvard." Well, he wasn't going to embeter President Kennedy, so he called over the foreign secretary, the Foreign Minister, and said, "Look, you work this thing out at Harvard. See that it's included in my schedule." And he went on to Morocco, which was the first stop in his trip abroad. Apparently he did a beautiful job at Harvard, and loved it. There was a good, friendly story in the New York Times about it, too.

When Senghor arrived at Andrews, the President went out to meet him there, President Kennedy. And the two Presidents and I got into the helicopter together to fly to the White House. I acted as interpreter. The first thing President Kennedy mentioned was, "I understand you were at my old university yesterday. Well, that opened the conversation nicely. And that little ride was amusing, and Kennedy was really at his very best. Both of them were very cute. He said, "Yes." Senghor said, "I enjoyed it very much. I read them some of my poetry and discussed it with them, and there were a lot of young men and women there who obviously understand French." Of course, there's one fundamental requirement for all these African-Frenchmen for being a cultivated person: you've got to talk and understand French.

Then, he said, "But last night, Mr. President, I was at Fordham, and there were hundreds, hundreds of Jesuit priests there." Kennedy smiled and said, "How many were there?" "Well," he said, "I don't know exactly, but there were several hundred." "And you mean you got out with your clothes on?" Kennedy asked, grinning. It was hard for me to translate this, and when he got it, Senghor roared with laughter. Kennedy said, too, "You must have been a very courageous man to enter into that kind of assembly."

Then Senghor said, "Mr. President, I've read before coming over, I've read your book La Strategie pour la Paix, and I was very impressed." He added, "I'm sorry that I didn't read it in English"--he knows English Senghor; he's translated some of our poets, Negro poets, into French--he said, "But I wanted to read it quickly." And then Kennedy replied, "Well, thank you." "But, you know, Mr. President, I've been in office now for eight months and one thing I've learned: it's much easier to write about these things than to act on the basis of what you've written."

There was a charming little bit, too, when Senghor expressed awe at the Lincoln Memorial and the President immediately called the pilot and said, "Fly slowly around the Lincoln Memorial. Let the President have a good look at it." We did just that, and it was an inspiring sight.

After landing on the White House lawn, we went directly into the President's office. The talk between the two Presidents began immediately.

O'CONNOR: You were still serving as interpreter at this point, I suppose?

KAISER: Well, no, we had a professional interpreter by then. And who was there? I guess [Dean] Rusk or [George W.] Ball. I'm not sure. Rusk may have been away. And [G. Mennen] Soapy Williams and myself, their Foreign Minister, their ambassador. The two Presidents already had warmed up, in just those few minutes. . . . How long does it take to fly from Andrews to the White House? About seven minutes? They already had a feeling of rapport. They were two eggheads, and both had a good sense of humor.

The first thing Kennedy said to Senghor in the White House was, "Now, look, Mr. President, I've a very important decision to make in regard to an African country and I need your advice." You can see why the African Chiefs of State went for Kennedy. He said, "I need your advice. We've got this Volta Dam project in Ghana. It involves a big chunk of aid for this fellow, [Kwame] Nkrumah." And he added, "You know, I'm sure, what the problem is with this man. And what's more, I must be frank with you: if I give this man this much aid, it means that other African countries won't get as much as they might otherwise have received."

Senghor said, "Mr. President, I appreciate your asking me for my advice. Let me start by saying to you that there's no question in my mind that what Nkrumah needs more than anything else is a psychiatrist." I'll never forget this, a psychiatrist. And he added, "Et un tres bon psy-
chiatrist," a very good psychiatrist. Senghor added, "I know the character. I visited him last year, a state visit. I could tell you about some of the stunts he pulled to prevent me from talking to the university students . . .

[Interruption] . . . at the University of Ghana who were not friendly to Nkrumah, and Nkrumah had seen the text of my speech," said Senghor, "earlier in the day. It was a liberal one, and it had in it ideas and views that he didn't find congenial. He did manage to sabotage my appearance by touring me around until it was too late for me to see the students. But," said Senghor to the President, to President

Kennedy, "in spite of this man's instability, in spite of his radical politics with most of which I disagree, you, Mr. President, have no alternative in my view" (that is, in Senghor's view) "but to go along with this project, particularly if, as I understand, it's economically viable, because otherwise the West African peoples and people in Africa generally will accuse you of using aid for vulgar, ideological and political objectives. And even though it does mean that, as you pointed out, that other African countries will get less aid, it's my firm conviction, it's my belief that you should approve the Volta River project."

