

No Diplomatic Immunity: African Diplomats, the State Department, and Civil Rights, 1961–1964

Renee Romano

On July 10, 1963, Secretary of State Dean Rusk made a historic appearance before the Senate Commerce Committee, testifying, not on behalf of a new foreign policy initiative, but for legislation that would transform the United States domestically. While the public accommodations bill of 1963 (which became the Civil Rights Act of 1964) seemed to have little to do with foreign policy, Rusk testified that its passage was crucial to the nation's ability to win the Cold War with the Soviet Union. In his testimony, Secretary Rusk outlined two particular concerns of the State Department: the fact that the Soviet Union capitalized on American racial incidents in its Cold War propaganda and the problems that nonwhite diplomats encountered in the United States because of legal segregation. When the United States was attempting to convince the rest of the world of the superiority of the American way of life, Rusk argued, racial discrimination called the country's commitment to its own ideals into question. Yet Rusk opened and closed his testimony by stressing that the benefits of the bill for United States foreign policy should be seen as secondary: "It is not my view that we should resolve these problems here at home merely in order to look good abroad," Rusk testified. "We must try to eliminate discrimination due to race, color, religion, not to make others think better of us but because it is incompatible with the great ideals to which our democratic society is dedicated."¹

The lengthy testimony of Secretary of State Rusk in support of a domestic civil

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¹ U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee on Commerce, *Civil Rights—Public Accommodations, Hearings before the Committee on Commerce*, 88 Cong., 1 sess., July 10, 1963, p. 281.

rights bill might seem to require little explanation, providing further evidence for the now well-established argument that domestic racism hampered the conduct of American foreign policy during the Cold War. A rich and growing scholarship on the relationship between Cold War foreign policy and American race relations suggests that the Cold War made American racism an international liability since segregation and discrimination tarnished the nation's image abroad. As Mary Dudziak argues, the intersection of race and Cold War diplomacy represented a "critical cultural and ideological weak point" in America's foreign relations. In the 1960s, that weak point became even more vulnerable as domestic racial protest put a spotlight on American racism.²

Yet, in spite of this international context, the State Department was not known as a hotbed of civil rights activism. In fact, the State Department was notorious, both within the government and among black activists, for its hostility to civil rights and its reluctance to become involved in domestic political affairs. Among government agencies, the department had one of the worst minority hiring records.³ Furthermore, as recent works make clear, the State Department in the 1950s was more concerned about painting a positive picture abroad than in improving conditions within the United States. In the 1950s the United States Information Agency (USIA) put far more energy into repressing criticism of American racial practices than into lobbying for civil rights reforms at home.⁴

² For the argument that the Cold War exposed and highlighted American racism, see Paul Gordon Lauren, *Power and Prejudice: The Politics and Diplomacy of Racial Discrimination* (Boulder, 1988); Mary Louise Dudziak, "Cold War, Civil Rights: The Relationship between Civil Rights and Foreign Affairs in the Truman Administration" (Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 1992); Mary L. Dudziak, "Desegregation as a Cold War Imperative," *Stanford Law Review*, 41 (Nov. 1988), 61–120; Mary L. Dudziak, "Josephine Baker, Racial Protest, and the Cold War," *Journal of American History*, 81 (Sept. 1994), 543–70; Brenda Gayle Plummer, *Rising Wind: Black Americans and U.S. Foreign Affairs, 1935–1960* (Chapel Hill, 1996); and Thomas Borstelmann, *Apartheid's Reluctant Uncle: The United States and Southern Africa in the Early Cold War Era* (New York, 1993). All of these works focus on the 1940s and 1950s; none of them continues the story into the 1960s. For Dudziak's statement, see Dudziak, "Josephine Baker, Racial Protest, and the Cold War," 543.

³ There were only seventeen black foreign service officers in early 1961, and when President John F. Kennedy ordered each government department to hire more African Americans, State's efforts were described as "completely inadequate" by administration insiders and "inept" by black critics. Frederick Dutton to Harris Wofford, July 19, 1961, Subcabinet Committee no. 2 File, box 14, White House Staff Files, Harris Wofford (John F. Kennedy Library, Boston, Mass.); John Davis, "The Employment of American Negroes in the Foreign Service of the United States," Nov. 23–25, 1962, in *Civil Rights during the Kennedy Administration, 1961–1963*, part 2: *The Papers of Burke Marshall, Assistant Attorney General for Civil Rights*, ed. Carl Brauer (microfilm, 28 reels, University Publications of America, 1986), reel 6. On the State Department's hiring problems, see Chester Bowles to Dutton, Oct. 6, 1961, in *Civil Rights during the Kennedy Administration, 1961–1963*, part 1: *The White House Central Files and Staff Files and the President's Office Files*, ed. Carl Brauer (microfilm, 19 reels, University Publications of America, 1986), reel 6. Lee White to John F. Kennedy, Dec. 17, 1962, *ibid.*, reel 2; Dutton to Wofford, July 19, 1961, *ibid.*, reel 18; Louis Martin to Robert F. Kennedy, Dec. 4, 1962, *Civil Rights during the Kennedy Administration*, part 2, ed. Brauer, reel 6; Rupert Emerson and Martin Kilson, "The American Dilemma in a Changing World: The Rise of Africa and the Negro American," *Daedalus*, 94 (Fall 1965), 1055–85.

⁴ For efforts by the State Department, Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), and United States Information Agency (USIA) to control the image of the United States abroad, see Dudziak, "Josephine Baker, Racial Protest, and the Cold War"; and Penny Von Eschen, *Race against Empire: Black Americans and Anticolonialism, 1937–1957* (Ithaca, 1997), 177–81. Most scholarship on the relationship between the Cold War and domestic race relations focuses on how the anticommunism of the late 1940s and early 1950s discredited progressive organizations and impeded the struggle for civil rights; see Charles Cheng, "The Cold War: Its Impact on the Black Liberation Struggle within the United States," *Freedomways* (Third Quarter, 1973), 184–99; Charles Cheng, "The

Why then in 1963 was the secretary of state moved to give forceful testimony for a domestic civil rights bill before the Senate? If, in the 1940s and 1950s, the United States government responded to concerns about the international ramifications of domestic discrimination by trying to whitewash the American image overseas, why in the 1960s would the leading figure in the foreign policy establishment argue that there needed to be a federal law outlawing segregation?

This article seeks to answer these questions by focusing on the Kennedy administration's efforts to deal with the problems of African diplomats in the United States. In 1961 the rising number of embarrassing incidents involving racial discrimination against black foreign diplomats led to the creation of the Special Protocol Service Section (spss) within the State Department's Office of Protocol. The spss had the mandate of preventing racial incidents involving African diplomats, but it quickly took the lead in campaigns to pass a fair housing law in Washington, D.C., and a public accommodations bill in Maryland. Its story provides an ideal case study to explore the complicated ways foreign policy concerns interacted with federal civil rights initiatives in the 1960s. It can also serve as a window into the inner workings of the Kennedy administration's civil rights bureaucracy, showing how the State Department was brought on board the administration's civil rights program. The spss, under the direction of a young and ambitious Kennedy supporter, lobbied to use the State Department's concern about the treatment of African diplomats to launch a broader campaign against segregation, both in Washington, D.C., and nationwide. Its success ultimately depended on the personalities and relationships between three actors in the administration: Robert F. Kennedy, the attorney general who eventually took control of the administration's civil rights bureaucracy; Pedro Sanjuan, the young director of the spss and a protégé of Robert Kennedy; and, to a lesser extent, Dean Rusk, the Georgia-born secretary of state.

The story of the spss adds to our understanding of the forces leading to domestic civil rights change in the 1960s and of the Kennedy administration's civil rights policies. President John F. Kennedy entered office largely uninterested in and ignorant of the problems of black Americans. Hampered by his own preference for foreign policy, a narrow margin of victory that left him with a conservative Congress, and the need to maintain a good working relationship with the southern wing of his party, Kennedy dragged his feet on civil rights, responding only when a crisis developed that demanded federal intervention. The new administration feared explosive confrontations and was as likely to blame civil rights activists for social unrest as to criticize southern segregationists. By 1963, however, President Kennedy was giving speeches that labeled civil rights a "moral issue," and his brother Robert was prodding him to speak out even more strongly against segregation and racial brutality. Scholars have hotly debated whether either brother began to see racial justice as a

Cold War: Its Impact on the Black Liberation Struggle within the United States—Part II," *ibid.* (Fourth Quarter, 1973), 281–93; Gerald Horne, *Black and Red: W. E. B. Du Bois and the Afro-American Response to the Cold War, 1944–1963* (Albany, 1986); and Adam Fairclough, *Race and Democracy: The Civil Rights Struggle in Louisiana, 1915–1972* (Athens, Ga., 1995), 135–63.

moral issue, but they agree that the invigorated civil rights movement and the violence of its opponents thwarted the Kennedys' attempts to keep civil rights on the political periphery and may well have led the brothers, especially Robert Kennedy, to begin to see civil rights as a compelling moral issue.⁵

While much has been written about the domestic crises that forced the administration to pay more attention to the issue of civil rights, the international forces that helped move civil rights to the center of the national agenda are less well recognized. The global decolonization movement contributed to a growing concern about the problem of domestic discrimination, particularly in an administration that was more interested in foreign than domestic policy. Even in his ground-breaking 1963 address to the nation, President Kennedy placed his appeal for racial justice in the context of Cold War necessities. The United States preached freedom around the world, Kennedy noted, but "are we to say to the world, and much more important, to each other that this is a land of the free except for the Negroes; that we have no second-class citizens except Negroes?" Robert Kennedy, meanwhile, told audiences around the country that eliminating racial discrimination was a matter of "compelling international politics." The origins of the *SPSS* and its position in the Kennedy civil rights bureaucracy help illustrate how foreign concerns, as well as domestic pressures, brought civil rights to the forefront of the Kennedy administration's agenda in the early 1960s.⁶

The International Context

While every administration since Harry S. Truman's had worried that racial discrimination limited the American ability to counter the Soviets in the Cold War, the issue gained new urgency with the Kennedy presidency. Not only was Kennedy a particularly enthusiastic cold warrior who had charged in his campaign that the Eisenhower administration had been lax in the face of the Soviet threat, but in the late 1950s Africa had emerged as the newest Cold War battleground. Beginning in 1957, when

⁵ Historiography on John F. Kennedy's civil rights record has gone through four main stages. The first studies, often by members of the administration, praised Kennedy's record on civil rights, but new works appearing by the mid-1970s were highly critical of that record. A third wave of scholarship argued that Kennedy accomplished as much as he could for civil rights given the political realities of the time. Most recent works describe Kennedy as a pragmatic politician who acted on civil rights only when forced by external pressures. For early critical works, see Lewis Paper, *The Promise and the Performance: The Leadership of John F. Kennedy* (New York, 1975); and Bruce Kennoff, *Pragmatic Illusions: The Presidential Politics of John F. Kennedy* (New York, 1976). Works that defend Kennedy's record include Carl M. Brauer, *John F. Kennedy and the Second Reconstruction* (New York, 1977); Robert E. Gilbert, "John F. Kennedy and Civil Rights for Black Americans," *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, 12 (Summer 1982), 386–99; and John Hart, "Kennedy, Congress, and Civil Rights," *Journal of American Studies*, 13 (Aug. 1979), 165–78. For a representative example of recent scholarship, see John Dittmer, *Local People: The Struggle for Civil Rights in Mississippi* (Urbana, 1995). On Robert F. Kennedy's attitudes about race, see James W. Hilty, *Robert Kennedy: Brother Protector* (Philadelphia, 1997), 289–404; and David Burner and Thomas R. West, *The Torch Is Passed: The Kennedy Brothers and American Liberalism* (New York, 1984), 150–223.

⁶ John Kennedy, "Address to the Nation," June 11, 1963, in *Civil Rights during the Kennedy Administration*, part 1, ed. Brauer, reel 18; Robert Kennedy, "Speech Delivered before the National Insurance Association," July 26, 1962, in *Rights for Americans: The Speeches of Robert F. Kennedy*, ed. Thomas A. Hopkins (Indianapolis, 1964), 152.

