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Tom Charles Huston Interview Transcription
27 June 2008

Timothy Naftali

Hi, I'm Tim Naftali. I'm director of the Richard Nixon Presidential Library and Museum. It's June 27, 2008. I'm in Indianapolis, Indiana, and I have the honor and privilege to be interviewing Tom Charles Huston for the Richard Nixon Oral History Program. Tom, thank you for joining us.

Tom Charles Huston

You're welcome.

Timothy Naftali

I want to ask you, one of your responsibilities was to collect information about violent groups, extremist groups. Tell us a little bit about the problem of Arab terrorism in the period when you were in the White House.

Tom Charles Huston

Well, this would have been in the fall of 1970, and the sudden rash of terrorist activities, primarily -- squarely when the airline hijackings started. And the fedayeen, what they were identified at that time, you know, were engaged in that. And the particular problem was that there was a scheduled meeting in New York, a Mideast peace conference, and there was concern about, you know, security and that. But more troubling was that as part of the review that the intelligence that we had done in --

Male Speaker

I'm sorry, I have to stop you, Tim, I'm sorry. I got a little buzz sound --

Male Speaker

Sorry for all that, we sound great.

Tom Charles Huston

Are we going to start over or are we just going to pick it up?

Timothy Naftali

Do we start from the beginning? Okay.

Male Speaker

We are rolling, and, again, thank you for your indulgence.

Timothy Naftali

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Hi, I'm Tim Naftali. I'm director of the Richard Nixon Presidential Library and Museum. It's June 27, 2008. We're in Indianapolis, Indiana, and I have the honor and privilege to be interviewing Tom Charles Huston for the Richard Nixon Oral History Program. Thank you for joining us today, Tom. Tom, tell us about the issue of air terrorism as it was viewed by the White House when you were there.

Tom Charles Huston

The problem arose in fall of 1970, and basically, there was a wave of airline hijackings by Arab militants, which were a group of fedayeen. And we had coming up, I think it was in September or October, a major session, a negotiating session in New York between the Israelis and certain others, and one of the many futile efforts to achieve Middle Eastern peace. And in the course of the review that we did of the intelligence capabilities of the government during the summer, early summer, it was fairly obvious to me that we had virtually no coverage, either domestic or foreign, in that area. And the -- the public perception of the problem was a hijacking problem. And Peter Flanigan, who was the member of the staff responsible -- the -- I think the FAA, I think, was basically given the responsibility to try to figure out how to beef up security, airline security. My view was that, you know, that the first problem was an intelligence problem, that we needed to know more about who these people were. We knew nothing about who -- what groups might be operating in the United States. And so I asked both the FBI and CIA to, you know, to undertake, you know, to put this on their priority list and try to, you know, see if we couldn't turn up something that would give us some feel for what the scope of the problem might conceivably be. You know, I think some effort was made in that regard. It really never -- Hoover used it as an opportunity to convince the president he ought to expand his empire by increasing the number of legal attachés in the foreign embassies. But beyond that, I don't think much came of it. And, you know, it became -- but it did later, as I recall -- there was a to do that the Bureau did make an unauthorized entry into one of their groups, pick up some membership rolls and things like that. But, you know, I only know that secondhand.

Timothy Naftali

Because in that era, the FBI was reluctant to engage in unauthorized entries.

Tom Charles Huston

Well, of course, you know, this was -- the irony of the situation was that, of course, Hoover had said no, you know, and the bureaucracy of the Bureau other than Bill Sullivan's people, you know, backed him up, but then, you know, after Mark Felt, who isn't there now, Ned Sevek [phonetic sp], but obviously, he had been -- he, in fact, did authorize the entries that, you know, were made without the knowledge of anybody outside the Bureau. And this occurred in -- apparently between sometime in '71, '73 in that period.

Timothy Naftali

These related to investigating the PFLP and --

Tom Charles Huston

Yes, mm-hmm. And also the Weatherman fugitives.

Timothy Naftali

To what extent was the Jewish Defense League also --

Tom Charles Huston

Well, it was a concern particularly to the NSC and Kissinger. I'd have to say I was somewhat ambivalent about having it in that I recognized that it was our responsibility to provide protection to the Soviet Embassy and the Soviet Legation and that sort of thing, but on the other hand, it seemed to me that we ought, you know, not lean over backwards to accommodate these people who, in their domestic policy, were pursuing rigorously anti-Semitic policy, and probably the reason for me to understand why the Jewish groups were upset about it. But, you know, it was a fairly extremist group, so it needed to be watched. I think that Mitchell was particularly harsh. Maybe that was because Kissinger was on him. Kissinger was more concerned about what the Soviets thought than what any of the domestic implications might be. But all -- there were indictments and, you know, they shut it down.

Timothy Naftali

I'd like to walk you through some of the chronology that we did last time. The setting is better, I think, for an interview today, the lighting is better. Could you tell us the origins of the bombing halt study?

Tom Charles Huston

Well, it really started, you know, in the very earliest days of the administration in late January, '69, when the president asked Kissinger to have the NSC staff put together a history of the Paris negotiations. And the president was, I think, driven by a couple of factors. One is that he obviously needed to know what had gone on in Paris in the negotiations that led to the bombing halt, what commitments were made, what difficulties they ran into, that sort of thing. Because they were clearly, you know, intended to initiate a new round of negotiations with the North Vietnamese, and, you know, when Johnson left town, he took everything -- all the records, file cabinets with him. So there wasn't a lot sitting around in the White House. So the president wanted it for that reason. I think the president also, frankly, was interested in the fact that -- wanted to know what the role politics had played into this bombing halt decision, because he clearly believed that Johnson's decision to halt the bombing the week before the elections nearly cost him the election. And so he was interested in that. And so Kissinger prepared a study, which clearly didn't address any of the political side. The president apparently wasn't happy with it, and so in September, he asked that, you know, either I or I think Clark Mollenhoff, I'm not sure, somebody -- one of the two of us do it over, and so Haldeman recommended to Kissinger that I do it, and Kissinger said fine. And so I was asked to undertake, on my own, a study of the bombing halt that would consider not only what happened in Paris and the diplomatic steps, but also look at the political side of it, to what extent that there was any evidence that would suggest that the timing of the decision may have been politically motivated.

Timothy Naftali

There were a number of other studies also linked to this one. You were asked to do various reports. It wasn't just --

Tom Charles Huston

Well, yes, the president also asked that we do something on the assassination of President Diem. He wanted a report on that, and he also wanted a report on the Bay of Pigs. As was my want, much to the dissatisfaction of some of my colleagues, I thought it was stupid. What possible use was there of those -- I mean that would -- had no current policy implications that I could see, number one, and number two, was that those were subjects that were so politically sensitive that the likelihood that you could get any information out of the mouths of the government was remote. So I just pushed those aside and left those alone and concentrated my effort on this bombing halt study.

Timothy Naftali

Was the Chennault story part of your -- were you asked to study Chennault --

Tom Charles Huston

No, I wasn't really asked specifically to address Chennault, but you couldn't really look at the bombing halt and the politics of the bombing halt without -- at least in my judgment, without looking at what Johnson was looking at. What Johnson was looking at was this perception that the Nixon campaign was doing whatever it could to sabotage his efforts to achieve a bombing halt. And so I undertook on my own initiative to say, well, let's see what we can find out about this thing. And so I did get from the Bureau, I think at least what Bill Sullivan assured me, were copies of all the information they had, which included their surveillance logs and that sort of thing. As you might expect, NSA claimed they knew nothing about it. Of course that was nonsense, because I had other information that I knew what some of their activity had been, and CIA, I mean for heaven's sakes, "we wouldn't know anything at all about that," says Dick Helms, which was nonsense, too. But the reality of it is, neither one of them were going to give me any information. So I really was limited to what I could get out of what the bureau had. And I treated that as a separate report. In other words, it's not -- if you get the bombing -- the bombing halt study doesn't talk about this. I did a separate report for the president on the Chennault affair relating what the evidence suggested happened, what Johnson knew or thought he knew, you know, what he did, and, you know, so, you know, I'm sure it wasn't complete. I mean since then, I mean new information has come out, but I mean there are certain things that, you know -- big issue always was well, was Mrs. Chennault's phone bugged? There was conflicting testimony on that both before the Ervin committee and the Church committee. The best evidence that I could find was the answer to that was no because her phone was linked to the switchboard and the Watergate, and they didn't want to do that. But clearly, I mean she was physically monitored. Her movements were monitored. There were electronic surveillance of the -- both the Vietnamese Embassy, the South Vietnamese Embassy and the chancery. And so they were picking up any communications, plus there was physical surveillance so that anyone going in or out of the embassy was identified and reported immediately to the White House. And Johnson was following this directly. I mean this wasn't something that was -- some low level guy was doing. I mean this was going right to the top all along. Each time that Bureau -- and Deke DeLoach, the number three guy in the Bureau who was Johnson's man at the FBI, would directly report, you know, immediately anything that came up that he thought that Johnson would want to know.

Timothy Naftali

You did this secondary study on your own initiative.

Tom Charles Huston

Yes, mm-hmm.

Timothy Naftali

What did Haldeman say when he found out you were doing it? Was he interested in what you found?

Tom Charles Huston

Well, they really didn't -- you know, seem to be that interested. You know, I think -- and I never heard him anymore after I submitted it. I don't know if the president read it or he didn't read it. I assumed that he would be interested enough to read it. I suspect he would have wanted to know whether there was any -- whether I stumbled on any evidence that would, you know -- any smoking gun that would confirm what Johnson believed, which was that Nixon knew and Nixon directed the reported interference. There was none. And I think for that reason, you know, I think it would -- I think it would be interesting -- I've assumed that he did read it. I've assumed that he knew it, because I think in later conversations that occur in the Oval Office in '71, when -- during the time of the Pentagon Papers, when they're talking about some of these things, it leads me to believe that he at least understood that as far as we knew, there were no smoking gun out there, because there was some concern about what Johnson would do or not do. And Johnson, really, I think he and Nixon had an implicit agreement that Johnson -- in his autobiography, Johnson basically takes the position that he assumed that Nixon didn't know about it, but it was still not a good thing that should have been done, et cetera. So I think they kind of had an implicit agreement to just kind of push that under the rug. And -- but I think -- clearly there was no doubt that the Nixon campaign was aggressively trying to keep President Thieu from agreeing. The bigger question was did it make any difference. And I think the answer to that was no, and Secretary Rusk thought the answer was no. I mean, you know, Rusk tells President Johnson that, you know, President Thieu doesn't need Nixon's people to tell him this is not a good deal, from his perspective. And he had serious domestic problems in Saigon, and Vice President Quie was adamantly against it. And so I think that at the end of the day, that, you know, it probably didn't make any difference, but there is no doubt that in typical Nixonian fashion, he wasn't going to leave anything to chance.

Timothy Naftali

Did you find any evidence that the FBI was bugging President Nixon's plane?

Tom Charles Huston

No, I -- you know, I mean that's what Hoover told Nixon, and when he met with him at the Pierre in December of '69. And Nixon kind of apparently shrugged his shoulders about it. I don't -- I don't believe that. I mean --

Timothy Naftali

This is the [unintelligible]

--

Tom Charles Huston

Pardon?

Timothy Naftali

We can hear the -- let me ask that question again. Did you find any evidence, Tom, that the president's plane was bugged?

Tom Charles Huston

No, I didn't. I mean, there were -- there was circumstantial evidence that led me to believe that -- that that was unlikely. But there was nothing conclusive, but it just seemed unlikely to me. Hoover told the president that -- Nixon, before he was president, president-elect, he told him that Johnson had ordered his plane bugged, and it had been bugged. And I think Nixon believed it. Now, Haldeman essentially was on both sides of that. He said, "No, we didn't believe that," and another time he said, "Yes, we did." I think Nixon believed it, and I think Nixon assumed, well, you know, that's the way the game's played. I mean, I think this is -- the problem a lot of people have in trying to understand Nixon is that, you know, they don't understand his -- what he thought, and what he thought -- hey, you know, Johnson's got a problem. He needs to know what the hell I'm doing, and, you know, if I were there, I'd probably be doing the same damn thing. So -- but I think it's unlikely. Now, Nixon -- the bigger, more typical question was, was Spiro Agnew's plane bugged? Again, I think the jury's out on that, and I haven't had opportunity to look at the records of the Johnson Library. I'd like to see what they have there, but I think there -- I came to the conclusion that it probably wasn't, because Johnson ordered the FBI to check the phones in New Mexico when they thought that a phone call that would link the campaign to Mrs. Chennault had come out of New Mexico, and Agnew was there at the time. And so they -- Johnson directly ordered the FBI to monitor, to check all the phone calls that came out of there at the airport. And so they checked the pay phones, and the phones that are on Johnson's -- or on Agnew's plane, identified who -- what the -- how many calls were made, who they thought they were made to. It seems to me that if the plane had been bugged, they wouldn't have needed to have gone to all that trouble. They would have already had it. But, you know -- but clearly, Johnson wasn't leaving anything to chance. I mean I don't know, you know, how far they went. The initial order to the -- the initial request to the Justice Department that came from the FBI for the surveillance of Mrs. Chennault requested approval not only for physical surveillance, but for electronic surveillance. Interestingly, Clark, when he testified by the Church Committee denied that. He said he never approved it. Well, that's, you know -- that committee was not interested in anything that anybody from any Democratic administration had done, so they just let it pass. But the fact of the matter is, the evidence is clear that the request that went to the Justice Department requested approval for both, and there is no evidence that the approval that came back was limited to physical surveillance.