This was the main point I recall in that conversation. There were other matters that came up in what was a general tour d'horizon of the whole African scene. And what impressed itself on one's mind, as indicated by the specific example I gave, was the degree of interest and concern that President Kennedy showed, first, in the overall African situation and, secondly, in the way in which he made Senghor feel that what Senghor felt and thought, what his views were about that specific Ghanaian issue as well as the other overall issues in Africa, were to him, to President Kennedy, terribly important. And, naturally, this had a big effect on Senghor.

O'CONNOR: Did Senghor talk to you about this meeting at all after?

KAISER: Oh, yes. We'll come back to that. At lunch there were a couple of amusing incidents which are worth reporting. It's a little bit of background, a little bit of the wonderful charm of President Kennedy. After the lunch he gave a toast to the President in the usual manner, and his opening remark, I remember, was that he knew of some chiefs of state who wrote poetry but never had the courage to have it published, but he was delighted that there was one chief of state who not only wrote it but had it published because it was such great poetry and it enriched the world culturally.

And then Senghor got up. Kennedy's speech was interpreted into French, of course. There was a professional interpreter there. Then Senghor, who speaks impeccable French--he's one of the great French speakers of the world, a master of the language, and this is recognized by Frenchmen--he got up and in his usual manner gave a perfect little response, just delightful, and the French was elegant. And there's another beautiful thing about his French: It was not only always elegant, but it was always simple and clear. And Kennedy, who had had nothing but a few years of high school French, was simply delighted with the fact that he could understand it. And this apparently had never happened to him quite before, so when the interpreter got up to interpret Senghor, he jumped up, President Kennedy just spontaneously jumped up and said, "I'm terribly sorry, but we're not going to have President Senghor's remarks interpreted. If there was anybody here who couldn't understand this elegant, beautiful, wonderfully clear French, then it's their misfortune." And . . .

O'CONNOR: I guess Senghor appreciated that. That was delightful.

KAISER: You see, the irony was, of course, that Kennedy forgot in the exuberance of the moment that there were people there who'd never had even any high school French. Obviously, if you'd never had any French at all, you couldn't possibly understand in spite of the fact that it was so elegant and clear and comprehensible.

Then afterwards, after we got up from the table, there was a marvelous exchange involving Walter Lippmann. The President said to me, "Bring over Mr. Lippmann. I want to introduce him to President Senghor, and I want them to chat a little bit." I brought over Lippmann. And Senghor, who is no slouch himself, you know, had a bit of the art himself, said, "Ah, Monsieur Lippmann," he said, "after all these years I have the honor of meeting you. Needless to say, I have read you regularly down through the years, and thanks to you I've been enlightened on many difficult and complicated issues. My views have been clarified, and I've been able to understand things that otherwise would have been beyond my comprehension." And Lippmann began smiling like a boy who'd just been given a big, big ice cream cone, at which point Kennedy said, picking up Senghor's line he said, "Well, President Senghor, I know exactly what you mean. The trouble is, though, that Mr. Lippmann writes his column only three times a week. On Tuesday, Thursday and Friday, when his column appears, life is very simple for me. I know what decisions to take. I know what to do. The day goes easily and smoothly. But those other days," said Kennedy, "when there's no Lippman column, I'm lost. I flounder. I don't know the answer."

O'CONNOR: Oh, brother.

KAISER: But the beautiful part was they did it, they did it both very straight. Lippmann just absolutely. . . . The grin was one . . .

O'CONNOR: I can imagine. I can imagine.

KAISER: Well, after that, to become serious now, after that life became a lot easier for me. There was a feeling about Kennedy on the part of Senghor that was very personal. He sensed that this man was interested in, really interested in their problems, understood their policy of nonalignment, wasn't pushing them too hard on the political front, didn't want obvious quid pro quos for aid given. And the President did another thing.

BEGIN SIDE II TAPE I

KAISER: The President did another thing in the course of this day. He made it clear--he was very good at that--that I was his boy, gave the feeling that I was . . .

O'CONNOR: A genuine representative.

KAISER: I was his representative. And this became, later on, invaluable in one or two dramatic ways, one in particular very important way. And there is no exaggerating the importance of this kind of feeling at the top level if it's properly used. Now in fairness, by the way, in all fairness, Johnson had visited Dakar, Senegal.