Ghana became independent, former colonial states in Africa claimed their independence at a rapid pace. In 1960 alone, seventeen new African nations became independent. While Eisenhower had been reluctant to support those new nations out of deference to the country's European allies, Kennedy was eager to embrace African independence. He pursued an African policy that was more independent of the European allies, siding with the United Nations (UN) against the Belgian-influenced Katanga province of the Congo, criticizing Portuguese rule in Angola, increasing foreign aid to newly independent nations such as Guinea, and appointing the energetic and flamboyant G. Mennen Williams as assistant secretary of state for African affairs.⁷

Kennedy's policy toward Africa was conditioned by his propensity to view Africa as the next major battleground of the Cold War. Africa was important to United States policy makers, not primarily for economic reasons, but because they believed the United States was competing with the Soviet Union for the allegiance of newly independent African nations, which had yet to choose sides in the Cold War. Thus Secretary of State Rusk testified before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in 1961 that the Soviet premier Nikita Khrushchev "looks upon the neutralist part of the world as the great grazing ground for further Communist expansion, and he thinks that they can beat us in this competition in the so-called underdeveloped parts of the world." A secret panel study on United States foreign policy in Africa, commissioned soon after Kennedy entered office, stressed that the United States had to take action in Africa immediately. "We see Africa as probably the greatest open field of maneuver in the worldwide competition between the [Communist] Bloc and the non-communist world," the panel concluded.⁸

Symbolically, the allegiance of nonwhite nations was viewed as an important reflection on the international strength and reputation of the superpowers. As a result, the Kennedy administration was very concerned about how American race problems were viewed in Africa. The USIA worried that stories of American racism "fed existing resentment towards whites, and could cause serious and long-lasting damage," especially in former colonial areas. The African press, the USIA noted, was particu-

⁷ For more on Dwight D. Eisenhower's and Kennedy's Africa policies, see Henry F. Jackson, *From the Congo to Soweto: U.S. Foreign Policy toward Africa since 1960* (New York, 1982); Thomas J. Noer, *Cold War and Black Liberation: The United States and White Rule in Africa, 1948-1968* (Columbia, Mo., 1985); Thomas J. Noer, "New Frontiers and Old Priorities in Africa," in *Kennedy's Quest for Victory: American Foreign Policy, 1961-1963*, ed. Thomas G. Paterson (New York, 1989), 253-83; Waldemar A. Nielsen, *The Great Powers and Africa* (New York, 1969), 245-304; and Richard D. Mahoney, *JFK: Ordeal in Africa* (New York, 1983).

⁸ U.S. Congress, Senate, Foreign Relations Committee, *Executive Sessions of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee*, 87 Cong., 1 sess., June 16, 1961, p. 184. The secret Kennedy administration study "Africa: Guidelines for United States Policy and Operation" (1963) is quoted in Edgar Lockwood, "The Future of the Carter Policy toward Southern Africa," in *American Policy in Southern Africa: The Stakes and the Stance*, ed. René Lemarchand (Washington, 1978), 435. Although Africa was relatively unimportant to the United States economically, representing only 4% of its imports and 3.5% of its exports in 1960, there was a sense of urgency because of shifts in Soviet policies. Before 1956, the Soviet Union had criticized nationalist movements as bourgeois, but in 1956, the Soviets publicly praised them as a progressive stepping stone to socialism, and in 1958, they offered Guinea financial aid and support. See Zaki Laidi, *The Superpowers and Africa: The Constraints of a Rivalry, 1960-1990*, trans. Patricia Baudoin (Chicago, 1990), 1-43; and Peter Duignan and L. H. Gann, *The United States and Africa: A History* (Cambridge, Eng., 1984), 285-323.

larly negative in its reporting of racial incidents in the United States. Many African newspapers, the USIA found, had been "highly critical" of the 1963 crisis in Birmingham, Alabama (where police turned fire hoses and attack dogs on peaceful demonstrators), and had raised the question of "American 'sincerity' vis-à-vis Africa in view of internal racial discord." The Birmingham demonstrations, moreover, had been effectively exploited by Moscow. During the crisis, the Soviet Union devoted 25 percent of its propaganda broadcasts to the police violence, and most of those broadcasts were beamed to Africa. For President Kennedy this negative publicity was frustrating. As he told a meeting of businessmen in 1963, "All of the money we spent for USIA might well have been saved after the picture of the Negro and the dog at Birmingham."⁹

While the United States government was seriously concerned about negative propaganda, perhaps the most important players in the battle for Africa were the diplomats from newly independent African nations. The diplomats began arriving in the United States in great numbers in the early 1960s. When Kennedy entered office, twenty-one new African nations had just opened embassies in Washington, D.C., and another seven had plans to do so. What would happen when these new diplomats came face-to-face with racial discrimination in Washington, D.C.?

No Diplomatic Immunity: The Problems of African Diplomats in Washington, D.C.

In 1961 the nation's capital was still segregated. In 1960 African Americans comprised 71 percent of the population of the city, but they were kept out of the city's nicest neighborhoods and apartment buildings. While local protests in the early 1950s had achieved the legal desegregation of most restaurants, theaters, and public accommodations in the city, informal segregation remained a problem.¹⁰ African diplomats and their families who moved to Washington, D.C., found it nearly impossible to find housing near the embassies or in upscale neighborhoods. Ambassadors and their staff were often slighted in better restaurants and public businesses. The Metropolitan Club, which admitted most ambassadors for free, refused to allow Africans or Asians to join. African dignitaries were also victims of more serious harassment. In 1961, Tesfaya Roba, the second secretary of the Ethiopian embassy, received menacing phone calls, the tires in his car were repeatedly flattened, and large rocks were left on his front steps. The police ignored his requests for an investigation. Outside the capital, conditions were even worse. Ambassadors and their staffs and families

⁹United States Information Agency, Office of Research and Analysis, "Worldwide Reactions to Racial Incidents in Alabama," May 29, 1961, in *Civil Rights during the Kennedy Administration*, part 1, ed. Brauer, reel 4; Donald Wilson to John F. Kennedy, memo, May 17, 1963, "Summary of Foreign Reaction to Racial Tension in Birmingham, Alabama," May 17, 1963, *ibid.*, reel 18; "Transcript of Meeting of the President with Business Executives on the Voluntary Desegregation of Commercial Establishments," June 4, 1963, *ibid.*, reel 3.

¹⁰For more on housing discrimination in Washington and organized efforts against it, see U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, *Civil Rights U.S.A.: Housing in Washington, D.C.* (Washington, 1962); Constance McLaughlin Green, *The Secret City: A History of Race Relations in the Nation's Capital* (Princeton, 1967); and Spencer Crew, "Melding the Old and the New: The Modern African-American Community, 1930-1960," in *Urban Odyssey*, ed. Francine Curro Cary (Washington, 1996), 208-27.

were regularly thrown out of restaurants on Route 40, the highway that connected Washington, D.C., and New York. When a counselor for the Ghanaian embassy traveled to Georgia in 1960 to observe the electoral process, he was roughed up by white supremacists.¹¹

The fact that African diplomats expected respect only increased the likelihood that they would be disrespected by white Americans. African diplomats saw themselves as high-ranking foreign dignitaries visiting the United States, and they expected to be treated as such. They wanted to live in luxury apartment buildings and to join the same social clubs that white diplomats did. In the United States, however, Jim Crow segregation applied to all blacks, whether the poorest members of the lower class or the most upstanding examples of the black professional class. Diplomats who acted in accord with their high position often faced the wrath of whites who thought they were stepping outside the boundaries traditional for blacks. One African dignitary was detained by the police for over four hours because his chauffeur was driving five miles over the speed limit. Another was singled out by police for jaywalking across a crowded street because police were "tired of the State Department sending these niggers out there who were always breaking their laws."¹²

Kennedy administration officials who worked with foreign visitors feared that the ramifications of such discrimination could be serious. An early report by Pedro Sanjuan, who would eventually head the spss, outlined the dangers. Since the ruling class in new African nations was often tightly knit, Sanjuan argued, "What affects one or more members of these groups is likely to have a strong influence on the opinions and attitudes of their governments." If the Nigerian ambassador was consistently mistreated, it might "influence the nature of United States–Nigerian relations to a considerable degree." Mistreatment not only damaged relations with the host nation but might also affect the power balance in the United Nations, since the Washington embassies of the new nations were closely tied to their New York UN delegations. As the neutralist bloc grew, it could one day hold the balance of power, Sanjuan argued. The fate of American policy in the United Nations might be adversely affected by the "impressions and reactions their [neutral countries'] Ambassadors receive in their daily experiences in Washington." The potential problems were compounded by the new diplomats' inexperience and the friendly ties the new embassies had to each other, so that an act of discrimination against any nonwhite diplomat was considered "as a slight to all of them." Discrimination also required immediate attention because the new nations had few commercial or historical ties to keep them in the American camp. For these reasons, discrimination against diplomats from Africa was considered more serious than incidents involving nonwhite digni-

¹¹ "Progress Report of the Public Affairs Unit of the Office of the Chief of Protocol," April 1, 1961, box 1, Pedro Sanjuan Papers (Kennedy Library); "Progress Report, Special Protocol Service Section, Office of the Chief of Protocol," Feb. 1, 1963, *ibid.*; "Progress Report of the Special Protocol Affairs Section," June 1, 1961, *ibid.*; Plummer, *Rising Wind*, 270.

¹² "Minutes of the Meeting of the State Advisory Committee on Diplomatic Travel," Sept. 12, 1961, box 1, Sanjuan Papers; "Progress Report, Special Protocol Service Section, Office of the Chief of Protocol," Feb. 1, 1963, *ibid.*; Pedro Sanjuan telephone interview by Renee Romano, Aug. 18, 1998, typescript (in Renee Romano's possession), pp. 7–8.



Discrimination against diplomats embarrassed the Kennedy administration. President John F. Kennedy here offers a personal apology to Dr. William Fitzjohn, chargé d'affaires for Sierra Leone, after he was refused service at a Howard Johnson's restaurant.

Courtesy John F. Kennedy Library.

ties from Latin America, the Caribbean, or even most of Asia. The spss was primarily concerned about incidents involving diplomats from countries that had fewer ties to the United States.¹³

The fear that discrimination against African diplomats might influence the allegiance of African nations was voiced by others in the administration as well. Robert Biren, a director in the Agency for International Development, worried that if Africans brought by the agency to the United States encountered discrimination, they might become disillusioned. These "leaders and potential leaders . . . return home to influence the choice between the way of the Free World and that of Communism," Biren warned a presidential aide. When William Fitzjohn, the chargé d'affaires from the newly independent nation of Sierra Leone, was refused service at a Hagerstown, Maryland, Howard Johnson's restaurant in March 1961, an administration memo

¹³"Living Conditions of New Diplomats in Washington and Vicinity and Suggestions for Easing of Tensions by the Office of Protocol," Feb. 29, 1961, box 1, Sanjuan Papers.

speculated that the incident might touch off "a row of dominos, with each a little larger than the previous one, reaching finally a thundering fall of U.S. prestige, power and character in a distant place." Even though the president of the Howard Johnson chain made a public apology, the mayor of Hagerstown invited Fitzjohn to come back, and President Kennedy met personally with Fitzjohn to apologize for the incident, surveys of African newspapers revealed that it "served as a catalyst for anti-American feelings." Even the mainstream American press recognized in the early 1960s that discrimination against diplomats from Africa strained relations between the United States and the new African nations the United States was seeking to impress in the Cold War.¹⁴

Although these concerns may have been exaggerated, African leaders were undoubtedly dismayed by the treatment they received in the United States. For many Africans, Washington, D.C., represented a hardship post. In a 1961 speech before the United States National Commission for UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization), E. M. Debrah, the counselor of the Ghanaian embassy, criticized American racism, listing nearly a dozen incidents of discrimination against foreign diplomats. He warned that coming to America was "a rude awakening" for most Africans, which led many to question the country's rhetoric about freedom and democracy. When questioned by the SPSS, many diplomats openly expressed their disillusionment with life in the United States. African diplomats described their American experiences as "humiliating" and themselves and their staffs as "hurt," "bitter," and "cut-off." Even those who expressed an admiration for the United States admitted that racial discrimination tested their patience and goodwill. Those diplomats who wanted to present a positive image of the United States often found their efforts undercut by incidents of discrimination. Thus, the ambassador of Mali complained in 1961 that his favorable reports about the United States were contradicted by the poor treatment a visiting dignitary from Mali received in Oklahoma. Such disillusionment with life in the United States could have serious political repercussions. In early 1961 the African diplomatic corps threatened to leave Washington if the new administration ignored their grievances. At the same time, Soviet premier Nikita Khrushchev was quietly trying to line up African nations behind a proposal to have the United Nations moved out of the United States because of persistent racial discrimination.¹⁵

¹⁴ Robert Biren to White, Jan. 11, 1963, in *Civil Rights during the Kennedy Administration*, part 1, ed. Brauer, reel 11. On the William Fitzjohn incident, see Pedro Sanjuan to Angier Biddle Duke, April 18, 1961, box 1, Sanjuan Papers; "Progress Report of the Special Protocol Service Section," May 2, 1961, *ibid.*; *New York Times*, April 16, 1961, p. E10. Quote from draft of memo, n.d., *Civil Rights during the Kennedy Administration*, part 1, ed. Brauer, reel 7. This memo was probably written by Harris Wofford, who wrote a draft statement about the Fitzjohn incident for President Kennedy. Examples of mainstream press coverage of discrimination against diplomats include "When African Diplomats Come to Washington," *U.S. News and World Report*, June 12, 1961, pp. 86–88; "The Color Line in Diplomacy," *ibid.*, March 27, 1961, pp. 78–79; "Big Step Ahead on a High Road," *Life*, Dec. 8, 1961, pp. 32–39; *New York Times*, May 26, 1961, p. 21; *Washington Post*, April 25, 1961, p. A14.