Timothy Naftali

And was this in September of '68?

Tom Charles Huston

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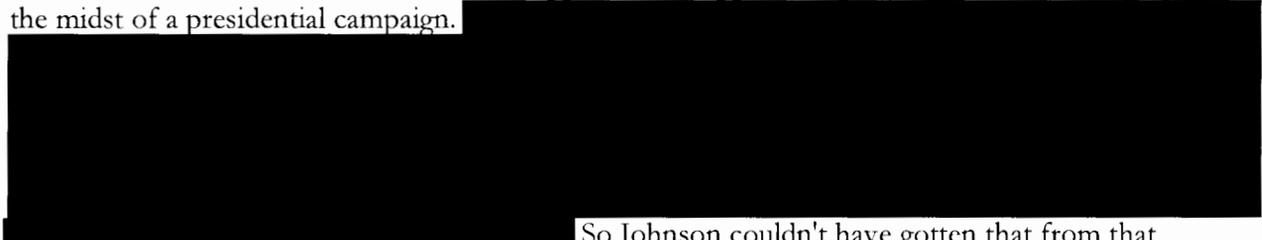
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This -- you'll have to forgive me. It's been a long time, I can't put it that early. It was in -- in the summer of '68 was when she met with Nixon in New York, and I think the big question is when did Johnson figure out or when did the government figure out that Chennault, who was well-known -- I mean she was a prominent, you know, figure, well-known. She had links to her -- I think her brother or brother-in-law, or brother, I think, was the Taiwanese Ambassador to Saigon. But she had strong links, you know, into the Saigon government, and was back and forth. And she was an active Republican and that, so, you know, that wasn't -- you know, wasn't a big deal. But the question was, you know, her role, alleged role as a conduit between the Nixon campaign and the Thieu government, really didn't become a relevant consideration until the talks got serious. And the talks really didn't turn serious until late September or the first week of October, when they finally got down to where Hanoi finally just began to say, well, we can make a move under pressure that was coming from the Russians, who wanted to help Humphrey. And so that's, you know, I think that's -- but the question that's always intrigued me is how did, you know -- who put this piece together, this -- that, you know, that she was allegedly in this conduit role that would be the prima facie case you'd have to make in order to support the normal notion that you're going to undertake physical and electronic surveillance of an American citizen in the course -- who is active in the opponent's -- opposition party's presidential campaign in the midst of a presidential campaign.



So Johnson couldn't have gotten that from that information. So, you know, I don't know. I mean, it was obviously at the time when people should have been looking at these things, that wasn't on the table. Church wasn't interested, Ervin wasn't interested.

per sec. 1.4 (c), 1.4 (d), 3.5(c)

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Timothy Naftali

From your research, did you conclude that the Nixon campaign was involved --

Tom Charles Huston

I think yeah, oh, yeah. I think -- there is no question of that. And, you know, at what level, you know, I mean there is no -- clearly Mitchell was directly involved. Mitchell was meeting with her, and, you know, the question, was the candidate himself directly involved, and, you know, my conclusion is that there is no evidence that I found, nor that anyone else has found that I can determine, that I regard as credible, that would confirm the fact that Nixon was directly involved. I think my understanding of the way in which -- having been in the '68 campaign, and my understanding of the way that campaign was run, it's inconceivable to me that John Mitchell would be running around, you know, passing messages to the South Vietnamese government, et cetera, on his own initiative.

Timothy Naftali

On the tapes, President Nixon later would say that it's important not to talk about LBJ's bugging. You just talked about an implicit understanding. Do you think there was an understanding between LBJ and the president that one wouldn't mention the Chennault affair if the other one didn't mention the bugging in '68? Do you think that -- is that what you meant by the implicit --

Tom Charles Huston

I think that would -- I think, yes, I think so. I think -- you know, I don't think when -- when they -- that they sat down and consciously said here's the trade, the quid pro quo. But I think that there was an implicit understanding between two very politically sophisticated people, who had been in the arena for a very long time, to say, hey, look. This thing is over, you know, neither one of us are going to gain anything by stirring up this pot, and let's leave it alone. And Nixon -- Johnson clearly kept his part of the bargain in his autobiography, you know, because he went out of his way, you know. It's really interesting, because I mean everything he cites is contrary to the conclusion that he states. So I mean it's clearly not something that would flow logically from what either he believed or what the evidence shows that he did. Simultaneously, I think that Nixon indicated, because Dean and others were on him to try to, you know, quote, blackmail Johnson into, you know, getting the Democrats to back off of the Watergate investigation and stuff. And Nixon resisted that, you know. I mean he tried to change the subject. I think he -- he understood what he was getting into, and he didn't want to go there.

Timothy Naftali

When did -- the bombing halt study, we've discussed before, you finished by the fall of '71.

Tom Charles Huston

Yes.

Timothy Naftali

You come back to finish the last few days --

Tom Charles Huston

Last three days, right.

Timothy Naftali

When do you finish this study on Chennault?

Tom Charles Huston

Oh, I did that earlier. That was done, I think, in -- either early '71 -- I'm not clear. Either late fall of '70 -- probably wouldn't have been before the election, mid terms. But it would have been if not then, early sometime in the -- I'm going to guess it would have been the first few months of '71. I can't tell you off the top of my head. But it was well in advance of the time that I, you know -- before I left.

Timothy Naftali

When you were asked to do the studies on the Diem coup of '63 and on the Bay of Pigs of '61, did Haldeman explain the question you were supposed to answer in both cases?

Tom Charles Huston

No. I mean the only thing I had was a copy of Nixon's memo that -- saying here is what I want. And, you know, I mean it basically, you know -- find out what we can about this thing. But then he added the caveat, but I don't want to ruffle any feathers or stir up the waters or whatever. Well, I took that as justification for saying, you know, there so no way, you know, I can get into this, either one of these subjects. And I mean I think -- I mean I knew where he was headed. I knew what he wanted. It simply was that I don't think, you know, A, that I could get the information -- even if the information existed, to support his conclusion that Kennedy and his senior people were behind the assassination or at least authorized or gave their implicit blessing to the assassination of President Diem. You know, on the Bay of Pigs, I -- I really didn't know what he wanted on that. I never did understand, you know -- I knew why he was upset about it, because he felt like that Kennedy had taken advantage of him in the debates where Kennedy acted like this great hawk, anti-Castro hawk, knowing full well that Nixon because -- Kennedy had been briefed on the impending invasion, but he knew that Nixon, because of his position and access to the classified information, couldn't, you know, say anything that would tip the hand that there were plans underway for this invasion. So I mean it stuck in his craw, and he blamed CIA for that. It's one of the reasons he really never liked CIA. And so I knew where he was going, but I didn't see any way to get there. And I didn't see any way to get the information, you know, from -- because by the time I really got into this stuff -- I mean I was having a hard enough time finding out what diplomats were saying to one another in Paris. To try to find out what the Kennedy senior people were thinking, or what CIA's operation staff were doing or not doing on the Bay of Pigs to me was just a mission impossible. So -- and obviously, it was. That's why you get a guy like Hunt has to make up memos or cables and, you know, Liddy, you know, some of the goofy things that they did. But I just said, you know -- he says don't ruffle any feathers, I can't do it without ruffling the feathers, so I won't do it.

Timothy Naftali

Why do you think that he wanted to know whether Kennedy was behind the Diem assassination?
What did it matter to --

Tom Charles Huston

I don't know that I understand why it mattered. I mean it was clear -- I mean I don't know, you know -- I mean -- anybody that had looked into it clearly understood that Lodge was, you know, was the moving force in giving the U.S. blessing to the generals to proceed with the coup. Now, I happened to have had personal experience of having interviewed the Vietnamese general that led the coup and had physical custody of President Diem and his brother, and I asked him flat out whether they deliberately intended to execute him in the beginning. He said, no, he, of course, was affronted. I asked, but claimed, no, it was an accident, hadn't been intended. But nevertheless, I mean there was no question that it was -- whether Kennedy's hand was on this cable or that, I mean, it seemed to be to be irrelevant. The fact of the matter is the administration had given the blessings to the generals. The generals would not have moved forward without knowing that the U.S. would support them, and, you know, that created the -- a problem that got dumped in Lyndon Johnson's lap. I mean anyone ought to have been [unintelligible] it ought to have been Lyndon Johnson. He's the guy that paid the price for that decision. So I don't -- I really don't know, you know. Sometimes, you know, it seemed like not just Nixon -- Johnson was the same way -- but they get, you know, they get this bone and start chewing on it, and you can't pull it out of their mouth. And so, you know, Huston says forget it, we're not going to

do that. And so six months, eight months down the road they got somebody else running around, you know, trying to do the same damned thing.

Timothy Naftali

Did you find that you were at cross purposes with Chuck Colson, because you didn't do this?

Tom Charles Huston

Well, you know, Chuck and I, yeah, we were at cross purposes, and certainly on -- he was the only person on the staff that I could say that I really ever had serious disagreements with, and problems with. And those arose in two contexts. One was that he kept asking me to have the bureau provide him with information that ultimately became obvious to me that he had no legitimate reason to have. And so I said no, that I -- I said I'm not going to authorize, you know, ask the Bureau to do this, because you haven't given me any good reason why you should have this information. First couple times he asked for name checks on people in connection with, you know, White House activities where it was, you know, reasonable by the standards of that time, you know, to -- you know, get information to make sure that, you know, you weren't inviting a pedophile, or whatever, you know, somebody in. But after a while it became obvious to me that there was no legitimate governmental purpose that was being served in my judgment, and since I was the one who was responsible in making the request, and it came to me, I just said no. Chuck didn't like anybody saying no. The more substantive dispute that we had was over the political strategy of what we called middle Americans and his approach, which was basically, in my judgment, was short sighted, limited simply to worrying about getting the president personally reelected in '72, focus on catering to certain select leaders, the AFL/CIO, and certain ethnic element groups.

And whereas I believed, and Harry Dent, Pat Buchanan, Bill Timmons, we believed that we were in a position where coming out of the '68 election, that there was a potential there for a fundamental shift in the electoral voting patterns of certain parts of the traditional Democratic coalition, of which what later became known as the Reagan Democrats were the group we identified. But our view was, my view was that this had to be accomplished on a programmatic basis. It wasn't a deal of, you know, calling in some labor leader to sip coffee with the president, and, you know, bail Jimmy Hoffa out of jail, but that, you know, you had to adopt to both rhetorically and programmatically language that spoke to these people in ways in which Republicans had traditionally not done. And, you know, and -- you know, I would bombard Haldeman with "here's what we think, here's what I suggest." Haldeman would say "that's great, we ought to do it, but the problem" -- well, there were two problems. One was that, you know, I didn't have any staff and Chuck had 23 people. I didn't see the president every day, and Chuck did. And so -- you know, and at the end, I mean after I left, but if I would have stayed, maybe we could have fought this thing and maybe we would have had a little more success. I doubt it. Because I think the president, at some point, made the decision that this campaign is going to be about me and not about the party, which was really out of character for him, because he probably was the -- of all our 20th century presidents, maybe with the exception of McKinley, the one who had been most committed to party building in his whole entire political life. So that's why I thought he would see the opportunity here that was available and that he could take advantage of, but it just didn't happen. It turned out you had to wait for Reagan.

Timothy Naftali

Why did you leave in 1971?