O'CONNOR: Yes, I know. Just before you'd gotten there.

KAISER: First visit he ever took abroad as Vice President. And he had gotten them some aid and done a good job and done a really good job on the visit, made a big impression. This had kind of opened the way up for this good feeling. I can't recall, I'm sorry to say, whether the Vice President was at that luncheon. I have a feeling he wasn't. He may have been out of town. In fact, I'm pretty sure he was away because he didn't turn up, either, for the dinner that Senghor gave. He had a previous engagement--he may have been abroad, but he certainly wasn't in Washington.

After Senghor's visit with Kennedy, my job as Ambassador became easier. About four hours of President Kennedy's time was involved--a talk of about an hour and a half in the White House and a luncheon of a couple of hours. From the point of view of [Kenneth P.] Kenny O'Donnell, I'm sure it was a complete waste of time. But on the basis of this expenditure of three or four hours, Senghor, a bright, very articulate, civilized, cultivated Chief of State, had the feeling that he had a special, personal relationship with the president. And I gather from other ambassadors that almost all the Africans who came to see him . . .

O'CONNOR: Received that feeling.

KAISER: . . . had that same feeling. And I know it from my second President, Ould Daddah of Mauretania. Now then when I went back to Senegal after Senghor's visit, on several occasions--you couldn't overdo this, but when the issue was important enough--I would say to Senghor, "Your friend, President Kennedy, needs your help," or, "You can't do this to your friend Kennedy." And he was always very responsive. I didn't overdo it. I had to be careful.

There was an incident, though, in reverse which was interesting. Senghor gave before his big party congress a long speech, a couple of hours speech, in which he used the line that [Charles] de Gaulle uses--de Gaulle is one of his great heroes--he used the line that de Gaulle uses often now, and that's equating the United States with Russia, the Soviet Union. In his speech before the party congress Senghor talked about "les deux grandes," the two great powers. And he made no differentiation between the two, the Soviet Union and the United States. As a matter of fact, as I recall now, it was in that context in which he said these two represented the new imperialism. He was trying to suggest that France was no longer imperialist, this was no longer its advocacy because it was no longer powerful enough.

I got annoyed about the speech, and I felt I had to go and see Senghor about it. Fortunately, I had a couple of goodies to give him. When you're going to be a little rough with a chief of state, it's always a good thing to say, "Well, I've got three or four things to talk to you about." And then you add, "Well, that road you wanted, I think we can help you build it. This other matter. . . ." And then finally you come to your real point: "Well, then, Mr. President, as long as I'm here, I want to mention your speech before your party. I've read it, and I must say I'm very disappointed. I can't help feeling that, on the basis of some of the things you said, that I've been a failure here. I'm afraid I haven't represented my country very well if a man of your intelligence and your understanding of political philosophy, of the difference between nations, of history, if you can say as you did, that there's no difference between the Soviet Union and the United States of America. Obviously, I haven't been able to explain satisfactorily what the United States stands for, what our traditions are, what our aspirations are. Certainly, you don't indicate that you understand, otherwise you couldn't have made the kind of statement you did."

And he replied, "Ah, Excellence, you may have a point. The trouble is that I drafted a good deal of this speech before President Kennedy was inaugurated and before I realized what kind of a man he was."

I replied, "Wait a minute. Monsieur le President, this is not related to President Kennedy. We're talking now about something fundamental in American history and tradition. One of your favorite words is humanisme. Humanism is a basic strain in American history that goes back to Thomas Jefferson, one of the greatest figures in American history." And I said, "This is not just a question of President Kennedy. President Kennedy is in that tradition. This is something that goes very deep in American culture." And I added, "By the way, have you ever read any Thomas Jefferson?" "No." "Well, Mr. President, it's very difficult really to understand America without having read people like Thomas Jefferson, particularly a man like Jefferson, who was such a Francophile, whom you would enjoy so much." And then I went on to explain early

American politics with particular emphasis on the impact of the French Revolution. Amazing, Senghor knew nothing about Jefferson. This is a literate Frenchman, really, an African Frenchman.

O'CONNOR: Yes, I would expect Jefferson would have been the one man he would have read.