¹⁵ E. M. Debrah, "The Effect of the Existence of 'Segregation' in the U.S. on the American Image in Africa," Oct. 25, 1961, in *Civil Rights during the Kennedy Administration*, part 1, ed. Brauer, reel 18. While critical, Debrah also praised Pedro Sanjuan and the Special Protocol Service Section for acting forcefully to deal with racial discrimination. The statements from African diplomats are in "Discrimination Against Diplomats in Housing,"

The Founding of the Special Protocol Service Section

Concerns about the scope and severity of the African diplomat problem led in March 1961 to the creation within the State Department's Office of Protocol of a new Public Affairs Unit, which soon became the spss. The official mission of the spss was to "pay specific attention to the problems encountered by diplomats and visitors from the newly independent nations of Africa," especially their problems finding housing, traveling, and establishing social ties.¹⁶ When a foreign visitor was denied service in a restaurant, was thrown out of a movie theater, could not find a place to get his hair cut, or could not find a place to live, it was the job of the spss to redress the wrong. All incidents involving foreign diplomats were to be reported to the spss, which would then notify the appropriate federal offices and conduct investigations. The spss would also serve as a resource for other units within the State Department that invited nonwhite visitors to the United States.

While it is difficult to know who ordered the formal organization of the spss, it seems likely that much of the responsibility for the unit's creation lies with Pedro Sanjuan, the assistant to the chief of protocol who was director of the spss from its inception in 1961 until its demise in 1964.¹⁷ Born in Cuba in 1931 to Spanish parents, Sanjuan moved to Spain with his family shortly after he was born. Fleeing the Spanish civil war, the family moved to Cuba in 1939 and to the United States in 1940. Sanjuan was raised in New York, California, and South Carolina. After attending college and serving in the navy as an intelligence officer, he received an A.M. in regional studies from Harvard University's Russian program.¹⁸

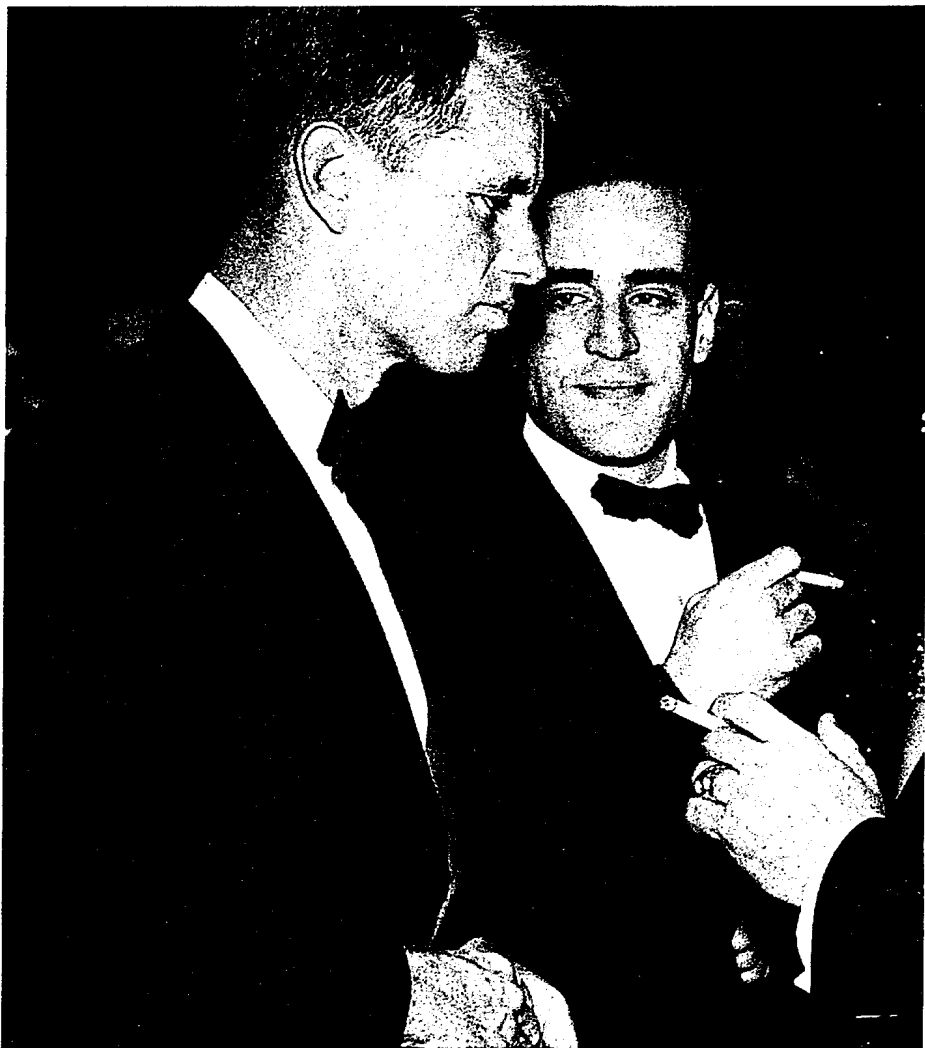
In 1960 Sanjuan volunteered for John F. Kennedy's presidential campaign and was put in charge of organizing Hispanic voters in New York. He became a favorite of Robert F. Kennedy's when he helped deliver Spanish Harlem for Kennedy. During the campaign, Sanjuan worked with Angier Biddle Duke, a socialite, foreign service officer, and former ambassador to El Salvador who was a close friend of John F.

spss Report to the Commission on Civil Rights, April 12, 1962, box 1, Sanjuan Papers. In the report, all the quotations are anonymous. On the incident involving Mali, see Sanjuan to Dutton, May 13, 1961, in *Civil Rights during the Kennedy Administration*, part 1, ed. Brauer, reel 3. On the political ramifications of discrimination, see "Progress Report of the Special Protocol Service Section," May 2, 1961, box 1, Sanjuan Papers; "Minutes of the 3rd Meeting of the State Advisory Committee," Sept. 12, 1961, *ibid.*; and Pedro Sanjuan interview by Romano, May 26, 1993, typescript (in Romano's possession), pp. 1, 6.

¹⁶ *Washington Post*, March 10, 1961, p. A1; "Progress Report on the Public Affairs Unit of the Office of the Chief of Protocol," April 1, 1961, box 1, Sanjuan Papers. On the unit's mandate, see "Report on the First Nine Months of the Special Protocol Service Section of the Office of the Chief of Protocol, Department of State," Nov. 1, 1961, *ibid.*; Arthur Pardec Jr., "Special Instructions on the Work of the Special Protocol Service Section," n.d., Special Protocol Affairs Section, Aug. 4–Sept. 12, 1961 File, box 9, White House Staff Files, Harris Wofford.

¹⁷ Dean Rusk wrote that he asked Angier Biddle Duke to tackle discrimination against diplomats "early on," since "discriminatory treatment was a severe barrier to cordial relations with many foreign states." Sanjuan, on the other hand, remembers having the issue "fall in his lap" and then approaching Duke for permission to work on it. Dean Rusk as told to Richard Rusk, *As I Saw It*, ed. Daniel S. Papp (New York, 1990), 583; Sanjuan telephone interview, Aug. 18, 1998, p. 5; Pedro Sanjuan telephone interview by Romano, Nov. 5, 1999, typescript (in Romano's possession), pp. 1–2.

¹⁸ On Sanjuan's background, see the United States Department of State, *Biographic Register, 1966* (Washington, 1966), 474; and *Washington Post*, Feb. 4, 1961, p. A10. Further information about Sanjuan was obtained in three interviews.



Pedro Sanjuan relied on his personal relationship with Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy. Here the two mingle at a Department of State reception for African diplomats in February 1962.

Courtesy Pedro Sanjuan.

Kennedy and served as a Democratic party fund-raiser. After the election, both Duke and Sanjuan wanted to work at the State Department; Duke wanted the job of assistant secretary of state for Inter-American affairs, while Sanjuan hoped to work on Soviet issues. President-elect Kennedy instead offered Duke the post of chief of the State Department's Office of Protocol, a largely ceremonial position in an office that others at State considered peripheral. Duke took the job and asked Sanjuan to come

along as his assistant. Sanjuan turned to Robert Kennedy, who had become a close friend and patron during the campaign, to get him a more exciting job at State, but Kennedy suggested that he “get his foot in the door” through the Office of Protocol and move to another position later.¹⁹

No one in the Kennedy administration anticipated the problems that the issue of discrimination against diplomats would cause, least of all Pedro Sanjuan. Sanjuan knew little about Africa or the problems of African diplomats before he arrived at the State Department. Soon after he arrived, however, he met with the *Washington Post* reporter Milton Viorst, who had written a series of columns on discrimination against African diplomats. The State Department had no files on the issue, so Viorst loaned Sanjuan his own files. As Sanjuan learned about the problems African diplomats faced, he became outraged at what he viewed as the inadequate response of the Eisenhower State Department to their complaints, and he decided to push the State Department to do more to help them.²⁰

Sanjuan's interest in the issue of discrimination against diplomats stemmed from both personal conviction and political ambition. Having grown up in a cosmopolitan family with an international background, Sanjuan questioned American racial norms even though he never felt himself the victim of any discrimination. His father, a well-known composer whose music drew on Afro-Cuban traditions, had many black friends. The young Sanjuan was amazed by the racial situation in South Carolina, which differed greatly from what he had known in Cuba. In South Carolina, he recalled, “decent” white people treated blacks as less than human. Out riding with friends during high school, Sanjuan insisted they let him out of the car when they began shooting into “nigger town” for sport.²¹ His sense of fairness predisposed Sanjuan to concern about the issue of civil rights. Moreover, the problem of discrimination against diplomats presented opportunities for action that Sanjuan had not expected in the Office of Protocol. Sanjuan immediately asked Angier Biddle Duke's permission to focus on it and sought the approval of Robert Kennedy. By the end of January, Sanjuan had become the point person in the State Department on the African diplomat problem, and by March he was director of the SPSS.

Early on, Sanjuan sought to position himself as a member of the Kennedy administration's civil rights bureaucracy. When he first entered office, President Kennedy appointed Harris Wofford to serve as his assistant on civil rights. Seeking to make the civil rights bureaucracy in the executive branch more efficient, Wofford created a subcabinet group on civil rights where representatives from the various departments could meet regularly to facilitate communications and coordinate responses. Sanjuan worked to make connections with Wofford, and by November 1961 he had

¹⁹ Duke was a well-known society figure who came from old money. He served as ambassador to El Salvador, Spain, Morocco, and Denmark. He died in 1995 at age seventy-nine in a rollerblading accident. See *Washington Post*, May 2, 1995, p. C1; *ibid.*, B6. Sanjuan telephone interview, Nov. 5, 1999, p. 2; Sanjuan telephone interview, Aug. 18, 1998, pp. 4–5.

²⁰ Milton Viorst telephone interview by Romano, Sept. 11, 1998, typescript (in Romano's possession), p. 1; Sanjuan interview, May 26, 1993, p. 1; Sanjuan telephone interview, Aug. 18, 1998, p. 5.