Tom Charles Huston

Well, I never planned to stay for the entire time. Actually, I had only intended to stay through the end of '70 -- of 1970. Because when I graduated from law school, I was -- a period -- I graduated in June. I was scheduled to go in active duty in the army in February. And at the time I was national chairman of Americans for Freedom, and so I was heavily involved in that, plus I was also working with Nixon and his people to -- in the early stages of the campaign. And -- but I have to think. I had accepted a job practicing law with a large firm in Indianapolis, and they said, "Well, look, normally you'd go there right after law" -- I said, "Well, since I'm going to go in the army, if you don't mind, I'll just wait until I get out." And so I committed to them that after I got out of the service, I'd come back and practice law. Well, you know, then instead -- when -- I was scheduled to get out of the army in February of '69, and in fact got out a little early, in January, to start at the White House on January 21st. But, you know, so I told the firm, I said, well, this opportunity has come along to work at the White House. I just feel like, you know, it's something I ought to do, I want to do. But, but I'll be back. And, you know, I'm committed to practicing law. My Hoosier roots run awfully deep. I'm not interested in being a Washington type. And so I said, you know, I'll be back after two years. And as it turned out, it was two and a half years, and partly that was a function that, you know, I had things that were going on that needed to be finished that had gotten pushed back, and so I asked, would it be all right if I stay until June, and that's what I did. So it was always intended. It wasn't, as is often reported, that Hoover slapped me down and therefore, I was, you know, discredited and didn't have anything to do and I left. I mean I had, you know -- I was busy, busier from, you know, August of 1970 up through the spring of '71, than I ever was. Because Haldeman and indirectly through the president had given me things that, you know, to do, not all of which were terribly important, but they thought it was important. I didn't, but they did. I was there to do what the hell they told me, not what I thought.

Timothy Naftali

One thing that happened after you left, but I think you were a contractor at that point, was they ordered a full field investigation of Daniel Schorr by the FBI. And I'm wondering if that would have happened when you were there.

Tom Charles Huston

I can't imagine how -- why they would have done that, I mean, you know, except I don't know that the people that were making those kind of decisions knew anything about it. I think that was somebody on Haldeman's staff that honored that. I can't imagine why they would do that.

Timothy Naftali

Who replaced you as --

Tom Charles Huston

Well, I mean -- well, Dean took over my basic responsibility. Initially, after the blow-up over the so-called Huston plan and its revocation, and Haldeman and the president and Mitchell decided well, Huston's lost his ability to deal with Hoover and these people on this, so we're going to shift this

portfolio over to John Dean and restructure in a way that will make Mitchell happy, and then they can sell Hoover. So that part of my portfolio, the restructuring part, moved over to Dean. But the day-to-day contact with the Bureau and the other intelligence agency stayed with me through the time until I left. And so like when I was dealing with the Arab situation, I mean that was in fall of 1970, and into the spring of 1971. So, you know, it -- but the -- you know, basically the -- I don't know that anybody had the same kind of relationship with the Bureau. Maybe that's good, but I mean -- because I knew the people over there, you know. And, you know, not just did I know Bill Sullivan who's the head of the intelligence division, but I know -- I knew the heads of the two major desks. I knew the guys who were working the desk, you know. And so I was able to, you know, have a feel for what they were doing and what they thought was appropriate. And -- but, you know, there were always parallel lines. Kissinger had his direct line to the Bureau directly through Hoover. And Haldeman would have. And that's how you get the so-called Kissinger wiretaps going, you know. I didn't know anything about them. They didn't come through me. Every day the courier, FBI's courier to the White House would come to my office, drop off envelopes for everything, except the things that would go over to Haldeman. And I always wondered, well, what's -- I never asked, It was just your job. But, you know, I knew that there was something that was going directly to Haldeman. And those were the transcripts of the Kissinger tape. So there was always this parallel line. But on the day-to-day operation, if somebody needed something in the -- not the criminal side. I didn't deal anything on the criminal side, but on the intelligence, internal security, national security side, it would come through me.

Timothy Naftali

Tell me about what you knew of the enemies list, since we're discussing Colson.

Tom Charles Huston

Well, I mean the enemies list to me, the whole thing -- first of all, it was never referred to as an enemies list. I don't remember, I think it was an opponents, or unfriendly. But I mean to me, I mean you would get these memos out of Colson's office. And I forget the guy's name who worked for Colson. He was his -- older guy, George, I think. Anyway, you know, you'd get these damn memos. Well, first of all, in context, because I also had helped set up the presidential news summary, and, you know, and for a long time, I got copies of all the memos that went out based on his scribbling on the side. Well, I mean -- I mean there wasn't a week that went by where -- "cut this guy off, don't let this guy into the White House, don't" -- I mean, just a litany. Anyone who has gone through that will see. So it came as no big surprise to me that there was a lot of angst in the West Wing about making sure that these -- this credible number of people that the president kept scratching off the list every day as he went through the presidential news summary, and somebody would keep track of it. So that's why I think you get this confusion, and it's quite legitimate, because you got poor Lucy Winchester over in the social office, and you got Butterfield. They're trying to figure out who's on what list. And you got Colson, you know, asking for this list. And, you know -- but I mean, when I did -- the only one that I remember, I saw some article the other day that claimed I put Carol Channing on some list, I mean, anyone would know it was me. If I put Carol Channing on a list, what that tells you, not that I was interested in somebody worried about Carol Channing, that tells how stupid I thought the whole process was.

But in the first list that I did, I added on there, Father Baroney [phonetic sp], who was Colson's lead horse in our fight to -- over the direction of the middle America thing. Because Baroney headed up this ethnic group that Colson was trying to convince the president of stuff that was the key to breaking into

the ethnic group, and I thought the gang was a whole hoax. And so when I did my list, I put two -- the usual names on there that everyone would have expected, and I said, you know, these are the unfriendlies, or whatever it was, you know. And then I added the good father, and then I added one of the top guys at the AFL/CIO that Colson was pushing. And so, I mean, to me, the thing was a joke. I think it was a joke to everybody except maybe the guy in Colson's office and Dean. I mean I think if you went around and asked -- talk to Pat or any of the others, but I wasn't the only guy getting these. They went out to everybody. But I mean the whole thing was a joke. And -- but it was all -- in my mind, the thing was driven, A, by some legitimate concern of the guys that had to keep track of not getting blamed for not paying attention to what the president said about X, Y, and Z, but also just, you know, something to keep, you know, Colson's people happy that they could go tell the West Wing, you know, this is -- we're doing this. But I never saw anything while I was there that would lead anyone to draw the kinds of conclusions that were drawn based on Dean's testimony. Then Dean subsequently says he was amazed that anyone turned -- you know, he kind of threw that out. He didn't really anticipate there would be the reaction there was, and the feeding frenzy that arose out of it. And -- but, you know, that's basically all I know about it.

Timothy Naftali

Was his name Bell?

Tom Charles Huston

Bell, yeah, George -- wasn't it George Bell?

Timothy Naftali

George Bell?

Tom Charles Huston

George Bell, yeah.

Timothy Naftali

I'm a little bit -- I want to be clear about this. There were several lists, right?

Tom Charles Huston

Well, I mean -- see, I don't know about lists. There was a -- clearly, somebody was maintaining a list that said, you know, these are guys that we don't -- the president don't want to see these people sitting across the table from him, you know. And, you know, the president doesn't want these people, you know, riding in the Air Force One up front. So there was that kind of a list. And there was this, you know, list that Colson's people, and I don't know how that fit with, you know, what the West Wing people were doing. I don't know -- I mean I don't have access to all my files, so I don't -- I can't, without looking to see how many I may have responded to. I'm only aware of one, but there may have been more, because it seemed to me that there were -- that Colson's people were constantly sending these things out saying, you know, we need to update this list. But as to the purpose for the list, I mean there was never any statements that, okay, this was our "screw them" list. I mean how are we going to

screw these people, or, you know, I mean the context was, you know, these are the people that were unfriendly to the administration, you know, who are the most egregious. Well, by that time, I mean, you know, you don't have to be paranoid to realize you got real, honest to goodness opponents out there trying to do you in, and, of course, to me the thing that made it equally stupid is that Nixon knew every one of them in his head. He didn't need any damn list. And so it was an exercise in futility, but it was the kind of thing that, you know, there was a lot of around there. I mean, you know, make work, trying to do something that -- create the impression that you're accomplishing something, that, you know, that will get you a gold star on the promotion list over there in the West Wing. And that's the way I viewed it.

Timothy Naftali

So were you asked to rationalize the Colson lists?

Tom Charles Huston

No, I never saw any list. No one ever gave me a list, so, here -- I never saw a grand list. I mean all I was asked to do was to contribute the name of ten people or whatever it was that I thought ought to be on any list of unfriendlies. So I gave them my list, two of whom were Colson's top dogs. And that, as far as I know, is the only contact I had with it. I never saw any list. No one circulated a list that said, okay, go down this list and tell me who else ought to be on it.

Timothy Naftali

On the tapes, Haldeman tells the president that there is a tax list of enemies whose taxes are going to be audited.

Tom Charles Huston

Well, that occurs after, Long after I'm gone, you know. And I think that was Dean's project. He's the one that met with Johnny Walters and tried to initiate that. And, you know, Nixon was big on

[unintelligible]

-- he felt personally -- he was ticked because the IRS had really, you know -- he felt it had been harassing his friends including Billy Graham, and he also was convinced -- he had been audited two or three times, you know, in the first years after he left the vice-presidency. And he was convinced that that was simply, you know, harassment by the Kennedys, and for him, you know, this -- you know, that's the way they played the game, and that's the way we ought to play the game. And, you know, I think the difference was that you had, you know, people that should have said, well, it's just you can't get there. You know, but that wasn't the mentality. The mentality was okay, that's what you want, we'll go try to do it. I think at the end of the day, all the evidence indicates that based on the studies that were done by the joint task committee and several other committees, at the end of the day the conclusion is that nobody was audited that wouldn't have been audited according to the customary audit standards. But that wasn't because Nixon didn't want it to be done. I mean clearly he did want to have it done. And it wasn't because Dean didn't try to prove how important he was by getting it done. It was because the people at the IRS, as anybody with an ounce of brains would have figured, was going to say, you know, this is nonsense. We're not going to do this, you know. It was just that simple.

Timothy Naftali

When you were doing the bombing halt study, I think you went to the Pentagon, and you were chatting -- you wanted information about the negotiations, and then your contact there told you about a study that you should get.

Tom Charles Huston

Right, when I started to do the bombing halt study, Kissinger had assured the president that the study that he had done was complete. And, he said, the first thing I did was get all the files of all the diplomatic cables and everything that Kissinger's office had. I had them all carted over in my office. And then I started going through it sequentially, when, you know, I would be reading a series of cables, and all of a sudden there was a conspicuous gap, so I would call over to the NSC and say, hey, you know, would you check with State or whoever, I'm missing a cable here for such and such a day. Oh, we'll check. Well, State would send it over, you know, we're sorry, we thought we had given that to you. So -- and it was just constant, and so -- also, you know, I was trying to -- to tell the story, I needed to know more than simply what the official correspondence -- you know, communication back and forth between Saigon and Paris, and Paris and Washington. And so, you know, I was trying to get out more information that would give me a broader context of what was being thought of -- said on the political side, how were the Russians involved, and the agencies weren't very helpful. And so having had served two years in the Pentagon, and having known -- gotten to know some of the officers there who were military assistants to the secretary or the deputy secretary, I went over to see the military assistant to the deputy secretary or assistant secretary for internal security affairs -- or International Security Affairs, ISA. And, you know, said, "This is the assignment the president gave me, and I need to try to get as much information I can about, you know, what was going on and what was the position of the armed services, what did the services think about the way the negotiations were going, the proposed bombing halt, et cetera." And I said, you know, "Is there anything that you're aware of, any reports, studies, anything that you think would be helpful to me?" And he said, "Well, yes." He said, "I mean there is -- there is a study that was done on bombing halt period after -- you know, just before the Johnson went out of office.

It was done in this office back when Les Gelb and Halperin and those people were in that ISA staff for the secretary, as the secretary to him." And he said, "And then there was a broader study on over all of Vietnam War, that up to the '67, I think, that was done in the secretary, McNamara's office. And that's a multivolume study." I said, "Oh, geez, you know, I forget all about that." Because I had known it was going on in the summer of '67, and I knew at the time that there was some such operation going on in McNamara's office, because one of the fraternity brothers of mine, he was a Rhodes Scholar, and was teaching at West Point, had been assigned that office on temporary duty to work on a study. But I had forgotten all about it. And so I said, well, "You know, gee whiz, you know, both of those things would really help me. Do you have copies?" He said, "Well, we used to have." I said, "What do you mean, you used to have?" He said, "Well, they're not here." I said, "Where the hell are they?" "Well, I don't know. They may be down in Secretary Laird's office." He said, "But, you know, there are other copies." I said, "Well, where are the other copies?" He said, "Well, there is copies at Brookings, Clark Clifford has a copy, Gelb has a copy." I said, "Now, wait a minute. Let me get this straight. You're telling me you don't -- you know, office of the assistant Secretary of Defense doesn't have this, but Clifford is busy writing articles attacking our policy in 'Life Magazine,' and Gelb and these people do." He said, "Well, that's right. And Senator Brookings."