KAISER: Yes, but he hadn't. Then I really poured it on him. "And have you ever read John Dewey?" I said, "You're a man who goes to the source of things, to the heart of things." And I told him a little bit about John Dewey, the great philosopher of American pragmatism, undoubtedly the greatest philosopher produced by America. And I added, "Do you know what his politics were?" Well, Senghor didn't know. I said, "He was a socialist. He used to call himself a socialist." Senghor said, "Oh, come on. How is this possible?" "Well," I said, "this is what we mean when we mean when we talk about the American pragmatic society, the many variations in it." And he said, "Well, can you get me some translations of Dewey?" And I assured him, "We'll take care of that." At the end he stated, "All right. Let me reread my speech. It hasn't been published yet. And when it's published in the party paper I'll make a few changes. I don't agree with everything you've said, but I think you have a point." I didn't expect him to, but he did make some changes, and he did work in a favorable reference to Kennedy.

But it was interesting, this exchange between us. This was a kind of reverse twist, you see, where you try to. . . . And I didn't let him get away with it, which was the right thing to do. You know, I couldn't allow him, an intelligent man, to have the notion that liberalism in America, or humanism, was something that just emerged like suddenly with John F. Kennedy.

O'CONNOR: I suppose his reason actually for making that sort of speech, though, was to continue the stance of neutralism.

KAISER: Nonalignment. Non aligne. That's right. That was the whole idea. And also, you see, he was attacked always by young radicals for being too pro-French, and he used the speech as a means of dealing with that problem. He made the point that there was no longer any French imperialism. That evolved from his attack on the deux grands, which he contended were the only imperialist powers in the world today.

Well, the real test came, of course, during the Cuban crisis. I was instructed in an urgent message from President Kennedy to get the Senegalese to deny the Russians the use of Dakar airport. There were two airports in West Africa that the Russians wanted to use. They needed them desperately if they were going to fly equipment and personnel from Moscow to Havana. Dakar and Conakry in Guinea. And I got the instructions and the full text of the president's speech before he delivered it, the famous speech in which he informed the American people and the rest of the world of the crisis in Cuba and of the action he had decided to take.

And I had a date, interestingly enough, that afternoon at 4 o'clock to take Senator [Allen J.] Ellender over to see Senghor.

O'CONNOR: Oh, really.

KAISER: And I exploited Ellender. I could have gotten an appointment anyhow on an emergency basis, but I called up Senghor's secretary, whom I knew well, and told her that I had something very important to talk to the President alone about, could I see him about twenty minutes before his scheduled meeting with Ellender and me. And this was worked out.

I came in and presented Senghor with the English text of the speech, after pointing out to him the seriousness of the crisis and President Kennedy's need for help. Senghor read the speech in English (there had been no time for a French translation). And he said this is very grave: "C'est très grave." He caught the essence of it immediately. And I said, "Yes. You realize what President Kennedy is trying to do here." He replied, "Yes," and added, "I must help him to the . . ."

O'CONNOR: He was in sympathy with that?

KAISER: "I must help him to the extent that I can," he said. "And, of course, we're not aligned and the Russians aren't using the airport now. And it would be an act of . . . It would violate our fundamental policy if we changed our practice." Now, Senghor himself was then in the midst of a domestic political crisis.

O'CONNOR: Sure. That was the problem with the Prime Minister, wasn't it?

KAISER: Yes. Very serious crisis at that time. And, in fact, when was the Cuban crisis? This was just before the election, in November. And early December actually was when the abortive coup d'etat occurred in Dakar. The Prime Minister was much more to the left than Senghor. He had just visited Moscow. And Senghor was a little concerned, more than a little concerned. He said, "But you know I have some troubles with my Prime Minister, Mamadou Dia." He paused, and then added, "I'm having a Cabinet meeting tomorrow morning. Can you write me a letter about the airport and deliver it, get it to me personally at the palace before the meeting tomorrow?"

When he mentioned Mamadou Dia, I pointed out to him I had word that [Sekou] Toure was going to probably close down Conakry. That was where good communications between Washington and our embassies helped. I said to him, "Of course you realize, Mr. President, that to the American people it would be absolutely incomprehensible, to the President, to President Kennedy in particular, and the American people, if Toure, the radical, closed down his airport and you didn't close down Dakar." "Oh," he said, "you must include that in the letter. You must say in the letter that you understand Toure is closing down Conakry."