²¹ Sanjuan telephone interview, Nov. 5, 1999, p. 1.

become a member of the subcabinet group on civil rights. Sanjuan also coordinated his activities with Berl Bernhard of the United States Commission on Civil Rights and with Frederick Dutton, the special assistant to the president who acted as the liaison between the spss and other government agencies. In addition, he cultivated good working relationships with those in the State Department who might be sympathetic to his cause. G. Mennen Williams, the assistant secretary of state for African affairs, and Chief of Protocol Angier Biddle Duke were willing to work with the spss in the fight against racial discrimination, although neither would prove as outspoken as Sanjuan.²²

Most important, Sanjuan had a personal relationship with Robert Kennedy, the powerful attorney general. Although Robert Kennedy and the Department of Justice would eventually assume control of the administration's civil rights bureaucracy, it was Sanjuan's friendship with Kennedy, more than Justice's jurisdiction over civil rights, that served him and the spss well. Sanjuan later worked for Robert Kennedy's senatorial campaign. In 1965 he traveled to Latin America as Robert Kennedy's translator. Robert Kennedy placed a high premium on personal loyalty, and Sanjuan was known as a loyal Kennedy man. Sanjuan sometimes attended Robert and Ethel Kennedy's parties at Hickory Hill, their Virginia home; he was once tossed in their pool while wearing a tux, a sure sign of being a Kennedy insider. Throughout his tenure at spss, Sanjuan tried to meet with Robert Kennedy once a week to keep him informed of spss activities.²³

These bureaucratic and personal connections were crucial, because the spss would have to struggle to become a player in the arena of civil rights. From the very start, Sanjuan wanted the spss to use the issue of discrimination against diplomats to wage a broad, general campaign against racial discrimination. Most people at the State Department, however, saw both the Office of Protocol and the issue of domestic discrimination as peripheral to the department's concerns. As presidential assistant Fred Dutton described it in a November 1961 memo to the president, the efforts of the Protocol Office to help African diplomats were meeting "considerable latent resistance" within the State Department. The career foreign service people at the State Department, Dutton later recalled, did not believe State should play a role in domestic issues and thought that working too strenuously against discrimination against diplomats would only draw unnecessary attention to the issue.²⁴ If the issue

²² Information about the subcabinet group on civil rights comes from folders on the group, box 14, White House Staff Files, Harris Wofford; Subcabinet Group, 1962 File, box 24, White House Staff Files, Lee White (Kennedy Library); Harris Wofford, *Of Kennedys and Kings: Making Sense of the Sixties* (New York, 1980), 144–50; Hilty, *Robert Kennedy*, 298–99; and Harris Wofford telephone interview by Romano, Sept. 28, 1998, typescript (in Romano's possession), p. 1. Sanjuan first appeared on the attendance list for a subcabinet group meeting in November, but he may have been attending earlier. Neither he nor Harris Wofford remembers when Sanjuan first became involved with the group.

²³ Sanjuan telephone interview, Nov. 5, 1999, pp. 3–4. On Robert Kennedy's character and his role in the administration's civil rights bureaucracy, see Hilty, *Robert Kennedy*, 304–15; Jeff Shesol, *Mutual Contempt: Lyndon Johnson, Robert Kennedy, and the Feud That Defined a Decade* (New York, 1997); and Arthur Schlesinger, *Robert Kennedy and His Times* (New York, 1978).

²⁴ Dutton to John F. Kennedy, Nov. 3, 1961, in *Civil Rights during the Kennedy Administration*, part 1, ed. Brauer, reel 4; Frederick Dutton telephone interview by Romano, Oct. 16, 1998, typescript (in Romano's possession), pp. 1, 5. Harris Wofford echoed Dutton's assessment that the State Department was reluctant to become involved in domestic affairs. Wofford telephone interview, Sept. 28, 1998, p. 1.

needed to be dealt with at all, most at State believed, the concerns of African diplomats should be kept distinct from the problems of American blacks. Early State Department suggestions about how to handle the issue thus focused on isolating diplomats from potential discrimination. It was suggested, for example, that the State Department buy an apartment building to house African diplomats or that Congress allocate money for a foreign service club, since the social clubs in Washington, D.C., refused to admit blacks. When Sanjuan told Secretary of State Dean Rusk about a diplomat who was refused service in a barbershop, Rusk suggested that African diplomats have their hair cut in his office by his personal barber. Such ad hoc solutions were suggested by more powerful figures than Rusk. President Kennedy's famous statement that African diplomats who faced discrimination in restaurants on the road between New York City and Washington, D.C., should fly rather than drive reflects his pragmatic approach to civil rights issues, and its flippancy led the spss staff to question his support for their work. Some in the administration, moreover, suspected that African diplomats who were sympathetic to the Soviet Union might seek out racial incidents in order to embarrass the administration.²⁵

This limited approach to the dilemma of African diplomats met immediate criticism, from Cold War rivals of the United States, from African diplomats, and from Sanjuan and the spss. Attempts to isolate diplomats were castigated in the Communist press. Chinese propaganda harshly criticized the State Department for seeking to establish a vacation beach for foreign diplomats since most beaches within driving distance of Washington, D.C., were segregated. The Soviet press accused the United States of trying to isolate the victims of discrimination rather than dealing with the discrimination itself. While American propagandists criticized other countries for creating "Potemkin villages" to conceal their internal problems from visitors, it was the United States that was the master of such deceptions, a 1961 TASS press dispatch asserted. African diplomats, for their part, made it clear that they did not want to have to identify themselves as ambassadors or as foreigners to avoid discrimination. As one African ambassador told the spss, "if I have to announce that I am an Ambassador before I enter any establishment or apartment building in this city in order not to be subjected to insults and humiliations, I will request that my Government recall me." Another ambassador resented being asked to wear his African robes when he went out so he would not be mistaken for an American black.²⁶

Sanjuan and the spss moved quickly to counter efforts to isolate diplomats or "whitewash" American discrimination. Although the earliest memos by Sanjuan had suggested that the spss approach the problems of African diplomats on an individual, ad hoc basis without addressing the issue of racial discrimination more

²⁵ "Briefing for the Undersecretary on African Diplomats in Washington, June 2, 1961," box 1, Sanjuan Papers; "Living Conditions of New Diplomats in Washington and Vicinity and Suggestions for Easing of Tensions by the Office of Protocol"; Rusk, *As I Saw It*, ed. Papp, 582. Kennedy was speaking to Chief of Protocol Duke, who called Wofford after the incident to make sure Kennedy was behind spss efforts. See Wofford, *Of Kennedys and Kings*, 127. See also Sanjuan interview, May 26, 1993, p. 1.

²⁶ Peking to Europe, telegram, May 22, 1961, Personal Scrapbooks of Pedro Sanjuan, Department of State, vol. 1: Feb. 4, 1961–Feb. 27, 1963 (microfilm, 1 reel, Kennedy Library); TASS Press Dispatch, Sept. 10, 1961, *ibid.*: "Discrimination Against Diplomats in Housing."

“It’s All Right To Seat Them. They’re Not Americans”



The *Washington Post* editorial cartoonist Herbert Block satirized those who would make exceptions to the rules of segregation for Africans, but not for black Americans, in this April 1961 cartoon.

Reprinted with permission from Straight Herblock (Simon and Schuster, 1964).

generally, two or three months after the unit's formation, Sanjuan was criticizing such efforts as inadequate. If the State Department bought an apartment house to house nonwhite diplomats, it would kowtow to discrimination and ghettoize

Africans, Sanjuan insisted. Sanjuan's memos stressed that diplomats sought real remedies, not token gestures, and that diplomats from the most friendly to the least friendly African states would resent being treated differently from black Americans.²⁷

Sanjuan's insistence that discrimination against diplomats could not be separated from the issue of racial discrimination against Americans, however, was not welcome at the State Department, and Sanjuan faced resistance in trying to establish the *spss*. He had to use his connections to the executive branch to get the unit running. When Sanjuan was told by State Department executive secretary Lucius Battle that there was no money for a staff for the *spss*, he appealed to Dutton, who worked in the White House. Sanjuan was given a staff by the State Department only after Dutton offered him a staff and office in the executive branch. He soon had a staff of eighteen, although Sanjuan believes the department purposely sent him the "dregs" of State Department workers, such as secretaries who could not type. The *spss* also had difficulty acquiring the necessary equipment. Sanjuan remembers raiding other State Department units for typewriters because he had so few supplies.²⁸

From these limited beginnings, Sanjuan set out to make the *spss* the key agency in the administration pushing the foreign policy angle for domestic civil rights reforms. Sanjuan believed that the State Department's interest in desegregation could be an important rhetorical weapon in the fight for civil rights, and he urged others in the bureaucracy to make widespread use of the Cold War argument to press for civil rights initiatives. As he wrote in a 1961 memo, the interest of the Department of State in civil rights provided "a powerful weapon for the Administration's civil rights program" since even those who were "adamantly opposed to civil rights as such, are nevertheless willing to hear arguments concerning the effect of discrimination on our foreign policy." Sanjuan even tried to maneuver Secretary of State Rusk into using the diplomatic issue for a broader attack on segregation. In January 1961, in an apparent setup between Sanjuan and Robert Kennedy, Kennedy asked Rusk about housing discrimination against African diplomats. Sanjuan wrote the reply, which Rusk signed. Although the letter insisted that the State Department must work "unobtrusively," without "fanfare" or publicity, to reduce incidents involving diplomats, Sanjuan also inserted the language that would reappear in Rusk's 1963 testimony for the public accommodations bill. Writing under Rusk's name, Sanjuan declared, "My own personal view is that this question cannot be solved satisfactorily

²⁷ "Briefing for the Undersecretary on African Diplomats in Washington, June 2, 1961." Sanjuan also criticized other agencies for downplaying the racial problem in the United States. He charged that a 1963 Agency for International Development booklet on civil rights tried to "whitewash problems of civil rights, perhaps to have the foreigner believe that racial discrimination is just human nature." Sanjuan to Lindsay Williamson, April 18, 1963, Foreign Nationals, Oct. 26, 1962–June 16, 1963 File, box 21, White House Staff Files, Lee White.

²⁸ Sanjuan interview, May 26, 1993, pp. 2–3; Sanjuan telephone interview, Aug. 18, 1998, pp. 5–6. The State Department probably feared losing the *spss* to the executive branch because the department wanted to be able to point to the *spss* to prove to the administration that it was doing something about civil rights. See "Contribution of the Department of State to Progress in Civil Rights," Oct. 27, 1961, in *Civil Rights during the Kennedy Administration*, part 1, ed. Brauer, reel 6.

simply in terms of diplomatic personnel. I do not believe that, in the Nation's Capital, a diplomatic passport should be required for the enjoyment of the normal rights of citizenship without discrimination."²⁹

Whether Rusk really believed this in 1961 is difficult to determine, but a few key civil rights supporters in the administration certainly wanted to see the *SPSS* become an ally in the larger fight for domestic civil rights. Harris Wofford, Kennedy's assistant on civil rights, saw the foreign policy point as good leverage in the campaign to integrate the United States; in particular, he believed the work of the *SPSS* would provide a wedge to force the desegregation of Washington, D.C. Today, Wofford remembers thinking that Sanjuan was put into the Office of Protocol because the key "civil rights folks" in the administration wanted to use protocol for a major desegregation campaign. Sanjuan insists that he was not planted in State to lead civil rights campaigns, but that he was enthusiastic about using the African diplomat issue to push for more fundamental civil rights reforms.³⁰

An overview of two main operations of the *SPSS*—the campaign to help diplomats find housing in the Washington, D.C., area and the fight to force restaurants along Route 40 in Maryland to desegregate—demonstrates how the *SPSS* pushed the boundaries of its mandate to become a leading actor in the fight for civil rights legislation in Washington, D.C., and Maryland. The *SPSS* quickly moved beyond ad hoc measures to push for first voluntary, and then compulsory, desegregation. Prodding a reluctant State Department, the *SPSS* and Pedro Sanjuan led in using foreign policy arguments to fight domestic segregation.³¹

The Campaign to Desegregate Housing

The most serious and immediate problem facing African diplomats when they arrived in the United States was finding suitable housing. In the early 1960s, many whites were fleeing the city for the Virginia or Maryland suburbs, which often excluded blacks informally. Furthermore, while racially restrictive covenants had been declared illegal by the Supreme Court, many properties in Washington, D.C., still relied on voluntary covenants to prevent their sale to blacks. Washington realtors had a long history of blockbusting, taking advantage of whites' fears by encouraging white residents to move and reselling their homes to African Americans at higher prices. The neighborhoods where many African diplomats wanted to live, those in northwest Washington near the embassies, were practically all-white. A

²⁹ "Report on the First Nine Months of the Special Protocol Service Section of the Office of the Chief of Protocol, Department of State," Nov. 1, 1961, box 1, Sanjuan Papers; Dean Rusk to Robert F. Kennedy, Jan. 31, 1961, Civil Rights—Miscellaneous, 1960–Jan. 1962 File, box 2, White House Staff Files, Harris Wofford. Pedro Sanjuan claims that he and Robert Kennedy devised this letter to see where Rusk stood on the issue of racial discrimination against diplomats. Sanjuan telephone interview, Aug. 18, 1998, p. 2.

³⁰ Wofford telephone interview by Romano, p. 1; Sanjuan telephone interview, Nov. 5, 1999, p. 4.

³¹ In addition to conducting the housing and Route 40 campaigns, the *SPSS* created the State Advisory Committee on Diplomatic Travel, which brought together representatives from seventeen states to aid the State Department in planning trips for nonwhite diplomats.