And so I said, "Well, that's" -- you know. But he said, "You need to check with Laird. Maybe they should have that copy." So -- well, I went back to the White House, and I dictated a memo to Haldeman. I said, "This is the damndest story I ever heard, you know. I'm going, you know, fighting like hell trying to dig out information, all this stuff. In the meantime, there exists these reports and no one seems to have known anything about them, and, you know, I can't get my hands on it at least there in that office, but, you know, Brookings has it, and the others." I said, "We need to get a copy. You know, I need to get a copy of this from Laird, if he's got it, and secondly, I don't see any reason in the world why Brookings should have this kind of material when they just announced that they're going to have this big, you know, to do that -- you know, study to oppose the president's Vietnamization policy." And so Haldeman's, you know, reaction was, you know, let's talk. And so he said, "Let's get Al Haig together." And so Haig, and Haldeman and I met, and I explained to Al what the situation was. Basically, "Look, I need to have -- I have a legitimate governmental purpose to have access to this study, and, A, I'd like for you to contact Laird's office and see if they've got it, and if so, get it over here. And, you know, I think the most efficient way to do that is to deal with Colonel Pursley, who is the military assistant."

Well, Al didn't like that for a minute. "Well, I don't think we ought to talk to Pursley about that," which I didn't understand at the time. I mean I now understand because it's -- subsequently I learned that Pursley was number one or number two on the Kissinger wiretap list, and so, you know, they were having a lot of heartburn with Pursley, who had been the military assistant to Clark Clifford, and had stayed over under Laird. But Al said, you know, "We'll talk to Laird's civil administrative assistant and see if we can get the study, and then" -- And I said, "Well, now, what about Brookings?" I said, "You know, it seems to me they have no business having that, and they're not up to any good over there, and we ought to just go get it, tell them to give it back. You know, it's the government's property. They have no right to have this thing." "Well, how are we going to do that without ruffling any feathers?" I said, "Well, it seems pretty obvious to me. You go over there and say, hey, we understand you got this study, and it belongs to the United States government. We're from the government. We're here to help you to take this study back." "Well, no, we can't do that." So anyway, we had this, you know, conversation and there was discussion at that point that Haldeman alludes to later in -- you know, about, well, maybe we can, you know, have some sort of inspection of security systems or something over there, anybody can lift it. Well -- so I mean it was just nonsense.

Timothy Naftali

You had that discussion then?

Tom Charles Huston

Yeah.

Timothy Naftali

In '70, you were talking about lifting it?

Tom Charles Huston

Well, this was one of the options, was, you know, not breaking in. I made it clear no one in that conversation talked about blowing the safe, I guess like Nixon later did. But the question was, you know, having a -- the presumption was that it was a top secret classified document, and they had it. It presumably should have been held in a secure area that was certified by DOD as appropriate for the storage of classified data. And so in the course of routine inspection to confirm that it met the standards, this judgment was, you know, well, maybe we could just send someone over there. In the meantime, they lift this thing. Well, of course it was 47 blinds [phonetic sp] around pick the damn thing up, sneak it out the back door. But -- I mean it was typical of the way in which they wanted to do business. I mean my view was, there is no big deal here. It belonged to the government. All we had to do is walk in the front door, say here's what we'd like to have, would you mind handing it over? But for some reason, that was beyond the realm of conception in the West Wing.

And so basically what happened, this was in the summer of 1970, and basically nothing much happened about it. At one point later on, I forget, something came up, and I sent Haldeman another memo that was later cited as being evidence that I was planning to firebomb the Brookings Institute, but it actually was a jab at him, saying, remember, I told you, you know, seven months ago about the situation, and we were going to do something about it, and nothing has been done. And so the -- you know, it was basically just dropped off the table, until the Pentagon Papers leak. And then -- just happens the week that I'm leaving the staff, and so all I knew about is what I've read of the transcripts of the [unintelligible] office conversations. But clearly, at that point, then, Haldeman tells the president that, you know, I've got this bombing halt, I've done this bombing halt study. He said we don't have anything. President says, do we have anything on the bombing halt? And they say, no, we don't have anything, but Huston is working on it. Well, first of all, that wasn't true. I mean they had Kissinger's original study, and Kissinger's in the room when this conversation is taking place. He doesn't say anything.

And -- but Haldeman says to the president, "But Huston says Brookings has the only copy of it." "Well, I didn't say they had the only copy of it. I said they had a copy of it." And -- well, I mean, that was like waving a red flag in front of the president. I mean here was, you know, the Kennedy government in exile, which is the way the president, and Huston, and Buchanan and other hardliners viewed Brookings. They got something that the president doesn't have. And that's not something that's going to endear you to Nixon's heart. And so -- and then Kissinger throws fuel on the fire by saying, that's right, not only do they have it but they shouldn't have it. "Well, then damn it, go get it." And, you know, so that's where the thing came from. But, you know, Haldeman had been told, and I assumed that the president had been told, you know, and, you know, back a year earlier that this study was over there. And -- but then once that -- Pentagon Papers leaked and it was all that concern about conspiracy and all that thing, and then this -- then suddenly took on this big importance in the president's mind, that he just, you know, was like Captain Ahab and the whale. I mean he couldn't get rid of it. "I want that damn report. John, go over there and blow the safe." You know, "Get that damn report." And, of course, you know, all he had -- if he wanted the report, I mean, you know, A, he could have just said, you know, call them over there and tell them to give us the damn report, number one. Number two, if what he wanted was to know that we had a copy of the report, he could have picked up the phone, called Mel Laird, and said, "Mel, I'd like to have this report. Would you mind shipping it over here?" But that was too direct. That would have required him to communicate directly with somebody other than Haldeman and his immediate staff. And so instead of that, he tells Ehrlichman, you know, you're the action officer, you know, go blow the safe and get that. Now, obviously nothing came out of it, but, I mean that's how that Brookings achieved -- you know, became, you know, so high on the radar.

Timothy Naftali

On the tapes, it's unclear what it is they exactly want from Brookings. They talk about classified materials.

Tom Charles Huston

Well, they're talking about this. They're talking about -- the only thing they knew about Brookings is what they learned from me. I mean that -- there was no -- to my knowledge, there was no other information. What Haldeman talks about in his book, the only reference he makes is to the conversation that he and I had -- that Haig, and he and I had. There was no doubt in my mind that the only thing they knew about Brookings is what I had told them in March in 1970, and what I had told them was that, you know, the study -- these studies existed, I couldn't get hold of a copy. I needed to have a copy. I thought Laird had it. We ought to get it from Laird, and Brookings had it, and we ought to get it from Brookings.

Timothy Naftali

This is both the bombing halt study and the famous --

Tom Charles Huston

And the Pentagon Papers. Now, you know, I will say this. You know, that wouldn't have made any difference, as far as our security is concerned in the leak in the Pentagon Papers, because -- I mean I did not know that the Rand Corporation had a set, which was the set that was used to be leaked. But clearly, the -- the only thing that they knew about -- so when Laird was talking about classified, he was talking about what I had told Haldeman they had.

Timothy Naftali

It turned out they didn't have them.

Tom Charles Huston

Well, I don't know. They were on the distribution list.

Timothy Naftali

Brookings didn't have them. In the conversation, they talk about this, Nixon moves from the discussion of how to blackmail LBJ to asking where those classified documents at Brookings. You're not in the room at the time, so you don't know his state of mind, but did you conclude -- did your bombing halt study conclude that LBJ had used the bombing halt for political purposes?

Tom Charles Huston

No, it didn't. I mean I don't think any decision that Lyndon Johnson ever made, just like there wasn't any decision Richard Nixon ever made, that didn't have a political calculation associated with it. But I think that Johnson really believed and was convinced that this was the opportunity, and might be the

only opportunity he was going to get, that for whatever reason, they had put terms on the table saying here's what we'll do if you'll do this. And for months Hanoi had refused to even talk about it. All of a sudden Hanoi says, yes, okay, we'll do this. And so, you know -- and Johnson was worried about it. And he was concerned about it. And he insisted that military people sign off on it. And he had General Wheeler as chief, and he had General Abrams flown back from Saigon to meet with him in the middle of the night. So he could look him in the eye and say, you know, are you comfortable with me doing this? Now, you know, my conclusion was -- was that his primary motivation was the notion that if I'm going to do it ultimately, I might as well as do it now. If I do it now, I'm going to save lives that would otherwise be lost if I waited until after the election. Because Rusk really felt that the president ought to, you know -- and Rusk -- or this national security --

Timothy Naftali

Rostow.

Tom Charles Huston

Rostow, I think, also felt that, you know, because it would be perceived as being political, it ought to be delayed. And Johnson worried about that. He worried about it. He knew it was going to be perceived as political. And -- but I think -- I give him the benefit of the doubt. I might be the only person in America that gives Lyndon Johnson the benefit of the doubt. But I think he -- he concluded just that, that we're going to do it. There is no reason not to do it. We said we're going to do it. And if I'm going to do it, I might as well do it now. No doubt in my mind, in the back of his mind he said and by the way, incidentally, old Hubert is going to be helped. But I don't think it was the other way, how do we help Hubert do this. But clearly, I think that -- and that's what I said. I mean and basically in the report, that was my conclusion. And it's not consistent with the views that others had, which is Safire and others who felt, you know, that it was political. And clearly, its implications were political, and it was serious. It almost cost Nixon the election. He knew that; he didn't like it. But the irony of it is that he did the exact same thing in 1972 that Johnson -- you know, in that -- and that he blackjacked the South Vietnamese government into signing off to a peace agreement that was against their interest. So I guess it just depends on which side of the table you're sitting on.

Timothy Naftali

Did you ever talk to Nixon about this issue? I mean did you talk to him about --

Tom Charles Huston

No, no, no, you know, he -- you know, Nixon for reasons I never understood, didn't like to talk about that sort of -- I mean you don't -- you know, he -- you know, he could have very -- you know, he was a ferocious reader. I mean he would really -- he could consume incredible amounts of information, and he preferred to do that. And I think that -- I think he felt like he had more control of the situation if it wasn't being influenced. In some respects, I think in a lot of cases, I think he felt like that he knew more than the person sitting across the table, wasn't worth his time to -- But, no, I just submitted a written report.

Timothy Naftali

Why is it that the West -- we were talking about Brookings, how you would go about getting those classified records. Why is it the West Wing would seek to do this unorthodox and eventually illegal way rather than just going and --

Tom Charles Huston

I don't have any idea.

Timothy Naftali

What was about it the culture of the West Wing?

Tom Charles Huston

I don't know, I really don't understand it. You know, it was -- it was as if they thought that, you know, by taking huge risks, you minimize the political implications of what it was you were going to do, that -- you know, that somehow -- there is no doubt that if we would have gone over there and said to Brookings, you know, you got my documents, and we want to clean the -- which is what I would have advocated, frankly. I would have gone over there with a truck and, you know, couple of guys from DOD, and an FBI guy, and said here, anything that's got a classified stamp on it belongs to the U.S. government, we're hauling it out of here. Now, we would have taken all sorts of hits in the press, and all the commentators would have moaned and groaned about what an outrage it was, and it would have lasted two or three days, and that would have been the end of it, in my judgment. But that -- these guys, all they could focus on were we have two or three days of taking all these hits and we don't want to do it. So we'll try some -- we'll think about whether there is some way we can do it that, you know, no one will know about, and therefore, we'll get the benefit without paying the price. But, of course, what they refused to do is factor in the price you'd pay if the stupid thing you were going to do got exposed. And I don't understand it. I just -- part of it was driven by the president. There is no doubt about it. I mean he -- you know, he seemed to think that the indirect was preferable to the direct. And that was a culture of the past. Now, I think the difference was that with the exception with, you know, most of the old timers, you know, would know when it was dangerous, and that's why you'd find a lot of things that were talked about, and everyone jumps all over how awful this is, and they were talking about it, but nothing ever happened. And that's because most of the people around Nixon at the senior level understood that, you know, this is blown off, and forget it. And it's not going to happen. But what happened was you get someone like Colson, or you get someone like Dean, or you get, you know, somebody who thinks that, you know, if the president barks out this stupid order, that means I got to do it, and if I do it, I'm going to be a hero, and therefore, I'll move up the rank, you know, and then that's what I think fed the downward spiral. But Haldeman was careless in talk, you know, with the president, but on balance was very cautious in action. And generally, you know, up until some of the '72 election stuff, but I mean he tended to be more cautious. But I don't know what happened over there. I mean I could -- but you could see this, you know, attitude there that the simple forthright way of doing things was just -- in the normal way was off the table. I mean it's like Laird. Why in the world wouldn't you just pick up the phone and call your secretary of defense and say I understand you've got, you know, these documents. I'd like to have them, you know. He didn't do it.