That is what we did. I went back to my embassy, and we had a fascinating exercise in drafting. Every officer in our embassy spoke good French, but there was only one who really drafted French well, comfortably, and that was the DCM [Deputy Chief of Mission], but he was on home leave. And there were one or two colleagues who were completely bilingual--one officer's parents had been French. But when it came to writing we had difficulty. But we got out what we wanted, and we got the letter to him. They went along and . . .

O'CONNOR: And did he run into much opposition from Mamadou Dia?

KAISER: No, apparently not. Senghor got it through. He sent word to me that they wouldn't let the Russians use the Dakar airport.

Well, I think this gives you some flavor of the impact of President Kennedy at a critical moment in our history.

Now as to the other President to whom I was accredited, to make it much more brief, the other fellow, the first time I met him when I presented my credentials to him, Ould Daddah, up in his desert capital in Nouakchott, recalled the speech that Kennedy had made on Algeria.

O'CONNOR: Yes, that's the one Schlesinger mentioned.

KAISER: Schlesinger's got that. I mentioned this to Arthur. Ould Daddah told me what a dramatic effect it had had on all the Africans in Paris.

But we had a little difficulty with Ould Daddah later on. He came to New York shortly after Senghor, 19. . . .

O'CONNOR: Yes. I have the date down here somewhere.

KAISER: No. The first time President Kennedy didn't see him at first; we couldn't fix a date. I think it was shortly after Senghor's visit, and Ken O'Donnell was difficult. I finally got a date. I squeezed it out of Ken O'Donnell, but it was later than he wanted it, Ould Daddah, and he was quite upset. His vanity and Arab pride got the better of him and he decided to return home without seeing the President.

O'CONNOR: Yes, it was in November, I guess. He came to the U.N., didn't he?

KAISER: Yes, that's right. He came to New York. It was around that time.

O'CONNOR: 1961, November.

KAISER: That's right. It was too bad, but they're very sensitive, these Moors.

Then he came to the U.N. in October, shortly before the assassination, in October 1963. He hadn't asked for an appointment--I was in Washington on home leave--and I thought it would be a good idea, to make up for the bad feeling as a result of the last time, to take the initiative. And I squeezed an hour or presumably one hour for him out of Kenny O'Donnell. He was very reluctant to give Ould Daddah any time. I had to use a lot of pressure.

And then I went up to meet him at the airport in New York when he arrived from Mauritania. And I said to him, "President Kennedy, when he heard you were coming, expressed a strong desire to see you and he would appreciate it very much if you could come up on Thursday"--or Friday, whenever it was. "He'd like very much to have a chance to have a good talk with you on problems of mutual interest and to discuss the African scene." Well, Ould Daddah was rather taken aback, in a nice way, and he said, well, he wanted to see what his schedule was like. He played it cute, in an amusing way. He obviously wanted to meet Kennedy. I said, "I understood that, but the President also wanted me to tell you that he would send up a private plane to pick you up and take you back so that you wouldn't be too inconvenienced." The following day I got word that he would be happy to come.

Ould Daddah was an entirely different sort of fellow: more reserved; shy; less, much less the man of the world than Senghor, who was quite a Parisien. Senghor spent a lot of time in Paris and moved in French intellectual, establishment circles. [Jean] Paul Sartre was a great friend of his. He had been a member of the French National Assembly, had been in the French government, had served as secretary of state in one or two of the Cabinets in the Fourth Republic. Ould Daddah was much younger. He was a lawyer, French lawyer, and bright. He also came from a very good, Maraboutic family, Ould Daddah. That's the religious elite of Mauritania. In addition, he had all of the cunning, the patience, and the wisdom, too, that it took to survive as a Mauritanian in this barren land, plus the good French education. He was married to a French wife who'd gone to law school with him. She too was a lawyer. In short, he was a bright character in his own way. A little guy, and he came into President Kennedy's office full of awe for his host. And it didn't take long for the President to absolutely charm him.

SECRETARY: Pardon, je vous prie. Vous voulez deux martinis?

KAISER: Oui.

O'CONNOR: Oui.

KAISER: Let's see. This will confuse these people.

O'CONNOR: They'll understand.

KAISER: There were two things that I told President Kennedy in a briefing before Ould Daddah's visit: First, that this fellow had given up budgetary support voluntarily, said to the French, "I don't want any more budgetary support," because he wanted to show his independence. And the President picked that up and patted Ould Daddah on the back, so to speak, and said, "Tell me, now, how could you do this? This is wonderful. This is so rare. All the under-developed countries keep pressing us for money, for budgetary support, and you voluntarily gave it up because you wanted to stand on your own feet." You could just see little Ould Daddah sort of rising up.