1961 study by the Bureau of Social Science Research found that only 8 of 211 luxury apartment buildings in northwest Washington would accept African tenants.³²

This residential segregation made it difficult for African diplomats to find housing. The housing situation, claimed Sanjuan, was the "most embarrassing problem Protocol has to face in connection with the establishment of diplomatic missions." Between 1961 and 1963 representatives from nearly all of the African embassies reported difficulty finding housing, whether for their ambassadors or for staff members. It took weeks or even months to locate suitable housing. In the course of their searches, diplomats almost inevitably encountered humiliation, often discovering apartments had suddenly been "rented" when they appeared for appointments. "The worst damage is done by the rebuff," Sanjuan noted in 1961. Even when housing was finally located, the injury was only partially alleviated. spss's inability to aid diplomats in finding housing demonstrates the intractability of the problem: in February 1961, when Pedro Sanjuan began working on the problems of diplomats, there were nine "emergency cases" of diplomats who lacked suitable housing. After four months of work, the spss had been able to find better housing for only five of the families.³³

Discrimination in housing was an issue that brought continuing embarrassment to the Kennedy administration. During the 1960 campaign, touting the ability of the president to take action on civil rights without any new laws, candidate Kennedy had promised that, if elected, he would wipe out racial discrimination in federally funded housing "with the stroke of a pen." After the election, however, fearful that an executive order to desegregate federal housing would cost the administration the support of southern Democrats or hurt the chances of Democrats in future elections, President Kennedy delayed living up to his campaign promise for nearly two years. After much lobbying from civil rights activists, who began sending the president pens for signing an order in a sarcastic "Ink for Jack" campaign, Kennedy finally issued Executive Order 11063 right before Thanksgiving 1962. Even then, the order was extremely limited, applying to less than 3 percent of existing housing and only 20 percent of new construction. The prohibition on racial discrimination, moreover, did not extend to private financial institutions. The final order was, in the historian Allen J. Matusow's words, "an empty gesture toward the principle of open housing."³⁴

The difficulties African diplomats faced in finding housing starkly revealed the severity of housing discrimination and highlighted the limitations of the federal government, which could not ensure fair housing even in the nation's capital. The problem for African diplomats was not new, although it was exacerbated by the great number of new diplomats trying to find places to live in and around Washington, D.C. The spss began working on the housing issue by following the lead of

³² U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, *Civil Rights U.S.A.*, 144. In 1960, over 45% of blacks in Washington, D.C., lived in areas whose population was over 90% nonwhite, and over 66% in areas whose population was over 75% nonwhite.

³³ "Living Conditions of New Diplomats in Washington and Vicinity"; "Briefing for the Undersecretary on African Diplomats in Washington, June 2, 1961."

³⁴ Allen J. Matusow, *The Unraveling of America: A History of Liberalism from the 1960s* (New York, 1984), 68–69. On the housing order and Kennedy's delay in issuing it, see Brauer, *John F. Kennedy and the Second Reconstruction*, 206–7; and Hilty, *Robert Kennedy*, 302–4.

efforts undertaken by the Eisenhower administration. In the fall of 1960, representatives from the State Department's Bureau of African Affairs had met with representatives from the Washington Real Estate Board (WREB), which represented nearly one thousand realtors in the District of Columbia. The head of the WREB suggested that any diplomats needing housing be referred directly to him; he would circulate their needs among the member realtors, who could contact the diplomats individually if they had suitable housing. This very limited approach ended neither discrimination against diplomats nor negative publicity about the difficult housing searches many African diplomats experienced. Milton Viorst's columns in the *Washington Post* about the diplomatic housing problem eventually led the State Department to sponsor a conference with leading realtors, but the Eisenhower State Department maintained a hands-off, low-key approach, calling press reports of discrimination "overstated" and accepting realtors' claims that landlords were reluctant to rent to African diplomats, not because of their race, but because their diplomatic status made it difficult to recover damages.³⁵

The SPSS continued this liaison with the Washington Real Estate Board, but the agency quickly concluded that the voluntary efforts of the WREB were not going to be enough. The board was proud of itself for finding five apartments, Sanjuan told the undersecretary of state in 1961, but such "meager findings" did not begin to alleviate the housing problem. Any effective approach was going to require new laws barring housing discrimination, Sanjuan insisted as early as June 1961: "We see no facile solution of the housing problem other than a new District ordinance, or a new interpretation of an existing law that will make it illegal to discriminate against prospective tenants because of their color or religion."³⁶

Sanjuan insisted that the problems of diplomatic housing could be solved only by outlawing housing discrimination in Washington, D.C., but in June 1961 he had not convinced others at State. With the SPSS already leaning toward a legal solution, the stage was set for conflict with Washington real estate interests and more conservative groups within the State Department. Thus in July 1961, when the Office of Protocol asked prominent Washington apartment building owners to attend a meeting on alleviating the problem of diplomatic housing, most administration officials present reassured the real estate owners that they were concerned only about diplomatic housing. While some at the meeting, notably the black Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Public Affairs Carl Rowan, argued that the group should address housing discrimination more generally, others from the State Department told the owners that the department's priority was resolving the crisis in housing for diplomats. Angier Biddle Duke, Sanjuan's superior, said that the Office of Protocol was concerned only about the problems of African diplomats. The owners agreed to form a State Department Advisory Committee on Diplomatic Housing (often called the Diplomatic Housing Committee or the Washington Housing Commit-

³⁵ J. C. Satterthwaite to Loy Henderson, Jan. 5, 1961, Civil Rights—Miscellaneous, 1960–Jan. 1962 File, box 2, White House Staff Files, Harris Wofford.

³⁶ "Briefing for the Undersecretary on African Diplomats in Washington, June 2, 1961."

tee), but they were adamant that their cooperation depended on limiting the scope of the committee to the diplomatic housing issue. As one owner recalled, he was "angry" that some at the first meetings of the committee "tried to stick an anti-segregation resolution down our throats." At the first meeting of the Diplomatic Housing Committee in July 1961, Frank Luchs, the realtor who chaired the meeting, established that the group was to limit itself to the African diplomat housing problem and not to tackle the issue of housing discrimination in general.³⁷

The plan for finding housing for diplomats was simple. The owners on the housing committee agreed to open seven buildings to African diplomats immediately and to work with the SPSS to establish a network to help nonwhite diplomats find apartments. Every week, the SPSS would send a list of its housing needs to the committee. The committee, in turn, would distribute this list to members of the WREB who agreed to receive it. Theoretically, realtors with apartments to rent would contact the diplomats directly. Duke was satisfied with the outcome of the first meeting. It was, he claimed, "a good first step toward solving one of our most grievous problems."³⁸

Only five months after the committee was formed, however, it became clear that the voluntary approach was failing. Pedro Sanjuan began to complain that some members of the committee were being "less than candid" with the SPSS. Managers of several buildings owned by members of the committee told the SPSS that they had no available units even while they were advertising units in area newspapers. Meanwhile, African diplomats and their staffs continued to face discrimination and harassment in the housing search. Sanjuan also contributed to a growing rift between the apartment owners and the SPSS by putting the names of African students and African American government workers on the lists he submitted to the committee. Before distributing the lists to Washington realtors, the housing committee deleted all the nondiplomatic names. In a memo to Fred Dutton, Sanjuan complained that the State Department could not continue to endorse the practice of providing aid to Africans but not African Americans. The "democratic necessity for giving assistance to the relatively small number of nondiplomats who request the aid of SPSS should be apparent to all," Sanjuan insisted.³⁹

By November 1961, Sanjuan began to push again for a bolder attack against housing discrimination. Claiming that the "obvious discrimination" in Washington

³⁷ The Washington Housing Committee consisted of Sanjuan, Duke, Robert Weaver, the black administrator of the Housing and Home Finance Agency, Walter Tobriner, the chairman of the District of Columbia Board of Commissioners, and nine building owners. See "Transcript of Meeting on Problem of Diplomatic Housing," July 6, 1961, box 1, Sanjuan Papers; "Minutes of the First Meeting of the Washington Housing Committee," July 10, 1961, *ibid.*; "Housing Committee to Help Erase Discrimination against Diplomats," *Department of State Bulletin*, July 24, 1961, p. 155; "When African Envoys House-Hunt in the Capital," *U.S. News and World Report*, July 1, 1963, p. 11; and "When African Diplomats Come to Washington," *ibid.*, June 12, 1961, pp. 86-88. *Washington D.C. Evening Star*, July 7, 1961, in *Civil Rights during the Kennedy Administration*, part 2, ed. Brauer, reel 6; "Minutes of the First Meeting of the Washington Housing Committee."

³⁸ "Housing Committee to Help Erase Discrimination against Diplomats," 154.

³⁹ On continuing housing problems, see "Special Protocol Service Section Housing Report," Nov. 1, 1961, box 1, Sanjuan Papers. For Sanjuan's criticisms, see Sanjuan to Dutton, "SPSS Housing Report," Nov. 16, 1961, in *Civil Rights during the Kennedy Administration*, part 1, ed. Brauer, reel 3. For the Washington Real Estate Board's criticism of Sanjuan's practice of putting the names of nondiplomats on the housing lists, see Frank Luchs to Sanjuan, Nov. 13, 1961, *ibid.*

housing had led the spss to act like a civil rights agency, Sanjuan insisted that the State Department should fight for an open occupancy policy that would forbid discrimination based on race and open all buildings to anyone who could pay the rent. Apartment owners vehemently opposed an open occupancy ordinance, and others at the State Department had been willing to compromise on the issue if diplomatic housing needs could be met informally. But as it became clear that the Diplomatic Housing Committee would not be able to find apartments for even the small number of diplomats, the spss began to push the department to support a blanket antidiscrimination ruling and to insist that the housing committee could not refuse to help black federal employees who needed housing. "‘Open occupancy’ offers the only definitive solution to our present and future difficulties," Sanjuan argued in late 1961. "Anything less than ‘open occupancy’ will be but a half-hearted stop gap solution."⁴⁰

When the Civil Rights Commission decided to hold hearings on housing discrimination in Washington, D.C., and its suburbs in April 1962, the spss saw them as a perfect opportunity to stress the need for an open occupancy ordinance in the district. During the two days of hearings, four representatives from the State Department testified before the commission. G. Mennen Williams, the assistant secretary of state for African affairs, Roger Jones, the deputy undersecretary of state for administration, Duke, and Sanjuan all argued that discrimination against African diplomats in housing hurt American international relations and that the problem could be solved only by adopting an open occupancy law. "Open housing is the only answer to this problem," Williams told the commission, while Duke testified that legal sanctions against housing discrimination in Washington were necessary to end the diplomatic housing crisis. Duke, who a year earlier had told apartment owners that he was interested only in housing diplomats, now emphasized that "it is not only his own housing problems that concerns the African diplomat. It is instead, the housing problem of those of African descent, whose roots in this country trace back well over a century, but who still are not able to find a decent place to live." Even if the housing committee could solve the temporary problem of finding shelter for African diplomats, only ending housing discrimination for all would provide a long-term solution to the larger problem, Duke insisted. Sanjuan echoed Duke's argument, telling the commission that attempting to house individual diplomats "in spite of existing restrictions" did not offer a real solution. "The only solution is to abolish discrimination entirely." The spss also submitted a forty-page report detailing the discrimination diplomats faced in housing.⁴¹

The rupture between the spss and the Diplomatic Housing Committee became public at the 1962 hearings. The realtor Frank Luchs, the former president of the

⁴⁰ Sanjuan to Burke Marshall, "Progress Report, Special Protocol Service Section," June 16, 1963, in *Civil Rights during the Kennedy Administration*, part 2, ed. Brauer, reel 6; "Special Protocol Service Section Housing Report," Nov. 1, 1961, box 1, Sanjuan Papers.