Timothy Naftali

Let me ask you another question about the plan that you're famous for, the so-called Huston Plan. You mentioned to me that after you heard that the president changed his mind, after Mitchell and Hoover both worked on it, you spent 30 days trying to reverse that decision. Tell us a little bit about -- you called it a campaign, the last time we talked. What did you do? How did you try to --

Tom Charles Huston

Well, I mean I bombarded Haldeman with several utterly tasteless and inappropriate memoranda that reflected poorly on me, and -- but reflected accurately, I guess, my anger and frustration, because my position was that -- look. You know, the president agreed he wanted this committee, of all the intelligence community. I mean, this is the first time that -- since at least, you know, Eisenhower might be the only one when he had commissioned the administration to look at the CIA. But this was the first time that any president ever said to all the intelligence services, look, we all want you guys to all sit down together. I want you to look at the domestic security problem. We got bombings, we got shootings, we got all this stuff going on. I want you to look at this situation. I want you to evaluate what the problem is. I want you to look at the tools you have. I want you to tell me what you think you need. And this wasn't, you know, simply calling Edgar over and saying, you know, Edgar, will you check on that and tell me how you think things are going. I mean -- so we set this process in motion. We have these series of meetings. Each agency submits its input. Each agency director, director of NSA, the director of CIA, the director of the army -- DIA, the military services. I mean they all have their input, you know. Some agree with this, some don't agree with that, some have this idea, some have that, but they all got their say. And Hoover comes along and says, you know, "I don't want anything to do with it. I'm not going to do it. That ought to be the end of the discussion."

And at the same time, I know, because I've spent months getting to know these people. I know what Bill Sullivan, head of the Internal Security Division believes. I know what Chuck Brennan and the other deputies in the Internal Security Division believe. I know what the analysts believe. And every one of those people believe that we're woefully inadequate. We don't have the resources we need. We're not doing the job that needs to be done, and we're particularly vulnerable as a consequence of our inability to have effective liaison relationships in cooperation with the CIA. I know that. And so, you know, Hoover, for his own reasons, and in fairness I will say, I didn't give him credit that he deserved for his political acumen, as to the fact that the climate that existed pre-1965, during which period every one of the things that we had recommended had been ongoing for a very long time, the political climate had changed. And I think Hoover was much more sensitive to that than I was, or anyone in the West Wing was. And so I give him that. But on the other hand, the fact of the matter was that he -- his position was simply, I don't want anything to do with anything at all that changes the status quo, period. And I thought that was an outrage. I thought it was an affront to the president, but more importantly, I thought it was a disservice to the country. Because rightly or wrongly, I believed, just like Bill Sullivan and Jim Angleton and others believed, I believed we posed -- we were confronted by a serious threat. And that the risk of this getting out of hand was great enough that we needed to be sure we were doing everything we could to forestall it.

And that's what preventive intelligence is all about. It's about preventing things from happening. It's not cracking heads, it's not creating martyrs, it's not putting people in jail. It's simply taking steps to prevent acts happening. And that's what we weren't doing. And so I felt that it was a great disservice to the country to -- for the president to pull back on this, and that's why I argued. But, you know, I was -- I was, you know, peeing in the wind, I mean, you know. They rightly concluded, and Mitchell rightly concluded that all the cards were in, you know, Hoover's hands and Hoover was the master bureaucrat.

All he had to do was to leak this or leak that, and it would have blown us all out of the water. So he had it all in the hand, you know. I don't know what would have happened if the president had followed my advice originally, which was that before we announce any decision, that he have Hoover come over, sit down with Hoover, talk to Hoover, explain to Hoover what it was we were trying to do, and see if he couldn't bring Hoover along. Now, he maybe -- he concluded that he couldn't get that job done, just like Dick Helms concluded he never could have any reason to see Hoover, because he couldn't get anything accomplished by doing it. But I think that's not -- that's the case. I think it's just another example of the president didn't want to have personal confrontation with somebody, and so the answer is, we'll just issue an edict, and therefore, everybody will do what they're told to do, and the answer is, they won't do, you know, what they're told to do. And so, you know, basically when they met in San Clemente and decided, well, look, we're not going to get this done this way, so let's get Dean, give the portfolio to Dean, let's refigure out how to do it, we'll get it done some other way.

Timothy Naftali

So parts of the plan were implemented.

Tom Charles Huston

Well, I don't know that it's fair to say -- you know, as Jim Angleton said -- you know, talk about the items of the plan as if these were some, you know, unique unusual things that Huston thought up that had never been thought up before. All these things that were in the plan were all on every intelligence agencies desirable list, you know, and had been for a very long time. And so, you know, yeah. I mean just because I got shot down and the plan didn't get approved in total didn't mean that Admiral Gayler in NSA were going to quit lobbying to try to get the approval they needed to do their job, anymore than it meant CIA was going to quit lobbying to try to get the approvals that they needed to do their job. So, you know, I mean there was no unilateral surrender. You know, Church and Mondale had -- those people thought, "Well, my gosh, the president withdrew the support." These people should have all stopped, you know. That's not the way bureaucracies work. You run into a roadblock here, you just pull back and move, you come around this way. And so, yeah, they all kept going after it. And the only change that Hoover finally agreed to make was that he did agree, finally, under pressure from the executive conference, and his own people, to lower the age at which you could agree to be an informant for the FBI from 21 to 18. But then subsequently, then, without anyone's knowledge, and certainly without the knowledge of anyone in the White House, you know, once Pat Gray became director, they did initiate cooperation with NSA on certain black bag jobs that needed to be done. And they also apparently authorized the New York bureau office to undertake, you know, some entries that, you know, allegedly were prohibited to do it under Hoover's earlier order.

Timothy Naftali

Did the NSA get any of the other things that it wanted?

Tom Charles Huston

NSA never got any official approval that [unintelligible] was -- their interpretation was correct. They've operated under that. They continued to operate under that presumption until the FISA Act, and as far as I can tell, that's basically the policy they're now following.

Timothy Naftali

But they did get that --

Tom Charles Huston

They -- you know, but they really were interested in two things. They needed the help of the Bureau to get access to certain cryptographic information that they needed, because they didn't have the people or the authority to do it. It had to be done in this country. And secondly, they wanted a presidential approval of their interpretation of the national security -- the National Security Council and directive that set forth the standards for interception of communications and international communications that would approve the policy they followed, which was the rule, the one party rule that if as long as one party to a conversation was outside the continental United States, that that conversation could be intercepted. So that if you're in San Francisco and I was in Paris, they could intercept. You know, if I was in New York and I was in San Francisco, they didn't intercept. But notwithstanding, that's the policy they had adopted going back to the Eisenhower years, and they continued until the time of Jimmy Carter.

Timothy Naftali

But they were looking for presidential sanction?

Tom Charles Huston

Yes.

Timothy Naftali

Did they get it?

Tom Charles Huston

No, well, they would have gotten it, but -- it was part of the general revocation.

Timothy Naftali

How much of the so-called Huston plan was an effort by the agencies to get presidential approval for things they were already doing?

Tom Charles Huston

Well, clearly, I think there was some of that. I mean I think there was -- you know, and I recognized that what NSA was doing there, you know, was really overreaching in that that was not clearly a -- and that was an issue that more appropriately should have gone to Kissinger and the NSC, than to come up through my channel. But I -- I thought that what they asked for was reasonable, and therefore, seemed appropriate that they should be allowed to make their case, and the president could decide whether he wanted to do it or not. On the issue of Bureau assistance, I mean they had tried previous directors, for Gayler, had tried to get the bureau's help, and Hoover just said no. And so, you know, clearly he -- they

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needed help, again, you know, because their role in domestic -- on purely domestic side was just so narrow, that, again, I could have punted that decision and said to Gayler, look, that's not on my agenda. You know, of course the presumption is that, you know, I set it all -- I wrote the rule. I didn't do that, they brought these issues. So what I was doing, I was a traffic cop. I could have said no, I'm not going to allow this to go forward, or yes, you can bring it. And I said yes. Now, CIA, you know, basically their issue, the issue there was on mail interception. And there were two categories that we were addressing. One was domestic and one was international. I had been led to believe that all mail intercepts had been terminated, and that -- so that the discussion was conducted on that premise. And that -- and so the arguments and discussions that were held addressed, okay, here's the issue of domestic, why we need it, and the Bureau was pushing that, because they had had good success in counter espionage operations with their mail intercept program that they had conducted pre-1965. And then there was a separate discussion of the international mail issue. Not a lot, but there was some discussion. There wasn't any point -- Jim Angleton raised his hand and said, "Oh, by the way, we're doing it. We don't need any approval." And, you know, and I faulted him for that in some respect. I mean I think he should have pulled me aside and said I think you ought to know this, but he didn't. And so yes, and to that extent, you can say that what we were doing was -- part of what we did was ask the president to approve something as if it were a de novo that, in fact, was an ongoing operation that he didn't know about.

Timothy Naftali

And this would have been true for the NSA. Did the NSA let you know that they were already --

Tom Charles Huston **SANITIZED** per sec 1.4 (c) and 3.5 (c)

Oh, I understood they were doing that, yes. There was no effort to conceal what they were doing. I mean I well knew that, but I had seen intelligence based upon -- and I regarded that as a legitimate part of the domestic intelligence scene, because one of the issues that we were concerned about was the fact that so many of these groups, [REDACTED] particularly, were, you know, operating abroad. And so, you know, we needed to have, you know -- we couldn't just say, you know, once you get on an airplane, leave Idlewild. Fly out of San Francisco, you know, good luck. We don't know anything about what the hell you're up to. And so, you know, we relied upon, you know, NSA for their interception of international communications. And to the extent that it was related to a legitimate investigative purpose that we had, I thought that was okay. I didn't have a problem with that. And so there was nothing concealed about that. It was like the CIA, I mean the issue with CIA was not -- there was no discussion, there was no effort to have CIA do anything domestically, you know. All the effort, all the discussion, the only thing I was interested in was that the CIA increase its capability to provide coverage abroad. So that when the president asked him, you know, says to Dick Helms, you know, the president of Venezuela was here this morning complaining about, you know, the U.S. exporting, you know, international revolution into the Caribbean, what do you know about it? I don't know anything about it. You know, so we needed to increase our capability there, and do it -- but it was activity that would have been conducted outside the United States. I didn't know about this Operation Chaos and, you know, to what extent -- to the extent that that was involved in any domestic activity. The office of security had some stuff going on, on its own account over there. I didn't know anything about that. I'm thinking you'll say, well, what the hell did you know about it? But I knew about what the agencies would tell me. And that's all you can know.

Timothy Naftali

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But you were basically a filter for some of this information to the president. Did that mean that you think the president didn't know about these operations?

Tom Charles Huston

No, I don't think the president knew about it, unless Henry told him. Now, Henry was briefed on the -- on -- I don't know if Henry was briefed on the Intercept program, but he was briefed on the Chaos program. Of course, you know, I thought that was -- I was not and Kissinger was. And my view of that was, especially when I heard about it, was that's typical CIA, because Henry could care less about it. He wouldn't know anything about the rules as to whether or what they were doing was appropriate or inappropriate or any delimitation agreement between the Bureau and other agencies. And so, by briefing Henry on it, you know, you have the defense, if anyone complains, well, we told the White House, you know. We didn't conceal anything from the White House. But you told the guy in the White House who, you know, wasn't going to know anything or raise any red flags, you know. If they had briefed me, I would have known right away, you know. If the Bureau found out about this, we would have even more problems than we had.

Timothy Naftali

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per sec. 1.4 (c)(d)

Tom Charles Huston

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per sec. 1.4 (c)(d)

Timothy Naftali

Were you briefed on the COINTELPRO?