At that moment the Algerians and Moroccans were having a border war over a piece of really valuable territory. This was very important for Ould Daddah. The Moroccans had still not recognized him, and the territory that the Moroccans wanted would have given them a common border with Mauritania, which they didn't have. President Kennedy asked President Ould Daddah his views about this war, a tough question to field in light of Ould Daddah's hostility to Morocco. Ould Daddah really handled it beautifully. He opened up by saying, "You know, Mr. President, we have our problems about Morocco, and it's difficult for me to be completely objective, but I'll try to the best of my ability." And then he continued on that basis. He really made a big impression on Kennedy. He answered it cleverly. He was "objective" (quotes), but he managed to come down on Algeria's side.

The conversation went on much longer than the hour allocated. It lasted for almost two hours. That was the morning that Kenny O'Donnell shook with irritation and annoyance.

O'CONNOR: Must have, yes, made Kenny O'Donnell worry.

KAISER: There was a big and important delegation from Illinois waiting outside, and we kept them waiting for almost an hour.

O'CONNOR: Oh, brother.

KAISER: And as we walked out--I naturally remember this--as we walked out of the corridor, the two presidents walked together with the interpreter between them. I was with Soapy, and we were about ten feet behind. And this is the last time I saw President Kennedy. He turned back to me as he said to Ould Daddah, "Don't say these nice things about the Ambassador to me. Tell them to the Ambassador. He's the fellow who would like to hear them." [Interruption]

O'CONNOR: Okay. You were speaking about the consequences of that meeting with Ould Daddah.

KAISER: I think I was saying that Ould Daddah was absolutely charmed by Kennedy. I remember the rest of the day I took him around Washington, and then we flew back on the private plane together and we chatted about the meeting. He was just radiant, really, Ould Daddah.

We had a problem with Mauritania involving Pan American. Pan American had opened up a flight shortly before that went from New York to Lisbon to Morocco and then down to Conakry. If you looked at the map, African map, you would quickly see that the most direct way, the direct way from Rabat to Conakry is across about seven or eight hundred miles of Mauritanian desert. Ould Daddah, in order to show his fellow Africans what a tough guy he was, to demonstrate that he wasn't just a client state of France, that he was a bit of a radical, said he wouldn't allow this plane, a plane that had touched down in Portugal, to use Mauritanian air space. This was one of those periods when the Africans were particularly angry at the Portuguese and the South Africans.

There were a couple of double twists involved in this decision. It pointed to the fact, it underlined the fact that the plane landed in Morocco, which hadn't yet recognized Mauritania, and it also was going to Toure's country, to Guinea, so that here was Ould Daddah being more virtuous politically than both Morocco and Guinea. All of this was costing Pan American quite a bit of extra money because the only way they could reach Conakry was to fly all the way out westward over North Africa and then turn down the coast to Conakry.

Before Ould Daddah arrived in Washington, the question arose whether President Kennedy should raise the issue of the Pan American flight with Ould Daddah, and I said no, I thought it would be undignified. I added, "Let me give him instead the Arab treatment. On the way back on the plane when we talk about his meeting with you I will say, 'Incidentally, there was one matter that the president might have raised but as a host, out of consideration to you, he didn't want to raise it, but I know it's on his mind.'" The President was delighted with this idea and told me to proceed as I suggested.

And fortunately, it worked just the way I hoped it would. On the plane back to New York, Ould Daddah was still glowing from his meeting with the President. When he finished telling me how delighted he was with the visit, I raised the Pan American issue in the manner I had recommended. And he immediately called over his foreign secretary, who was there, and said, "What's this all about?" (Of course he knew the facts). "Is it true that Pan American can't fly over our air space?" The foreign secretary said, "Yes." "Well," Ould Daddah said, "as soon as we get back to Mauritania, to Nouakchott, I want you to change this order, and Pan American must have the right to fly over our air space." And he did it. When I left Ould Daddah in New York, put him on the plane that flew to Dakar, I immediately called Washington and told them to send a telegram to my Chargé in Nouakchott, [William L., Jr.] Bill Eagleton . . .

O'CONNOR: What's his name?

KAISER: Bill Eagleton.