⁴¹ Testimony of G. Mennen Williams in United States Commission on Civil Rights, *Housing in Washington: Hearings* (Washington, 1962), 127; testimony of Duke, *ibid.*, 140–41, 174–75; testimony of Sanjuan, *ibid.*, 146–47.

housing committee, told the Civil Rights Commission that voluntary efforts had solved the diplomatic problem and that an open occupancy law was unnecessary. The real problem, he insisted, was a general shortage of apartments in Washington and the low rent allowances of many African diplomats. He maintained that the job of the housing committee "was to take care of housing African diplomats," not to worry about open occupancy. The rift between the Diplomatic Housing Committee and the spss continued after the hearings, with a heated war of words about what the scope of the committee should be. In April 1963 Pedro Sanjuan discontinued any relationship with the committee, and by July the national press reported its demise.⁴²

The position of Washington realtors, however, became less important as the spss proved able to influence the Civil Rights Commission. The interest of the State Department in the hearings and in an open occupancy law in Washington, D.C., was widely reported in the press. Furthermore, the commission's report on the hearings demonstrated that the department's internationalist arguments had made an impact. "The shortage of rental housing for Washington's Negroes has created problems with international repercussions," the commission concluded. The discrimination against nonwhite diplomats "has done inestimable harm to the District of Columbia as the nation's capital and to the United States as a nation." In May 1962 Sanjuan could truthfully report that the spss had begun actively working for open occupancy in Washington "using the diplomatic issue."⁴³

In September 1962, the Civil Rights Commission proposed a fair housing practices regulation. Moreover, the commission suggested that the presidentially appointed District of Columbia Board of Commissioners adopt the antidiscrimination ruling, hoping to bypass the heavily southern House of Representatives District of Columbia Committee. The Department of State lobbied for this unusual procedure. In a memo to the president (most likely written by Sanjuan), Dean Rusk urged Kennedy to support the housing measure. "It is of great importance to our foreign relations that action be taken promptly to end housing discrimination in Washington. The continuation of this situation is clearly harmful to our national interests in the present-day world." Working with the Civil Rights Commission and the president's special assistant for national capital affairs, the spss lobbied the District Commissioners' office for an open housing ordinance. African and Asian diplomats were very interested in the possibility of such an ordinance, Sanjuan reported in late 1962. As the spss frequently reminded the District Commissioners, foreign diplomats had never understood why a government that said it opposed discrimination could not make it illegal in its own capital; now that an ordinance had been proposed,

⁴² Testimony of Frank Luchs, *ibid.*, 169; William Evergam to Sanjuan, April 1, 1963, Housing—Committee on Equal Opportunity in Housing, April 11–Sept. 19, 1963 File, box 21, White House Staff Files, Lee White; Sanjuan to White, April 11, 1963, *ibid.*; "When African Envoys House-Hunt in the Capital," 11.

⁴³ For press coverage, see *New York Times*, April 13, 1962, p. 22; *ibid.*, April 14, 1962, p. 21. For the commission's conclusion, see U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, *Civil Rights U.S.A.*, 21. For Sanjuan's statement see "Report of Achievements of Special Protocol Service Section since January 20, 1961," May 1962, in *Civil Rights during the Kennedy Administration*, part 1, ed. Brauer, reel 15.

they expected its speedy passage. Finally, after a series of congressional stalling tactics, the District of Columbia Board of Commissioners adopted a fair housing regulation on December 31, 1963.⁴⁴

While the politics of the adoption of a fair housing ordinance in Washington, D.C., are complex, the State Department's advocacy of open housing, spearheaded by Sanjuan and the SPSS, clearly influenced the United States Civil Rights Commission and the District of Columbia Board of Commissioners. Even though the SPSS moved toward a legislative solution only after voluntary attempts at solving the diplomatic housing crisis had failed, the fact that a unit within the racially conservative State Department lobbied for the law at all is important, particularly when the Kennedy administration had hesitated to act on its promises to end housing discrimination. Moreover, the SPSS effectively presented the problem as one that concerned the entire State Department, the message culminating in Dean Rusk's letter to Robert Kennedy. In the campaign against segregation of restaurants along Route 40, the SPSS would do even more to bring the State Department to the center of efforts to lobby for new civil rights laws.

The Route 40 Campaign

The campaign for a fair housing ordinance in Washington, D.C., suggests some of the ways the SPSS tried to use the diplomatic issue to push for a broader civil rights agenda. Similar strategies are apparent in the SPSS campaign to end segregation in restaurants along Route 40 in Maryland. The Route 40 case demonstrates, moreover, how Sanjuan drew on allies outside the State Department to protect his own position and to push State to become more active in civil rights efforts. The SPSS campaign, furthermore, quickly drew the attention of a key civil rights organization, the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE). Although the SPSS did not officially work with CORE, CORE saw an opportunity to exploit the State Department's position, mounting its own demonstrations in Route 40 restaurants to coincide with the SPSS campaign. The Route 40 campaign thus illustrates both how the concern about the foreign policy implications of domestic racism could be used by civil rights groups to their own advantage and how domestic civil rights activism could further the agenda of those working within the administration.

Route 40 stretches between New York City and Washington, D.C., the path that many diplomats drove when traveling between their embassies and United Nations headquarters. But nearly all the restaurants along the highway in Maryland and Delaware refused to serve blacks. Dozens of diplomats, including the ambassadors of Sierra Leone, Niger, and Cameroon, were unceremoniously refused service in res-

⁴⁴ "Fair Housing Practices Regulation Proposed for Adoption by the Board of Commissioners of the District of Columbia," in *Civil Rights during the Kennedy Administration*, part 2, ed. Brauer, reel 27; *New York Times*, April 14, 1962, p. 21; *ibid.*, Sept. 28, 1962, p. 25; Rusk to John F. Kennedy, Nov. 30, 1962, in *Civil Rights during the Kennedy Administration*, part 1, ed. Brauer, reel 9; "Progress Report, Special Protocol Service Section, Office of the Chief of Protocol," Nov. 1, 1962, box 1, Sanjuan Papers. For coverage of the adoption of the regulation, see *New York Times*, June 15, 1963, pp. 1, 8; and *ibid.*, Jan. 1, 1964, pp. 1, 10.

taurants there. The impetus for an organized administration campaign to desegregate Route 40 restaurants came in June 1961, when Adam Malik Sow, the new ambassador of the Republic of Chad, was refused service while en route from New York to present his credentials to President Kennedy in Washington, D.C. Sanjuan accompanied Sow to his meeting with President Kennedy, and when an interpreter "sugarcoated" the details of the incident, Sanjuan interrupted to tell the president that Sow was thrown out of a restaurant after being told they "didn't serve niggers there." Kennedy instructed Sanjuan to see his assistant Ken O'Donnell, who would set up a meeting with Maryland state officials for him. While O'Donnell was hesitant, worried that black diplomats were simply looking to stir up trouble, he did arrange a meeting between Sanjuan and the attorney general of Maryland. Thus began a campaign led by officials of the federal government to undermine segregation in Maryland.⁴⁵

This campaign provides a rich case study of Kennedy's civil rights bureaucracy in action. Because Kennedy had given the project his blessing by telling Sanjuan to meet with Maryland state officials, his subordinates within the administration felt they had free rein to act in his name. At meetings with Maryland state officials, Sanjuan and representatives from the White House planned a multifaceted strategy for approaching the Route 40 problem. First, letters would be sent from the president and the governor to restaurant owners, newspaper editors, and civic leaders in counties along Route 40. The governor's office would hold press conferences with local county editors, and an educational campaign would be conducted by the Maryland Commission on Interracial Problems and Relations in cooperation with the Department of State's Office of Public Affairs. Finally, representatives from the Kennedy administration would visit the restaurants individually in an effort to convince owners to desegregate voluntarily. From the beginning of the project, Sanjuan and the SPSS outlined two paths toward the goal of desegregation. First, the SPSS would work with the owners of the restaurants along the road to try to convince them to desegregate voluntarily. At the same time, the agency would lay the groundwork to lobby the Maryland state legislature (the General Assembly) for a public accommodations law that would outlaw discrimination in restaurants.

All of this required close contact between the SPSS and other people involved in the Kennedy administration's civil rights bureaucracy. At Sanjuan's request, Harris Wofford sent Maryland leaders letters and telegrams in President Kennedy's name advocating equal access to public facilities. Gov. Millard Tawes of Maryland arranged for Sanjuan to meet local newspaper editors, and the office of the assistant secretary of

⁴⁵ Sanjuan telephone interview, Aug. 18, 1998, pp. 9–10; Sanjuan interview, May 26, 1993, pp. 1–2; Sanjuan to Duke, "Background to the Route 40 Campaign," Nov. 9, 1961, in *Civil Rights during the Kennedy Administration*, part 1, ed. Brauer, reel 3; "Progress Report of the Special Protocol Affairs Section, July 1, 1961," box 1, Sanjuan Papers. Other information on the campaign is drawn from Dutton telephone interview, pp. 2, 4–5; Dutton to Sanjuan, July 24, 1961, in *Civil Rights during the Kennedy Administration*, part 1, ed. Brauer, reel 3; Dutton to Alice Duanigan, Aug. 28, 1961, *ibid.*, reel 7; Sanjuan to Dutton, "Progress Report: SPSS," Oct. 1, 1961, *ibid.*, reel 3; John F. Kennedy to John Feild, Sept. 22, 1961, *ibid.*, reel 1; "Report on the First Nine Months of the Special Protocol Service Section"; "Progress Report of the Special Protocol Service Section," Feb. 1, 1962, box 1, Sanjuan Papers; "Big Step Ahead on a High Road," 32–39.



Pedro Sanjuan's attempt to convince Earl Kammerer to desegregate his Route 40 restaurant was documented in *Life* magazine, which provided crucial publicity for the Special Protocol Service Section (spss) campaign in Maryland.
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state for public affairs prepared press and radio releases for use in the local papers. The Department of State invited Maryland's newspaper editors and publishers to a luncheon to discuss the problem of Route 40 and to enlist their aid in rallying public opinion behind the campaign, while the spss compiled statements from foreign newspapers about discrimination against diplomats to distribute throughout the state. Dutton advised Sanjuan to send a staff member to every Maryland county to set up meetings between local leaders and representatives of the State Department and governor's office. "This will be the kind of over-all community consensus that will be essential to win over the restaurant owners on any substantial basis," Dutton wrote Sanjuan. "It should also be most useful in getting public support for any public accommodations legislation that comes up at the next session of the Maryland legislature." Sanjuan, often accompanied by Berl Bernhard of the United States Civil Rights Commission, also visited Route 40 restaurant owners personally to ask them to desegregate. Sanjuan and Bernhard drafted a telegram urging desegregation using President Kennedy's name and gave it to each restaurant owner. In all of this, Sanjuan brought along the press, and he presented the issue in very simple terms. When an African diplomat was refused a cup of coffee in a Route 40 restaurant, Sanjuan told

the *Washington Post*, United States “foreign policy in Africa was jeopardized for a measly dime.”⁴⁶

Sanjuan actively sought publicity for the campaign despite repeated requests by others at State that he work behind the scenes to resolve problems on an individual basis. He brought reporters from *Time* and *Life* to his first meeting with the Maryland attorney general. Both magazines ran articles in the coming months, and both prominently featured Sanjuan’s role in the Route 40 campaign. Sanjuan made sure a press entourage followed him along Route 40 so that his position and his office would become well known. The publicity, he felt, would also help protect him in the State Department: the better-known he was, the harder it would be to fire him.⁴⁷

In the Route 40 campaign, Sanjuan used the foreign policy argument to justify the federal government’s involvement in state affairs. In speeches, interviews, and one-on-one encounters, he stressed that discrimination in restaurants along Route 40 hurt American foreign policy, and he sought to draw on people’s patriotism to win their support for desegregation. Thus, in his first speech before the Maryland General Assembly in 1961, Sanjuan asked the legislators to raise their hands if they wanted to help the Communists win the Cold War. If they did not pass a public accommodations bill, that was exactly what they were doing, Sanjuan argued. In this rather extraordinary testimony, Sanjuan told the legislature, “I would like to put this in the clearest terms possible. . . . when an American citizen humiliates a foreign representative or another American citizen for racial reasons, the results can be just as damaging to his country as the passing of secret information to the enemy.” Sanjuan’s attempts to influence the Maryland state legislature were a dramatic departure from traditional understandings of the role the federal government should play in state politics. While the attorney general’s office was arguing that it could not protect civil rights workers in the South because the federal government could not interfere with a state’s police power, Sanjuan was urging a state legislature to pass a bill for the good of the nation’s foreign policy. When a public accommodations bill was proposed in 1962, the State Department endorsed the bill, and the Maryland Committee on Human Rights, a local civil rights organization, sent every state legislator a copy of one of Sanjuan’s speeches about the need for a public accommodations law.⁴⁸

Despite the Cold War argument, the Route 40 Campaign met strong resistance from restaurant owners and the Maryland legislature. Most of the seventy restaurant owners along Route 40 refused even the request to form a committee to work toward desegregation. Many resented the federal government’s interference and

⁴⁶ Wofford, *Of Kennedys and Kings*, 127; Wofford telephone interview by Romano, p. 1; Dutton to Sanjuan, July 24, 1961, in *Civil Rights during the Kennedy Administration*, part 1, ed. Brauer, reel 3. For Sanjuan’s role, see Sanjuan interview, May 26, 1993, p. 3; and Sanjuan telephone interview, Aug. 18, 1998, p. 10. *Washington Post*, Sept. 17, 1961, p. A24.