Tom Charles Huston

No, no, no one -- as far as I know, no one outside the Bureau -- no one in the Justice Department knew about it. And this goes back, I think the first program was either -- I think was the CP program, and -- or socialist workers, and I think those two may have gone back to the late Eisenhower, or

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certainly at least by the Kennedy administration. The most successful program they did of those, because they were separate COINTELPRO programs, and directed at certain things. And the most successful one, and, frankly, one that I think was justified, the only one I think was justified, was the one against the Klan. And really, in my judgment, was effective in breaking up the Klan. And without it, I don't think it would have been possible, or certainly not as -- before there had been a lot more death and mutilation. But the new left COINTEL was initiated in Johnson's time without his approval. I mean, I have no reason to believe Johnson knew any more about it than Nixon. I mean, Hoover kept that close. And that's why he didn't want to have this coordinating board that we were trying to set up, even though he was going to be chairman. His people were going to be the de facto secretariat. He didn't want anybody who was from outside the Bureau to be in a position to look at what he was doing and second-guessing. And so when they argued that they were against doing this sort of thing or that sort of thing, what they really said, we're against doing this sort of thing or that sort of thing, if anyone else knows about it or has the authority to say yes or no. But we'll reserve the right to do exactly that, if we decide we think it's the thing to do, and we don't tell anybody about it. That was the bottom line.

Timothy Naftali

So they were still doing black bag jobs?

Tom Charles Huston

Well, it turns out they were, yeah. Now, I don't know -- I can't say that at the very time that we were talking in the summer of 1970, that they were doing that, but clearly, by -- and, you know, in the Hoover -- after Hoover's death, clearly, they did, and Mark Felt, who was the -- you know, who was the most -- you know, one of my most severe critics, although I never met Mark Felt, and Mark Felt didn't know a damn thing about me or anything I was doing until after I had left the White House. But, you know, it was that -- it was at that level, the whole Hoover lieutenant level that that decision was made to undertake those activities.

Timothy Naftali

It's -- so when the president asked you to write that study of the role of foreign powers in the -- in the dissent, didn't he ask you --

Tom Charles Huston

Yeah, mm-hmm.

Timothy Naftali

That was the study that he asked you to write in '69?

Tom Charles Huston

Yes, that was actually the first thing. That was before -- I did that before I did this -- was assigned the bombing halt study. That was, I think, in the summer of '69 or late spring of '69. And basically he had asked for a report from Ehrlichman on the extent to which there was foreign influence or financing of the antiwar movement. And Ehrlichman turned that over to Bud Krogh, who was a liaison with the

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Justice Department, and Bud got whatever information he could from the Bureau, whoever, and submitted a report, and then went to the president. And apparently the president didn't like it, it wasn't sufficient, I don't know, whatever it was. But anyway, he wanted another report. So he said, "Have Huston look into this." So I undertook that, and so I don't know that Bud went as far out in the other agencies as I did, but I basically went to all four of the major agencies and services and said, you know, tell me what you have. What do we know about this?

But I expanded the inquiry from, you know, the antiwar movement, which seemed to me to be the least significant of the problems that we should legitimately be concerned about, to the broader question of what do we know about the groups that are advocating revolutionary violence, and particularly the -- with the Weathermen and Black Panthers. And to what extent -- so I broadened the scope in that respect, but the setting was what do we know about foreign influence on foreign financing. And, you know, some people said, well, Huston ordered the CIA to undertake -- I didn't order anybody to investigate anything. I said the president wants a report of what we know. Tell me what we know. You know, I'm not asking you to go dig up anything new. Just tell us what we know. And basically, at the end of the day -- but it was through that exercise that I got to know the people at the Bureau, because I went over, they did a briefing for me on what they knew, and how they knew what they were doing. And I got to know the people over there. But basically at the end of the day my conclusion was, look. There is no evidence that we have that there is any significant amount of foreign financing of either the antiwar movement or the revolutionary protest movement. There simply is no such evidence. That doesn't follow that because we don't have the evidence that there may not be some, because there are other ways in which this could be conducted. And, in fact, could be done the same way they financed the Communist party in USA for years to the tune of millions of dollars that were brought in by Soviet couriers through the U.N. nation in New York.

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per sec. 1.4 (c)(d)

But nevertheless, the relevant conclusion was that we don't have any evidence, but, you know, we don't know what we don't know. And -- but on the influence issue, there is more evidence there, because clearly that there are efforts under way to -- well, Hanoi, particularly, you know, to provide leadership cadres and support and role for the broader antiwar movement and whatever, and also Cubans. But, you know, so this is what I sent to the president. Well, you know, I mean he was like, Johnson, you know, I mean Johnson believed that there had to be foreign interference and meddling and stirring up all this trouble, because right thinking Americans would have to come to the same conclusion that he came to, that he was doing the right thing. And only if they were being misled by foreign agitators and stuff could they think otherwise. And Nixon, I don't think, was quite that bad, but I think Nixon couldn't conceive either that, you know, this thing was not being stirred up, you know. In fairness, part of it is that both -- you know, the Soviets and us, that was part of the intelligence game was stirring up trouble. I mean we were trying to stir up trouble over there. You had to presume they were trying to stir up trouble here. But, you know, to the extent that we had any information, the answer was no. So there was no way that anybody could, in the West Wing from Haldeman or the president, could say, you know, with a straight face, we have evidence that this is happening. I sent the report, never heard anymore about it, but I know he wasn't satisfied.

And some months later, you know, he asked again, and this time he's back with the Ehrlichman people saying I want you to look at this again. There has got to be something there. Well, Krogh goes through the ritual the third time, and of course we get the same damn result. This is in the spring of 1970. So that's what triggers, at this point, my plea to Haldeman and Krogh to -- look, this is nuts. I mean we

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got all these people running around treading over the same territory. We're coming up with the best information we have. Because it's not what you want to hear, you tell us to go back and do it again. I mean, you know, the fact is, these are the facts, but the most important thing is we've got all these people fussing around here and no one person is responsible for seeing that all these pieces in the puzzle get pulled together, so maybe we will have some reasonable notion of what the hell is going on. And so that's what triggered the meeting in March with Krogh and Butterfield, and Haldeman and myself to where we split up responsibilities, and that was at the point at which I was designated to be the staff person for dealing with the intelligence agencies on domestic intelligence matters. But the -- you know, the money issue was, you know -- there simply was no evidence and it's not true for someone to say, you know, well, people tried to mislead the president or, you know, tried to doctor the evidence to support it. It's not true. I told them flat out, Krogh told them flat out, on three different occasions, we had no evidence.

Timothy Naftali

But one could conclude, though, that people had different motives in getting around the table in the sense that you -- your definition of the threat, you were concerned about the Weathermen, the Black Panthers. Perhaps do you think that the White House had a different view of the threat?

Tom Charles Huston

Well, I mean I think -- you know, the -- I think that everybody including the president understood the difference between, you know, kids marching in an antiwar movement, march, than people setting off bombs in the Capitol, or the Pentagon restroom or snipers shooting police officers and that. So clearly, there was an understanding. But I think that part of the problem was that at that time, and even so to some extent today, we didn't have a political vocabulary that was precise enough to be able to distinguish between those what I call the revolutionary protest movement, or those people who really and truly believed that they -- you know, their job was to create a revolution. I mean, you know, they were goofy, but they believed it. And they were taking measures, active measures to try to be successful. There was that movement, and then there was the antiwar movement, and then there was the old left with the CPUSA, Socialist Workers' Party, primarily, and progressive labor. So you had three -- analytically, you had three distinct wings of this so-called protest movement. So when people were talking about the protest movement, you know -- Frank Church thinks of only that sweet, you know, Wellesley girl marching in a war parade. If she's the protest movement that Huston is worried about.

You know, and they don't identify, you know, that here are these old, intolerant people, who are very sophisticated organized people, the CPP people, the SWP people, the PLP people, who were fighting with each other about controlling the new [unintelligible] how you control it, how you correct it, and then also entirely [unintelligible] table, but, you know, claiming to be antiwar, or the Weathermen and the Black Panther people. So, you know, how do you define that? They say, well, you went after Nixon's enemies. "Oh," and, you know, yeah. I mean they were America's enemies that I was going after, I mean the Black Panthers, the Weathermen. When they referred to the antiwar movement, all these people were, quote, part of the antiwar movement. But the antiwar movement that I identified, and I think generally that the West Wing identified, was associated with a New Mobilization committee and with the October and November marches, in '69. And, you know, that was clearly distinguishable. And that our concern was simply to prevent violence. We didn't want anything to happen that would be remotely reminiscent of what had happened in Chicago. And so where people make a big deal out

of, you know, Haldeman allegedly telling the president or whatever, we'll get some thugs to beat these kids up and stuff, I mean that's just nonsense stuff. The reality was every concern was to prevent any violence. That's why we circled the White House in buses, that's why we did what we did. And, you know, so that was our job. The intelligence information that we were interested in is how many people are we going to have, where are they going to be, how can we monitor them, how can we control it. There was no concern about how do you stop it. You couldn't stop it. I mean no one -- I mean, we weren't dumb. This is a powerful movement. And, you know, politically, you know, it was just to me part of the problem. Now, no president wants to look out his window and see people marching against his policies, it tends to irritate him, and you know, and he gets mad about it. But the bottom line was, it was a political reality, and plus, it wasn't hurting him politically. I mean every time they had one of these things, he went up in the polls because he'd follow up with a national address or whatever. And so it was a political problem, it wasn't a security problem. But there were security problems. And those people were trying to wrap themselves to this blanket of the antiwar movement, so, you know, that -- so that you couldn't draw what should have been the logical lines between these different categories of groups.

Timothy Naftali

I just find it interesting that what triggered this -- this effort to coordinate domestic intelligence was the president's belief that if he got better information, it would prove his assumptions about foreign source.

Tom Charles Huston

Well, I don't think it was that -- I don't -- I misspoke, if that's what -- I don't think it was that, that they thought if they did this, they would get the answer they wanted to hear. I think what -- because there were other problems. At the same time, there was a lot more concern in the spring of 1970 about the precipitation of violence. You remember, that was when the Greenwich Village townhouse explosion went up with the bomb -- Weathermen were killed in the bomb-making factory they had there. And it was also the time of the raid in Chicago and Detroit that uncovered further bomb making facilities. So it wasn't driven just by that. It was -- you know, the decision was driven more by the -- that we had come out of the antiwar phase thing. There really was a lull from November 15th up until May, until the Cambodia thing in terms of major marches and that sort of thing. But in that time of law, in the antiwar movement activity, there had been this escalation in the revolutionary violence category, and that's what drove it. But what -- the relationship to the other thing was simply that, you know, from a staffing point of view, it was nuts to play pick your staffer. You know, roulette; so, if I'm at the White House I'm going to ask this guy to go find out, if he can't get the answer I want, I'll go try this guy and have him -- see if he can do it. So the idea was to narrow the focus so you had one guy, and when he said this is the result, you could rest assured, that was the result.

Timothy Naftali

What was the procedure by which the president would task the agencies to get better information on an issue? I'm talking about the intelligence. Did he ever ask them through you, at least, --

Tom Charles Huston

No, I think only -- no. Other than in the meeting we had with the directors in the Oval Office is when he told him, here's what I'm concerned about, here is what I want you to do. And then, you know, there were -- you know, occasions when issues would come up, just like the airplane hijacking thing, where obviously they were concerned. And, you know, but because they didn't think in terms of those kinds of issues necessarily in terms of the intelligence, you know, capability or, you know, to the extent is this an intelligence problem we ought to be addressing, and to the extent it was, you know, I did ask -- tell CIA and the Bureau, both, you know, the president wants you to focus on this. And that's the only case that I can recall that we specifically could say that the White House laid a requirement -- a domestic intelligence requirement on the agencies.

Timothy Naftali

This is the hijacking issue?

Tom Charles Huston

The hijacking, investigation of the Arab fedayeen interest in the United States.

Timothy Naftali

When was this? Do you remember?

Tom Charles Huston

Yeah, this would have been in 1971. It would have been in February, March, in that time; January, '71.

Timothy Naftali

Do you remember what the trigger was?

Tom Charles Huston

Yeah, it was a hijacking. And I forget where they blew the plane up. I think it was in the desert in the Sinai --

Timothy Naftali

That was in September of '70?

Tom Charles Huston

Yeah.

Timothy Naftali

This is -- [talking simultaneously] -- after that.

Tom Charles Huston

Yeah, after that, right.

Timothy Naftali

I pressed you about tasking because it's interesting that the CIA -- neither the CIA nor the FBI told the White House, at least within your knowledge, of the programs they had established to collect information about foreign involvement, possible foreign involvement in a domestic war.