O'CONNOR: Eagleton. That's for the benefit of those who are going to type this.

KAISER: . . . telling him of my conversation with Ould Daddah and instructing him to be sure to get in touch with the Foreign Minister soon after he returned to Nouakchott. But the Foreign Minister took the initiative and got in touch with Eagleton first, the day the Foreign Minister got back from the U.S.

O'CONNOR: He actually carried out that promise immediately.

KAISER: Apparently immediately. The other thing was that on the China issue, on the U.N. vote--I don't remember, to be perfectly honest, how the vote question was posed--but Ould Daddah did not go the whole way in spite of the fact that on that issue the President had asked him, President Kennedy had asked him specifically for support.

O'CONNOR: He had asked him specifically to vote against China in this particular question.

KAISER: Against Communist China.

O'CONNOR: Yes, against Communist China.

KAISER: And he was the only one of those twelve French-African states who voted that way, and it was really undignified in light of what I was saying, I think yesterday, what I was saying earlier, about the deal on his being admitted to the U.N., because his getting into U.N. was wrapped up with the China issue, you recall, Outer Mongolia and himself being admitted with all of the twelve French African states then voting against Communist China.

Now this takes you to your question about personal diplomacy, how far can you go with personal diplomacy, which is a very good question. And the answer is not easy. I suppose the answer is: It all depends. It all depends on the basic orientation of the other country, to begin with. It depends, too, on the extent of the personal feelings involved. I presume when you asked that question, we're assuming here that in each case the chief of state has been favorably impressed by President Kennedy, and what you're asking is: How much of a "pay-off," so to speak, to use the vernacular, can you derive from that fact, were you able to derive from that fact. And all one can say, I suppose, is it's a very important lubricant. It can be a very important lubricant.

As I was suggesting to you earlier, when the tape wasn't running, it was quite extraordinary in the case of President Kennedy for the three years, almost three years, because it was already becoming apparent that it was going to be tough for him to do as much as he wanted to for the Africans, to provide as much aid as he might have liked to provide, so that the real test never came. The fact is, though, that over that period I don't think anybody could refute the fact, refute the conclusion, could argue that his personal diplomacy hadn't worked. I hasten to add a little caveat here; the use of the word "personal diplomacy"--the phrase "personal diplomacy" may be misleading. It has a kind of traditional significance, and you were dealing here with something special and unique. I think I may have said earlier you're dealing here with personality. When you talk traditionally about personal diplomacy, you talk, I suppose, about diplomacy between, dealing between chiefs of state or special emissaries of chiefs of state, but you have to be careful about your terms here. "Personal" has several different meanings. In the case of President Kennedy you were dealing with a very unique personality which in and of itself made an impact. He was young; he was vigorous; he projected an image of boldness, of newness, of a willingness to experiment, of a willingness to change policy. So that you're not just talking about personal contact, see. You're talking about things that have a substantive connotation.

It was this combination of characteristics ascribed to the President which made up his image, which constituted his image in the eyes and in the minds of these various chiefs of state. It was in that context that you got the most favorable consideration, or you got a more favorable consideration, you as an ambassador representing our country or representing President Kennedy at that time, than you probably would have received under a different set of circumstances and with a different personality as President. And I think that's really the point. That doesn't mean that you always got what you wanted, you always got the vote that you wanted . . .

O'CONNOR: But a little bit more consideration.

KAISER: You always got a lot more consideration, and you often got it, too, when it was a crucial question of--you know, when it was touch and go, so to speak. When the decision could go either way the tendency was to go right rather than wrong because of this feeling. I think this is a pretty balanced and fair answer to your question.

O'CONNOR: Yes, I think it is. There are really only two other questions that I specifically wanted to ask you. And the first one is--and you commented a little bit about this when we were off the tape as well--were there any specific policies of President Kennedy or of the Kennedy Administration toward Africa that had a strong effect negatively or positively on Senegal or Mauritania? I was thinking specifically of the Congolese policy.

KAISER: Well, President Kennedy's Congolese policy made a big impression, and Senghor was very conscious of this because on several occasions there was talk of Senghor being the mediator between the two sides in the Congolese conflict. He had credit on both sides, and three or four times Senghor's mediation was mentioned as a possibility, publicly and privately. Senghor said to me when we came down very strongly on the U.N. side, supporting the Dag Hammarskjold policy of winding up the Katanga secession movement, "Well, this proves to any intelligent, fair-minded African that your government, President Kennedy, is prepared to follow a policy which runs counter to the policy of your close allies, France and England and Belgium." And this certainly made a big impression. It went on over quite a period of time; it wasn't just a day or a week.