⁴⁷ See “Big Step Ahead on a High Road,” 32–39; and “Troubled Route,” *Time*, Oct. 13, 1961, p. 26. Sanjuan interview, May 26, 1993, p. 7; Sanjuan telephone interview, Aug. 18 1998, p. 6.

⁴⁸ Statement by Sanjuan before the Legislative Council of the General Assembly of Maryland, Sept. 13, 1961, reprinted in “Department Urges Maryland to Pass Public Accommodations Bill,” *Department of State Bulletin*, Oct. 2, 1961, pp. 551–52; Beryl W. Williams to John F. Kennedy, Oct. 2, 1961, Maryland Committee on Human Rights File, box 4, White House Staff Files, Harris Wofford.

feared the negative economic consequences of serving blacks. The proprietor Clarence Rosier, for example, reacted sharply when Sanjuan asked him to consider desegregating his restaurant.

To hell with the United Nations and the hell with your colored diplomats! I built this place with my sweat. Now you come up here with your clean shirt and pressed pants and tell me how to run my business. Go back to Washington and tell Kennedy he can feed 'em. I wouldn't have a customer left if I let them people in here.

Compounding the intransigence of the restaurant owners was the reluctance of the Maryland assembly to pass a bill that would outlaw racial discrimination in public accommodations. While Governor Tawes gave rhetorical support to the *SPSS* campaign, he refused to pressure the legislature to pass a public accommodations bill. In 1961, a public accommodations bill was defeated for the twelfth consecutive time.⁴⁹

In late 1961, when the meetings between the *SPSS* and restaurant owners had stalled, *CORE* announced plans to target restaurants along Route 40 in a day of sit-ins. *CORE*, famous for sponsoring the freedom rides, was clearly interested in Route 40 because of the State Department's groundwork there. One of the first planning memos for the Route 40 freedom ride noted that "The State Department . . . by its interference in the 'internal affairs' of the State of Maryland [has] given us a perfect in, it seems a shame to pass it by." *CORE*, the memo suggested, could even send a list of restaurants that would serve integrated groups to the State Department, the African delegations at the United Nations, and the African embassies in Washington with a letter stating that *CORE* would be happy to be of service in the future. By mid-October, a coordinating committee had been established to plan a freedom ride along Route 40.⁵⁰

CORE planned to have carloads of freedom riders stage sit-ins at Route 40 restaurants on November 11, 1961. The goal of the ride was to force Governor Tawes to call a special session of the Maryland General Assembly to consider a public accommodations law. Julius Hobson, the eastern representative of *CORE* who became the spokesperson for the campaign, stressed that *CORE* wanted to intensify the pressure on the state assembly to act, pressure that had been mounting "ever since African diplomats began being rebuffed at restaurants along Route 40." Hobson also wanted to make sure that *SPSS* efforts along Route 40 amounted to more than a public relations campaign. Indeed, he often followed Sanjuan around on the road, personally testing the seating policies at restaurants Sanjuan had just

⁴⁹ For Clarence Rosier's statement, see "Troubled Route," 26. "Report on the Achievements of Special Protocol Service Section Since 1961," n.d., Subcabinet Agency Reports, June 5, 1962–July 17, 1962 File, box 24, White House Staff Files, Lee White. Gov. Millard Tawes supported the Route 40 campaign only when he could do so without serious political cost; he would not exert leadership to get a public accommodations bill through the Maryland legislature.

⁵⁰ Joe to Gordon Carey, Oct. 9, 1961, *Papers of the Congress of Racial Equality, 1941–1967* (microfilm, 115 reels, Microfilming Corporation of America, 1980), no. 495, reel 46. The memo was probably written by Joe Steinfeld of the Long Island chapter of *CORE*. For an account of the Route 40 Freedom Ride that does not mention the *SPSS* or the State Department, see August Meier and Elliott Rudwick, *CORE: A Study in the Civil Rights Movement, 1942–1968* (New York, 1973), 162.

visited.⁵¹ Not surprisingly, CORE's plans met strong opposition from the governor and the Maryland Commission on Interracial Problems and Relations. The governor refused to call a special session of the assembly, and he cautioned the riders against "rash action" that would hinder efforts to desegregate. The chairman of the Maryland commission protested that sit-ins would only strengthen the opposition to integration and make it impossible to pass state legislation, and he urged CORE to cooperate with the State Department's goal of preventing negative publicity about discrimination. As "patriotic Americans," CORE should put the interest of the country first, he argued. Some in the administration also expressed serious reservations about CORE's plans. In a memo to the president, Fred Dutton speculated that CORE's "blatant action" would set back the government's efforts to persuade the Maryland assembly to pass antidiscrimination legislation.⁵²

Just three days before the scheduled freedom rides, 47 restaurants along Route 40 agreed to desegregate voluntarily, 35 in Maryland and 12 in Delaware. In response, CORE called off the November 11 freedom ride, announcing that it would instead hold "tests" of the newly integrated restaurants sometime later that month. At the end of November, Baltimore CORE tested 35 of the restaurants that had agreed to desegregate; 8 of them had failed to do so. In light of this failure, CORE undertook the freedom ride on December 16, 1961. Although the December 16 demonstrations did not go as smoothly as expected, Julius Hobson urged CORE to exploit the international liability argument in continued campaigns in Maryland. He proposed a statewide freedom ride in Maryland, aimed at desegregating the entire state. The ride would be planned and carried out from Washington, D.C., the capital of the "free world." "The international implications of such a project would be tremendous and would serve to rally many individuals and organizations to CORE's support," Hobson argued. Much to Hobson's disappointment, CORE did not follow through on the project.⁵³

⁵¹ See "Route 40 Riders' Chart Plan," *Wilmington Delaware Journal*, Oct. 21, 1961, in *Papers of the Congress of Racial Equality*, no. 495, reel 46; Minutes of Meeting of U.S. 40 Freedom Rides, Oct. 28, 1961, *ibid.*; Carey to CORE Groups, Officers, Advisory Committee, Nov. 1, 1961, *ibid.* For Julius Hobson's statement, see *Baltimore Sun*, Oct. 20, 1961, *ibid.* Sanjuan telephone interview, Aug. 18, 1998, p. 10. It was very unlikely that a civil rights law would pass in the regular session of the General Assembly scheduled for February 1962, when only statewide legislation could be enacted; if a single county exempted itself from a bill, it would be considered a local bill and could not be enacted during the session.

⁵² *Washington Star*, Oct. 20, 1961, *Papers of the Congress of Racial Equality*, no. 495, reel 46; W. C. R. Sr., Chairman Governor's Commission on Interracial Problems and Relations, n.d., *ibid.*; Dutton to John F. Kennedy, Nov. 3, 1961, in *Civil Rights during the Kennedy Administration*, part 1, ed. Brauer, reel 4. See also *Washington News*, Oct. 20, 1961, *Papers of the Congress of Racial Equality*, no. 494, reel 46.

⁵³ *Howard University Hillion*, Nov. 10, 1961, *Papers of the Congress of Racial Equality*, no. 34, reel 19; Carey to CORE Chapters, Advisory Committee, Nov. 15, 1961, *ibid.*, no. 495, reel 46; James Farmer, telegram, Nov. 9, 1961, *ibid.*, no. 43, reel 10; News Release from CORE, Nov. 8, 1961, *ibid.*, no. 495, reel 46; Walter Carter and Solomon Baylor, telegram, Nov. 29, 1961, *ibid.*, no. 495, reel 46; "Progress Report of the Special Protocol Service Section," Dec. 1, 1961, box 1, Sanjuan Papers. The demonstrations did not go well. Fewer people than expected took part in the ride, a planned rally in Baltimore after the ride fizzled, and press coverage was light. Hobson complained that the December 16 ride "let the State off the hook as far as a public accommodations bill is concerned." Julius Hobson, confidential memorandum, Dec. 26, 1961, *Papers of the Congress of Racial Equality*, no. 35, reel 13. On the campaign's problems, see Lincoln Lynch to Norman Hill, Dec. 26, 1961, *ibid.*, no. 495, reel 46; and Meier and Rudwick, *CORE*, 162-63.

The involvement of CORE in the Route 40 campaign illustrates how the foreign policy argument could cut both ways. CORE claimed to be helping the State Department by pushing for desegregation; opponents claimed that the publicity such rides engendered would harm the nation's image abroad. Pedro Sanjuan clearly sided with CORE in this debate. The protests by CORE were in no way planned by the SPSS, but Sanjuan welcomed the group's efforts to force the Maryland assembly to act. CORE's efforts and its "sensible moderation," Sanjuan wrote in a 1961 memo, contributed to progress on the Route 40 problem. CORE, for its part, thanked the State Department after it won the desegregation of thirty-five Maryland restaurants. Such public thanks raised eyebrows at the State Department. Ernest Lindley, a speech writer for the department, called Sanjuan in to criticize him for his "appalling bedfellows."⁵⁴

The Route 40 campaign, more than any other conducted by the SPSS, used the diplomatic issue to push for broader civil rights reform. Harris Wofford describes the decision to link desegregation of Route 40 restaurants to foreign policy interests as "shrewd," and he credited Sanjuan, a "fiery" and "peppery" fellow, with pushing Duke and himself to get involved in the campaign. Williams, the assistant secretary of state for African affairs, recalled in a 1970 interview that while the State Department usually tried to handle the African diplomat problem quietly, there was a conscious attempt to exploit the Route 40 problem for the general civil rights cause. Sanjuan helped cultivate the link by securing press coverage of the Route 40 campaign and by undertaking a public speaking tour in Maryland to highlight the SPSS position. Dutton, one of Sanjuan's key supporters in the White House, worried that Sanjuan perhaps pushed too hard on the Route 40 issue and sought publicity too freely, but he also acknowledged that it was important for someone to focus intensely and narrowly on the campaign.⁵⁵

Despite the pressure from the administration and CORE, achieving desegregation in Maryland was difficult and slow. The Maryland General Assembly narrowly defeated the public accommodations bill again in March 1962, notwithstanding Sanjuan's claim that its members would be acting as "agents of the Soviet Union" if they did not pass the bill. Even when threatened with sit-ins by CORE, only about half the restaurant owners along Route 40 agreed to desegregate voluntarily. Finally, in March 1963, two years after the SPSS began its campaign to desegregate Maryland's restaurants, the General Assembly passed a law that barred discrimination in restaurants and hotels, but only in the counties around Route 40. Soon this limited law would be superseded by the national Civil Rights Act of 1964.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ Sanjuan to Duke, Nov. 9, 1961, in *Civil Rights during the Kennedy Administration*, part 1, ed. Brauer, reel 3; CORE Headquarters News Release, Nov. 8, 1961, *Papers of the Congress of Racial Equality*, no. 495, reel 46; Sanjuan telephone interview, Aug. 18, 1998, p. 10.

⁵⁵ Wofford telephone interview by Romano, p. 1; Harris Wofford interview by Larry Hackman, May 22, 1968, typescript, pp. 60–61, Oral History Program (Kennedy Library); G. Mennen Williams interview by William Moss, Jan. 27, 1970, typescript, pp. 69–70, *ibid.*; Dutton telephone interview, pp. 4–5.

⁵⁶ "Progress Report, Special Protocol Services," June 16, 1963, box 1, Sanjuan Papers.