Tom Charles Huston

Well, the problem was that we had -- in my judgment, the problem was that we had no institutional mechanism in place for the analysis of whatever intelligence it is that we had, separate from the agencies that were producing it. Now, you know, so -- and the Bureau, you know, their notion was, you know, we're not analysts. It's not our job to interpret anything. We just give you raw data. And that was part of the problem is that if you ask for something, you get this mass of raw data, and, you know, that is unfiltered, unanalyzed. You don't know -- a typical person wouldn't know whether this is credible or not credible. In CIA, you got a finished analytical product. But, of course, you know, they were very cautious and they weren't about to start getting into crossing the line very far to analyze in any helpful way what was going on in this country. So basically, what was the driving force was how out of the Justice Department. And it was driven on the criminal side. So you had Bob Mardian you know using the Justice Department, the Grand Jury as a means to bludgeon these people, and to get indictments, return indictments, and pursuing, you know, essentially an ad hoc campaign, you know, based on whatever data they're getting from the Bureau or from the different U.S. attorneys' offices. But no one in their organization that has any expertise particularly to make an independent evaluation of the data, and nobody focusing on the more traditional counter intelligence type activity. But, you know, simply a prosecutorial policy. And to my knowledge, generally, that was policy that was followed, you know, by every president up through, you know, this one. That basically to the extent anyone was paying any attention to any of that story at all would have been somebody on the National Security Council staff, NSC staff.

Timothy Naftali

So we were -- I was asking you about Hoover's view of analysis or his dislike of analysis.

Tom Charles Huston

Yeah, well, the Bureau prided itself as a fact finder, and, you know, basically their job was to ascertain facts, you know, collect information, turn it over to the U.S. attorney, let the U.S. attorney interpret it and decide whether or not he had sufficient facts there to form a basis for an indictment in a criminal process. Now, that's a wonderful thing in the criminal justice system. It's a lousy way to conduct an intelligence operation, because raw intelligence is worthless. Unless you can be able to, in the modern parlance, connect the dots. Somebody has got to look at all this information and be able to tie it together and draw some conclusion from it. And there was nobody in the Bureau that could do that, or was willing to do it. There was no one in the Justice Department who was in a position to do that, even though they had, theoretically, a couple places they could have put that sort of analytical spot. And, you know, the CIA who has the analytical capability, but, you know, wouldn't -- jurisdiction is limited because they couldn't do it. But Dick Helms did offer Hoover assistance. After their flare-up over the

RIA [phonetic sp] case in Denver, Helms, in an effort to try to make peace with Hoover offers him to, you know, provide certain support. And one of the things he offers is to conduct training sessions on writing of analytical analysis, and preparation of intelligence analysis and stuff, and Hoover just gives him the backhand and says "No, thank you, I don't want any of that." All he wanted was some fancy equipment that Helms -- the CIA had. But Hoover -- Hoover dismissed all that stuff as Ph.D. intelligence. You know, he wasn't interested in Ph.D. intelligence. I mean this guy was a cop. He thought of himself as a cop, not an intelligence officer. And it was terribly frustrating to those people like Sullivan, and Chick [phonetic sp], and others who were intelligence people.

Timothy Naftali

After you tasked the agency and the FBI to get you information on hijacking, did they come through?

Tom Charles Huston

Well, you know, really this was about the time I was getting ready to leave, so I really wasn't there. But the main thing, you know, was that I could see where we were headed, was that, you know, Hoover, as I say, had seized the opportunity to use this to go to the president for bureaucratic advantage to get more people on his staff to, you know, fill out slots and build and expand his empire. It wouldn't have done diddley to help with this particular problem, at least the problem as it related in this country. And, you know, and secondly, the primary person on the staff responsible for it was Peter Flanigan, who's a wonderful guy, who knew absolutely nothing about, you know, intelligence, people blowing up airplanes or anything else. But he happened to have, in his portfolio, airline regulatory responsibility. And my -- you know, I sent a memo to Haldeman saying, you know, this is crazy. I mean why is this thing being turned over to Peter to handle, and -- but that was the way they did things.

Timothy Naftali

Did the Secret Service provide analysis? I mean, given --

Tom Charles Huston

I never saw any Secret Service. I never, you know, really never had any contact. Butterfield had liaison responsibility with the Secret Service, and the only time I ever saw -- served as an agency, but I never had any dealings with them.

Timothy Naftali

What do you recall the other things you were asked to do in the last year that you were on the staff before you left in the summer of '71? You said you were doing other things.

Tom Charles Huston

Well, I got dragged into the '70 campaign, and what the president had decided that was the year of the radic-lib, radical liberal. And I think he was going to, you know, run against his -- he was going to campaign against these people, and so, you know, they wanted -- I was tasked with responsibility for gathering together all the incriminating quotations from speeches or statements or anything that were

made by any Democratic senator running for reelection. And, of course, Nixon was absolutely convinced that all of them had made terribly embarrassing statements. So I turned that over to the national committee, the research staff up at the national committee, said, you know, go through this -- cull what you can find, send it down to me. So I get what they send me, and so then I put it in different formats so it can be used in advertising, it can be used in speeches, whatever. And, you know, but the fact of the matter is, I mean, they're not -- you know, there are a few guys.

McGovern is always good for some stuff that we can certainly think are pretty radical, and Humphrey, if you go back far enough, you can find some pretty silly things. But overall, I mean there is not a whole lot of meat there, but effort, that was there. I put it in the format, sent it over to Haldeman. Haldeman, of course, puts it in the envelope for the president to review. And, you know, the next thing, I get this blistering memo about how I haven't done my job, I haven't found -- and there have to be better quotes than this. You know, this is not getting me where I want to be. There have to be better quotes. Well, the bottom line is, I can only -- you know, I'm not going to write something and say, you know, Humphrey said this, and not be able to support it. I mean this is what we can find. And then we also had the radic-lib index, voting index, that is, we'd take a select group of issues that we thought were important and do a voting index on how these people voted on, and if you voted a certain way on all these carefully selected bills, I mean you had a 90 or 100 percent position on the radic-lib voting index. And so I did that, and of course, then, you know, we -- Pat was -- Buchanan was working with Agnew, you know, feeding him some raw meat to throw out there. But, you know, the president was really, you know, committed to this notion that he was going to run this campaign against these guys based upon, you know, in particular the law and order issue. But, you know, because Wattenberg's -- in the book, they talk about the Dayton housewife and all, you know, had come out earlier in the year, and everybody was buzzing about how, you know, the -- because again, we're talking about the Reagan Democrats, you know, what -- the issues that have moved them. And of course law and order and stuff, and this is a way to try to move that segment of the electorate.

But, you know, there were two problems with it that seemed to me you didn't have to be a Democrat analyst to figure out, you know. One was that all you had to do was change your rhetoric, so you ended up having, you know, Hubert Humphrey campaign for, you know, the Senate. You thought he was running for sheriff, not for senator. And that was true with many of them. And then secondly was that the economy was headed into the tank, and I don't care what kind of radical lib index I could come up with, you're going to have to deal with that. And so, you know, that was something that they didn't feel they could obviously think they could control, so it got done. But then -- but they had -- you know, everybody -- you know, well, everybody was working on -- not everybody obviously, but, I mean, you know, Pat and Safire were both essentially detailed to the vice-president. Colson had his operation, you know, the hit on Senator Dan Brewster, Maryland, the story they leaked in "Life" magazine. A few other -- you know, they had the townhouse fundraising operation that was being run, raising money off the books. And then Chotiner shows up. I mean that's the first time I had seen Murray running around in our area, was -- it was going into the campaign. And, you know, when I -- I remember Pat and I were together and we looked, and we saw him, you know, I said oh, my Lord. What are we up to now? So we had all this stuff, you know, all going on. And, you know, with the only good result out of any of it was the fact that we did defeat the sitting Republican senator in New York and replaced him with Jim Buckley. And, you know, that was an operation that came -- was -- you know, that was the one thing the president did that was right, it was effective. And that was Hoffinger's [phonetic sp] operation running that.

Timothy Naftali

Whose idea was it that the president should run for sheriff?

Tom Charles Huston

Well, I'm not talking about the president running for sheriff. I mean he was running for sheriff, anyway, I mean, campaigning. But what happened was that the Democrats, you know, running -- acted like they were running for sheriff. They changed the tone, you know, were just as hard line on crime and law and order as any Republican could be, and there was no distance. Because once you were trying to peg your distinction between the parties on -- you know, isolated rhetorical expression of the candidates at a particular earlier moment in time, all you had to do is change the rhetoric today, and you changed the dynamics of the campaign. Well, you know, I wasn't hired to be the -- Nixon would have told you, "I know more about this than you'll ever know. I mean I'm the command campaigner in chief. I know how to run this campaign. And this is what we're going to do." And, you know, he ran around the country hitting hard and all that stuff, and he gave a speech in Arizona, and they ran a crappy video on television, national television. Safire caught the heat for that, and it was a disaster. Well, in fairness, I think it was only partly a disaster, because of that -- but I don't think it was a material thing. In other words, if that had been -- all other things had been better, that wouldn't have made that much of a difference. The real problem was we were running a -- it was in a down economy. And, you know, they had nothing to say that gave any person reason to believe that we knew what the hell we were going to do to keep the economy from going down.

Timothy Naftali

Who oversaw campaign intelligence for the '70 --

Tom Charles Huston

I don't know if there was any, or I don't know. I never, you know -- I mean people have tried to, you know, make it sound like somehow I was involved in that. I never had anything to do with any intelligence operation, method, procedure, information, access to information, receipt of information on any subject that wasn't clearly a governmental -- legitimate governmental issue. I mean, I didn't know -- I knew Jack Caulfield, knew him for a year before he came to the White House. I didn't know he was shimmying up telephone poles, putting wiretaps on Joe Kraft's lawn. I didn't have any notion. I didn't know anything about the tailing of Kennedy at Chappaquiddick. That was all operated out of Ehrlichman's shop. And, you know, I mean the stuff that was -- the dirty trick stuff. I mean Perlstein refers to me as a dirty trickster. Well, hell, I never had a damn thing to do with what I think of as a dirty trickster, which is campaign related or politically motivated operations. I mean, to the extent they were going on, I mean to the extent that what Colson did, dropping that bomb on his incumbent senator in Maryland, there's legitimate information, but it was clearly driven out of the White House. And Lord knows what Chotiner was up to. I always assumed it was going to be no good. So I mean there was stuff going on, but I didn't know anything about it. I was confined to the radic-lib thing. And, you know, I mean it wasn't silly, you know, but, you know, I know -- I knew it wasn't Haldeman saying do this. You know, I mean you get this memo, it's got Haldeman's name on it. But, you know, I've been around, I mean I got stacks of dictated memos from Nixon going back to, you know, 1967. I mean, I can identify Nixon's memo from Haldeman's memo. So, I mean this is what the president wanted. If that's what the president wanted, the only reason I'm there, because he wants me to be

there. And, you know, silly, but it wasn't wrong or illegal or stupid. I mean it was stupid, I thought, but, you know, we did it, and he didn't like it, because, again, I didn't meet his preconception.

Timothy Naftali

What else did you work on in '71?

Tom Charles Huston

Well, I spent a lot of time on this middle America business. If I can recall, and that really was -- and, of course, I also spent a lot of time in that period, you know, working on the bombing halt, because I had -- from the time the president got all excited about this radic-lib project in September, from that time up through November, I mean that was basically taking the bulk of my time. Plus the regular stuff -- plus I was still getting, you know, stuff from the Bureau, and channeled things back and forth, and acting as a liaison. But that was the main thing. So after the election, then, I had to get back to the bombing halt or I would be way more than three days behind in June. But I was working on the bombing halt and the mid- America project was a major thing. We had a -- we had a separate working group that basically was -- were the political guys, and the, I guess you could say the ideological guys. Bill Timmons, and Pat Buchanan, Harry Dent, myself, and I forget, there were a couple others. [unintelligible] but we were pushing hard on this mid-America thing, because we thought this, you know, was really an opportunity. And particularly because we saw the way in which all the policy initiatives, domestic policy initiatives that were coming out of, first Moynihan's shop, and then Ehrlichman's shop, were not designed to appeal to our kind of people. And so we were particularly anxious in view of that to be able to try to limit the adverse political impact on the votes Nixon would need if he wanted to be reelected. And we thought the way to do that was not with gimmicks, but was with real substantive policy and rhetoric. And so, you know, I fought pretty hard on that. I really felt like I was making progress with Haldeman, but the clock ran out, and, you know, at that point. And when I left, and after it fell apart, I was kind of the only one that was bullheaded and determined enough to, you know, keep fighting. And this thing fell apart, and at that point, Colson won by default.

Timothy Naftali

Was that the committee of six?