O'CONNOR: It was a consistent policy.

KAISER: That's right. Not one act. It was something that demanded persistence, sticking with it, taking some gaff back home, which the Africans saw, a fellow like Senghor appreciated. I could always talk to Senghor about the President's domestic problems.

O'CONNOR: Because he understood them.

KAISER: Well, yes. And foreign policy, you see, is a matter of--more and more one becomes aware of this fact. How shall I say it? It's a matter of making the demands--good relations between two countries is, to a considerable extent, a matter of doing everything possible to handle the relations between two countries in a way that does not exacerbate the domestic problems of one or the other. If you can prevent domestic pressures from compelling you to do things that run counter to the interests of other countries, particularly your friends, then you're going to get good or better international relations. More and more I think this is the case, probably has been all along. What are your needs internally? What your needs are internally or what your aspirations are, what your problems are internally, they always, practically always, are the higher priority, and this makes international relations today more complicated because never before were countries so inter-related economically and in other ways and communications so instant and so widespread.

You have that case in England now, the big debate because of their economic problems. Do you give up or do you cut back drastically your world role? If you've got a foreign exchange problem, should you be east of Suez? Should you cut back your army in the Rhine? In short, these internal economic problems have all kinds of international implications. This is probably true in the modern world where often you have to do things internally that make your friends or countries that are not your friends quite unhappy. An ambassador has to make that point, when you explain to Senghor, when you'd come to him or Ould Daddah and you'd say, "Look, you've got to appreciate what the internal problems of the President are. Let me explain to you the history of the whole Chinese-Korean war." You remind them of the sentiment about China in the United States and the reasons for those sentiments.

Now if a Chief of State has a positive feeling about the American President, he tends to feel sympathetic and he says, "Well, now, this fellow's got a tough job. It's the most powerful country in the world, with all its problems, and President Kennedy is such a fine fellow, he's my friend. I must try to help him. . . ." I don't know whether I made myself clear.

O'CONNOR: Yes, that explains my question.

KAISER: Now, the other thing that made a big impression, interestingly enough, was President Kennedy's position on civil rights. And here Bobby Kennedy, who also had charisma in Africa, was a help--youknow, he came to the Ivory Coast representing the President and made a very favorable impression on the Africans. They had a feeling that he too was deeply interested in their problems, as well as his brother, the President. But the sense that President Kennedy was much more positive about civil rights than Eisenhower had registered very strongly, and this certainly had its effect.

O'CONNOR: Well, you've mentioned now then two policies, one in a sense a foreign policy and the other a domestic policy, that did have an influence. The other question that I wanted to ask you is sort of the reverse of this. These were two positive influences. Were there any really negative steps that were taken, steps that you thought were mistakes with regard to an African policy, or steps that influenced Senghor or Ould Daddah unfavorably?

KAISER: Well, let me think. There was beginning to develop at the end of that period, at the end of that three year period, a realization that the bloom was going off, the bloom was disappearing so far as American attitude towards Africa was concerned, that we were being more heavily engaged elsewhere, that we were giving Africa lower priority. Senghor talked to me about that a couple of times towards the end of my tour. I was there, what, about thirty-four months? Ould Daddah also discussed it: Why wasn't more aid forthcoming? why were you losing interest in Africa? This was certainly beginning to emerge, and that's why I say that the real test. . . . You remember I said a little earlier the real test was about to come. It never really came. But up to the point that I left, the African balance sheet on President Kennedy and the U.S. was in the black, quite strongly black.

O'CONNOR: But I thought possibly something like greater involvement in Vietnam might have. . . .

KAISER: Well, we hadn't gotten that involved by the time I left, you see. I left in May '64.

O'CONNOR: Though even during the Kennedy Administration there was a greater and greater tendency toward involvement.

KAISER: Yes.

O'CONNOR: And I wondered if the, you know, the handwriting was on the wall and perhaps this would. . . .

KAISER: No. I think the thing that was more important was the point I made.

O'CONNOR: The bloom gone. American interest. . . .

KAISER: You can't. You can't. You're beginning to relegate us to . . . [Interruption]

O'CONNOR: Listen, we are finished with this, really.