The 1964 Civil Rights Act and Beyond: The SPSS and the State Department

The difficulties in achieving desegregation on Route 40 demonstrate that the international argument alone did not convince reluctant legislatures and that the State Department's interest in civil rights was no guarantee of the passage of new laws. Nevertheless, Sanjuan's efforts succeeded in bringing the State Department into the Kennedy civil rights bureaucracy and in forcing State to take a more active role in domestic civil rights reform. Sanjuan pushed the State Department by seeking publicity for the SPSS and by positioning himself as a representative of the State Department. He could not have done so without the support of his outside allies, from the subcabinet group on civil rights to Robert F. Kennedy. Many in the department felt Sanjuan was doing a disservice by publicizing the discrimination diplomats faced; Sanjuan claims that probably 95 percent of those who worked at the State Department saw him as a "canker" or a "running sore." Powerful opponents such as executive secretary Lucius Battle wanted him out of the department. When, in September 1961, Sanjuan's opponents tried to fire him after he attracted media attention to the Route 40 campaign, Sanjuan immediately informed Robert Kennedy, who called Secretary of State Rusk and told Rusk to give him a promotion. When Sanjuan's position was again threatened in the winter of 1962, Kennedy protected him and he was once more promoted. Between February 1961 and July 1962, Sanjuan rose from G-13 to G-15 status at the State Department. Kennedy's decision to protect Sanjuan probably stemmed from both a sense of loyalty to his supporters and a desire to force State to become more involved in civil rights issues. Kennedy may also have enjoyed annoying the State Department, which he considered ill run and inefficient. Dutton claims that Robert Kennedy protected Sanjuan out of both "conviction and duplicity." Either way, Sanjuan managed to secure his own position at the State Department through the help of powerful outside allies.⁵⁷

Yet even with this support, Sanjuan's position would probably not have been safe if Secretary of State Dean Rusk had been openly hostile to the SPSS and its mission. Sanjuan discovered a potential ally in Rusk. Although Rusk and Robert Kennedy disliked each other and Rusk found the attorney general's tendency to meddle in the State Department particularly annoying, he did not turn against Sanjuan for his connections with Kennedy. Rusk was interested in issues of civil rights and was considered a racial liberal. Born in rural Georgia in 1909 to a relatively poor farming family, Rusk grew up in segregated Atlanta, in a neighborhood he described as "not only anti-black, but also anti-Jewish, anti-Catholic, and antiforeign." Although, as he recalled, racial prejudice was not particularly pronounced in his family, it was only when he went to Oxford University on a Rhodes Scholarship that Rusk began to question his own racial views. In a letter to his mother, written from Oxford, the young Dean Rusk argued that there was something amiss when black Americans listed in *Who's Who* could not get a decent hotel room in Atlanta. Although never a

⁵⁷ United States Department of State, *Biographic Register*, 1966, 474; Sanjuan interview, May 26, 1993, pp. 2–3; Sanjuan telephone interview, Aug. 18, 1998, pp. 6–8; Dutton telephone interview, p. 4.

crusader, Rusk sought to practice racial tolerance in his personal life. In 1942 while working for the War Department, Rusk helped desegregate the War Department's Officers Mess by inviting Ralph Bunche to eat with him there. In the 1950s Rusk refused to join the Scarsdale Country Club because it did not admit Jews or blacks. When Rusk accepted the position of secretary of state and moved his family to Washington, D.C., he and his wife tried to take the restrictive covenant out of the deed for their new house. In 1967 Rusk proudly attended his daughter's wedding to a black man.⁵⁸

Rusk thus began his tenure at the State Department already interested in the issue of civil rights. He would argue repeatedly before Congress that racial discrimination at home hindered the conduct of American foreign policy. Rusk was worried enough about incidents involving diplomats that he asked Sanjuan to attend staff meetings twice a week to keep him informed of spss activities. Although Rusk was a relatively conservative leader surrounded by staff who did not want to see the State Department become involved in domestic civil rights issues, he usually sided with Sanjuan when pushed. When security guards locked the doors of the State Department during the 1963 March on Washington so that marchers would not be able to use the facilities at what was the closest public building to the meeting site, Sanjuan went to Rusk's office and convinced him to open the doors.⁵⁹

Rusk's racial liberalism probably explains why he, despite much advice to the contrary, decided to give strong testimony in favor of the administration's 1963 civil rights bill. Rusk was asked to lead off the testimony in front of the Commerce Committee in large part because of the success of the spss in positioning the State Department as an interested party in civil rights policies. Before his appearance, Rusk had to choose between a forceful opening statement written by Sanjuan and a watered-down version by the speech writer Ernest Lindley. Lindley's version focused on the concerns of African diplomats, while Sanjuan's insisted that diplomats should not be treated differently from Americans and argued that the diplomatic issue was secondary to the real problem of discrimination against American citizens. Sanjuan threatened to resign if Rusk gave the weaker testimony.⁶⁰

At a meeting before the hearing, however, key figures at the State Department, including Williams and Dutton (by 1963, an assistant secretary of state for congressional relations), warned that if Rusk gave the more forceful testimony, southern senators might slash the State Department's appropriations. Rusk, however, decided to use Sanjuan's testimony, regardless of the consequences. In his memoir, Rusk argued that both "policy exigencies" and the "rightness of the cause" led him to

⁵⁸ On the relationship between Dean Rusk and Robert Kennedy, see Thomas J. Schoenbaum, *Waging Peace and War: Dean Rusk in the Truman, Kennedy, and Johnson Years* (New York, 1988), 268–69; Hilty, *Robert Kennedy*, 410–11; and Rusk, *As I Saw It*, ed. Papp, 296, 336. On Rusk's background and racial views, see *ibid.*, 579–83; and Schoenbaum, *Waging Peace and War*, 51–52, 242, 271, 381–83. For his description of his Atlanta neighborhood, see Rusk, *As I Saw it*, ed. Papp, 48.

⁵⁹ Sanjuan telephone interview, Aug. 18, 1998, p. 3; Sanjuan interview, May 26, 1993, p. 2; Sanjuan telephone interview, Nov. 5, 1999, p. 2.

⁶⁰ Sanjuan interview, May 26, 1993, pp. 5, 6; Sanjuan telephone interview, Aug. 18, 1998, pp. 2, 3; Sanjuan telephone interview, Nov. 5, 1999, p. 3.

throw the full weight of the State Department behind the administration's civil rights programs. While it is hard to know Rusk's motives, it is likely that President Kennedy had asked him, as the first witness in the Senate hearings and the highest ranking member of the cabinet, to testify forcefully. Moreover, Rusk was clearly driven by his own personal convictions. Ultimately, his appearance before the Commerce Committee was notable less for the statement he read than for his pointed responses to the questions of the South Carolina segregationist Strom Thurmond. When Thurmond tried to get Rusk to say that civil rights demonstrations hurt the nation's image abroad, Rusk retorted: "I would say this, sir: if I were denied what our Negro citizens are denied, I would demonstrate."⁶¹

The SPSS did not last long after the Route 40 campaign ended. Dean Rusk's testimony for John F. Kennedy's civil rights bill and the subsequent passage of the act, which prohibited discrimination in public accommodations nationwide, were seen as a proper ending point for the agency. Sanjuan himself recommended that the SPSS be dismantled since the passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act made the work of the agency obsolete. Although nonwhite diplomats might still encounter problems in Washington, D.C., they would no longer face racial discrimination that was sanctioned by the federal government. The fact that many in the State Department viewed Sanjuan as a "n—r lover who is stirring up trouble" may also have contributed to the agency's demise. Certainly the black press interpreted the dismantling of the SPSS as a victory for racism in the State Department. Sanjuan, however, did not see the end of SPSS in this light, and he went on to work for the new Office for Special Representational Services, which sought to develop civil rights guidelines for State Department use at home and overseas. He continued to advise Robert Kennedy, and he eventually became the first assistant secretary of the interior for territorial and international affairs. In 1965, he was even awarded the State Department's Medal of Honor.⁶²

It would be wrong to overstate the importance of the SPSS or the State Department in the arena of civil rights. While the SPSS was taking relatively timid steps to end housing discrimination in Washington, D.C., blacks throughout the South were putting their lives on the line to end Jim Crow segregation. Mass protest and activism ultimately proved far more important in forcing reluctant legislatures to do away with discriminatory laws than pleading by the State Department. Nevertheless, the story of the SPSS and the problems African diplomats faced in the early 1960s is important for three key reasons. First, while many have argued that the foreign policy concerns about domestic racial discrimination led primarily to symbolic acts to improve the American image overseas, the actions of the SPSS demonstrate

⁶¹ For recollections of the meeting at the State Department about the testimony, see Sanjuan interview, May 26, 1993, pp. 5–6; Sanjuan telephone interview, Aug. 18, 1998, pp. 2–3; Sanjuan telephone interview, Nov. 5, 1999, p. 3. For Rusk's version, see Rusk, *As I Saw It*, ed. Papp, 586–87. For Rusk's testimony, see Committee on Commerce, *Civil Rights—Public Accommodations, Hearings before the Committee on Commerce*, 315.

⁶² *Baltimore Afro-American*, July 6, 1963, Personal Scrapbooks of Pedro Sanjuan; *Washington Post*, Sept. 6, 1963, p. A9; Sanjuan interview, May 26, 1993, p. 6. Today Sanjuan is president of the Institute of East–West Dynamics, which works with the United Nations to help nations that had centrally planned economies make the transition to free-market economies.

that the foreign policy implications of American racial discrimination could lead to substantive efforts to end racial segregation and discrimination at home. Concerns about the international ramifications of domestic discrimination led the federal government to undertake some fundamental reforms for the sake of foreign policy. Ultimately, it proved impossible to protect African diplomats from discrimination without confronting Jim Crow discrimination directly.

Second, the SPSS helped develop and promote the argument that racial discrimination at home hurt the United States abroad. While concern about how domestic race problems would affect America's image in the Cold War began in the 1940s, it was the presence of African diplomats in the United States that brought home the international costs of domestic discrimination. The incidents of discrimination against diplomats provided concrete proof of the links between domestic racism and international costs, and they very likely convinced many Americans that segregation was a liability in foreign affairs. In 1948, only 36 percent of Americans polled in a National Opinion Research Center survey believed that American racism damaged the nation's prestige abroad, but by 1963, 78 percent of white Americans felt domestic race problems could not be defended before world opinion and hurt America's image abroad. For Sanjuan, those numbers, as he wrote in a 1963 memo to Burke Marshall, "indicated a certain measure of success for our efforts to impress the layman over the last two and a half years with the international significance of what is not just a domestic issue."⁶³ There is, of course, no way to quantify how much concern about the international costs of American racism contributed to the civil rights reforms of the 1960s, but as Pedro Sanjuan recognized, the diplomatic argument might sway individuals who normally opposed civil rights legislation. It seems likely that the Kennedy brothers themselves, who often referred to the international implications of American racism in their formal addresses on civil rights and in private meetings, began to see the civil rights issue more broadly in part because of this foreign policy connection.⁶⁴

Finally, the story of the SPSS reveals some of the inner workings of Kennedy administration bureaucracy. Scholars have noted that the Kennedy administration was highly personalized and centralized.⁶⁵ In this case, Sanjuan's personal connections with the attorney general allowed him the leeway to try to force the State Department to become involved in the administration's civil rights campaigns. Whether sending telegrams under the president's name or labeling segregationists as

⁶³ Plummer, *Rising Wind*, 167–68; *Washington Post*, Aug. 26, 1963, pp. A1, A2; Sanjuan to Marshall, Aug. 26, 1963, in *Civil Rights during the Kennedy Administration*, part 2, ed. Brauer, reel 7.

⁶⁴ John and Robert Kennedy often spoke publicly about the international implications of domestic racism. Typical examples include John F. Kennedy, "White House Special Message on Civil Rights to the Congress of the United States," Feb. 28, 1963, in *Civil Rights during the Kennedy Administration*, part 1, ed. Brauer, reel 8; John F. Kennedy, "Supplemental Message on Civil Rights," June 17, 1963, *ibid.*; Robert Kennedy, "Speech at the Law Day Exercises of the University of Georgia Law School," May 6, 1961 in *Rights for Americans*, ed. Hopkins; Robert Kennedy, "Speech at the Annual Luncheon of the Associated Press," April 23, 1962, *ibid.*; and Robert Kennedy, "Speech at the Meeting of University of South Carolina Chapter of the American Association of University Professors," April 25, 1963, *ibid.*

⁶⁵ Hilty, *Robert Kennedy*, 304.

Communist sympathizers, someone like Sanjuan, a relatively low-level figure in the administration, had freedom to act in the arena of civil rights in large part because he had the personal support of Robert Kennedy.

While the SPSS was a small agency with a short life-span, its story has important historical implications. Today, as new works in African American history demonstrate that the struggle of African Americans to achieve civil, political, and legal equality in the United States has been almost continuous, it is crucial to explore why black activism was more effective in the 1950s and 1960s than it had been previously.⁶⁶ The actions of the SPSS suggest that it was no coincidence that a sustained and successful attack on the American racial system occurred when the United States was engaged in an ideological battle with the Soviet Union. The pragmatic international concerns of the Cold War coupled with the domestic pressures of the civil rights movement put the federal government in a position where even the conservative State Department could be forced to support limited reforms in American racial policies. Just as African diplomats arriving in Washington, D.C., quickly discovered that they would have no diplomatic immunity from antiblack racism, so did the State Department find that its focus on foreign policy could not be used as an excuse for ignoring domestic affairs.

⁶⁶ See, for example, Robin D. G. Kelley, *Hammer and Hoe: Alabama Communists during the Great Depression* (Chapel Hill, 1990); Robin D. G. Kelley, *Race Rebels: Culture, Politics, and the Black Working Class* (New York, 1994); Steven Reich, "Black Texans and the Fight for Citizenship, 1917-1921," *Journal of American History*, 82 (March 1996), 1478-1504; Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920* (Cambridge, Mass., 1993); Patricia Sullivan, *Days of Hope: Race and Democracy in the New Deal Era* (Chapel Hill, 1996); and Fairclough, *Race and Democracy*.

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