Tom Charles Huston

No, it was largely made of the same people, but the committee of six really only functioned for -- up until -- during the first -- through '69. I don't think it lasted -- maybe a little bit early into '70. But at that time, after that, they -- it set up another -- what the president referred to as his PR group. Everything was always PR. It wasn't really just PR, but that's what he called it is his PR group. He seemed to think everything was essentially a PR problem, and not a substantive problem. And -- but we really kind of seized this opportunity. I mean, we were like anybody else. You know, I mean [unintelligible]. We weren't potted plants that had just been picked up off the street and moved into the executive office. I mean we were people who would come into the Nixon White House, you know, with a political agenda based upon having actually done things politically, you know, before his election, and so, you know, we were clearly, you know, committed to the notion that we wanted to try to influence the president to move in a certain direction. We thought it was in his interest to do that. And we thought it was in the country's interest. But our vision was much broader than simply what are

the tactical things we need to do to be successful in 1972. And I could see by the early part of '71, with -- when the decision was made to -- for Magruder to leave, for the attorney general to go, I could see where this thing was headed, and it was on a time track that was accelerating. And it was going to accelerate a hell of a lot faster than this ground warfare that was -- I was trying to conduct with Colson. So, you know, I think he won by default, and as a consequence, in my judgment, you know, they got, you know, Meany's blessing in some respect, at least for '72. I think they would have gotten the same blessing if they had never said hello to George Meany because George Meany was a patriot, and George Meany was a strong, anti-communist. And he sincerely believed that McGovern was headed in the wrong direction, and that the Democratic Party was headed in the wrong direction under McGovern. And all he was interested in was getting rid of McGovern and getting the Humphrey wing and the Jackson wing back in control of the Democratic Party. He was not interested in the Republican Party becoming the majority party.

Chuck didn't seem to understand that. I mean I tried to convince Haldeman, this guy has no interest in helping us become a majority party. He really didn't have any interest per se in Nixon being reelected, except to the extent that it's going to be necessary in order for him to get -- hope to get the kind of Democratic Party that he was comfortable with. And, you know, so tactically Colson could claim credit for having accomplished what he set out to do. But it took Reagan to understand the broader picture, to understand how you appeal to these people, both rhetorically and programmatically. And Nixon could have done it, I think. I mean I think there was no doubt that '68 was the critical election. I think Nixon cracked that constituency, I think Nixon moved the ball along a little further than anybody had done before him, but it was not the kind of move he could have made and not the kind of move I think he would have made in a second term, if he hadn't have had that Watergate disaster. I think he would have been more open in a second term. I think he -- his thinking was fuzzy; I think he had kind of a funny notion as to who these people were, and how you got to them, but his heart was in the right place. And he emotionally related to these people. And that was Nixon's long term -- I think, long term secret. Here is a guy who never should have been an effective political figure in terms of personality or whatever, but in his gut he understood the middle class, and the working middle class. And when -- he understood when they felt they were being put upon, because he felt he had been put upon. And unfortunately, he simply didn't have either the desire or the skill to coalesce that in a way that would have had really long-term, greater long-term effects. But he laid the groundwork, and that was important.

Timothy Naftali

The committee of six was the conservative response to the Moynihan group?

Tom Charles Huston

Essentially, yeah; basically our view -- and the president -- I mean we just didn't constitute ourselves. The president -- we told -- Pat sent the president a memo, said we think, you know, there is a point of view you're not getting that you ought to hear. We said we think these are issues that ought to be addressed, and here is who we think ought to be looking at it. And the president said, yeah, I agree, I want that. And so, you know, basically what initially the committee of six's mandate was to look at the political implications of what we were going to do, to try to, you know, not so much to try to, you know, take on Moynihan's policies and fight against him or even to support, except peripherally what Arthur Burns and Marty Anderson and those guys were supposed to be doing, which was they were the ones that were supposed to be confronting Moynihan on the policy side. What we were interested

in doing was making sure that once the president had a policy, once he made a decision, that out in the real world, in the departments, where in my judgment, most of the people seemed to be under the impression that Hubert Humphrey had actually won the election. You know, they weren't going to pay a damn bit of attention to what we were doing, to what we wanted. And so, you know, one of our mandates was to look at how do we reach out to the departments through the secretaries and whoever was out there that allegedly was loyal to the president, and make sure that things get done. Secondly, there are certain things we got to do, we know we got to do, they're right to do, but they're going to be politically costly.

And, of course, right on top of that list is school desegregation. And, you know, there wasn't anybody at any time arguing about the fact that this was something that needed to be done, legally required to be done, and the only question was what's the most effective way to do it, and from our perspective, not only the most effective way to do it, but do it in such a way as to minimize the political damage. Because the political reality was that no -- Richard Nixon was not going to be reelected to the presidency if he couldn't carry the majority of the southern states, period. That was just the electoral map. And so the question was, how do we do these things in such a way that, you know, the president doesn't get, you know, blamed for being insensitive, for being -- you know, trying to pick on him, because a lot of -- we believed, and I think the president believed, a lot of the resistance was the perception that there was this double standard between the way we're being treated in Louisiana and the way the folks are being treated in Boston, and so how do you minimize that. And I think -- and, you know, this was an issue that largely was in the purview with the vice-president and with George Shultz. Ray Price was heavily involved in that. I think one of the best accounts of that whole process is Ray's. But -- so, you know, we were looking at -- and issues would come up. I mean we had problems with the State Department and so -- and HUD. I mean, you know, poor Finch, Bob Finch was over there. I mean, you know, Nixon loyalty strength there went to about number two. He didn't go past number two, if I remember, number two. He had it down to Bob Mardian, who was then general counsel. In that whole department, there were only two people who on a good day would say they were Nixon people. And so, you know, that's what the committee of six was looking at and, you know, trying to identify, these kinds of issues that no one else -- fell outside anybody else's mandate.

Timothy Naftali

I was just wondering, was it the issue of loyalty to Nixon or loyalty to a more conservative Richard Nixon?

Tom Charles Huston

Well, I mean I think, you know, both, but you got to understand that we were conservative Nixon people. You know, I know Nixon never questioned whether Tom Huston was a loyal Nixon man. He knew I was a hard right conservative and I was a lot more conservative than he was, but I know he knew that I was loyal to him, just like Pat Buchanan was loyal to him. And Harry Dent was loyal to him. So our perception of what our job was, we thought doing these things was in his interests. We weren't trying to figure out how to do things that would be against his interests, or things that he wouldn't approve of, you know, once we made our argument as to why we thought they ought to be done. So, yes, we were conservatives, and, you know, it was probably the only, you know -- I mean you come into my office when we were meeting or into Pat's office, I mean someone threw a grenade in there, you know, it would have wiped out the -- what few, true, ideological conservatives there were on the White House staff. But we didn't -- we saw our job as trying to make sure that Nixon -- that these

people who thought their job was simply to push policy, because in their mind, it was a great thing, a great policy. They had absolutely no concern whatsoever for whether you could get it through Congress, you know, what the reaction of the constituencies, the Republican constituencies would be. What would Bill Buckley think? What would the editors of "Human Events" think? You know, I mean they could care less. They weren't focused on that. And that wasn't in the president's interests. And, you know, so we didn't set out to sabotage anything that these guys were opposing, you know. I mean once this was the president's policy, our job was how do we mitigate what we perceive to be the damage, and what can we do over here or over here that will make those people happy, that will mitigate their unhappiness for another Moynihan bomb being dropped.

Timothy Naftali

Why did you, in retrospect, why did you think you had to mitigate so much damage? Why did you guys do so many policy debates?

Tom Charles Huston

I don't know, I mean I knew when I agreed to support Nixon, when he asked me to come to work for him in June of '67, when I met with him, we had a long talk in his office, and I rode with him downtown. He had an appointment, and he wanted to continue the conversation. I told the president, "I'm for you because, A, I think that after the debacle in '64, it's critical that we have a presidential nominee that can unite the party. And secondly, we live in a dangerous world. I mean I'm a DIA strategic intelligence officer. I see a lot of things; I know we're living in a very dangerous world. And I want -- and I want somebody to be president who I think has the capacity to handle that. But on domestic policy, I'm no less skeptical than Bill Rusher or anybody else." But what I tried to do, what I tried to convince him, and I devoted, you know, two years to doing that, and even while I was in the service. What I tried to convince him was that, you know, you have the opportunity to preempt a Reagan challenge by, you know, taking certain conservative positions that are not inconsistent with positions you've historically had. And, you know, you ought to do that. And, you know, so I tried to convince him to move to the right and Pat tried to convince him. But Nixon was a natural born centrist. I mean that was his political -- his whole political career. I understood that.

But, you know, I wasn't asking him to repudiate any position that he had taken, but I did know, in the pre-convention period, that -- and I told him this, and I told Pat this. You're not going to get the nomination if you don't have the support of three people: John Tower, Barry Goldwater, and Strom Thurmond. If you got those three, I don't care what Cliff White comes up with with Reagan. If you don't have those three, you know, then all bets are off. And I'll give him credit for having, whether he already knew that, I mean, he's smarter than I am, but I do think I understood the conservative side of the playing field a lot better than he did. I understood what we had accomplished in '64. We lost the election, but we took control of the Republican Party. I also knew that a majority of the delegates in Miami were going to be the same people who had been the majority of the delegates in San Francisco. And so that had to be the strategy, and that was the strategy. And then during the general election, you know, he did what all good candidates do. I mean he moved to the center -- he got to the center -- beat on those issues that had popular appeal that -- on law and order, and that sort of thing, and threw out all -- let Ray Price and Safire put out all this nice sounding rhetoric and stuff, and all this other stuff that -- other elements in the party, the Riponers and other people were interested in. And they weaved down there, but at the end of the day, you know, I mean he won, and if [unintelligible] had been in there, it would have been a landslide. Because the country was ready for a change. The country was fed

up, you know, with the domestic disorders. And, you know, I don't care if it had been George Romney or Chuck Percy or Joe Schmo. I mean, if anyone running for president on a Republican ticket in 1968 had wanted to be elected, and understood the dynamics on the political playing field, that would have been the campaign they would have run.

And once we got into the White House, Nixon reverted to default, which is, I don't really give a crap -- he said one time, I don't give a damn about the -- a shit about the lira. He didn't give a damn about domestic policy. All he wanted to do was to keep the sharks away. You know, if this is what's required to keep these people off my case, I do what I want to do and I know how to do, which is negotiate with the Soviets, deal with Vietnam, and make the opening to China, then that's fine with me. In many cases, Nixon -- Nixon's clearly more conservative than the policies he enunciated. It's a certain amusement to me, you know, that he saw the opportunity with Joan Hoff, I'll have to claim -- of course, she thought that was a great accomplishment in the administration, that it was the most progressive domestic policy since Hoover. And Nixon -- "Yeah, right, that's what we did." Well, you know, I mean, Nixon didn't -- he didn't like that guaranteed income plan that Moynihan came up with, and he got rid of it and jettisoned it as soon as he could immediately do so. But he wanted to -- he wanted -- he grew up believing that his political experiences were laws that generally, on domestic policy, successful, what were perceived to be successful presidents are progressive on economic and domestic policy. And he came out of the California Republican progressive tradition. He had been a Stassen supporter in '48, so in some respects, it was very natural. But his instincts of many of these issues were much more conservative. But Pat, particularly, was so effective. I mean, you know, it was a no brainer. But once it got into Ehrlichman's hands, I think Ehrlichman -- you know, I mean I considered it a fault. Other people would say it was a virtue. But I mean Ehrlichman was a, you know, a true believer in a lot of this stuff. And, you know, he came out of, again, a more progressive western Republican tradition than most of the people, and, you know, he pushed it. And I think, you know, I think Nixon saw the political advantage of doing that. And, you know, thought that, you know, it's a small price to pay, and, you know, really what difference does it make? The main thing is to keep things on an even keel. He was more intimately involved in the economic policy than he was on these other things, and that, of course, led to the terrible decision he made to go off the gold standard and impose wage and price controls which is ironic, because he won his first election to Congress campaigning against how terrible the wage and price controls had been, because he knew, because he had been in the office in Washington that tried to administer them.

Timothy Naftali

Why did he decide that?

Tom Charles Huston

Hell, I guess John Connally convinced him that that was the only thing he could do. Arthur Burns certainly didn't think so. But I wasn't there, so I don't know. I mean, I --

Timothy Naftali

How did Nixon get Strom Thurmond's support? Do you know?

Tom Charles Huston

Well, I mean, you know, the conventional wisdom that progressive historians like to put out, because it fits with their narrative, is that it was all race based, you know. Nixon basically would say -- said to Thurmond, said to the Southern delegates, you know, if you like me, you don't have to worry about, you know, in-school integration or any of that stuff, we're going to stop. And that's just nonsense. What Nixon brought to Thurmond, and to the South generally, was an empathy, that is, a feeling that, look, I understand this whole thing is very disquieting. It's disrupting. We're talking about uprooting an entire society and its norms. And I understand that, but you'll hear the first part, you'll always hear Nixon saying the first part, but they miss the second part. "But this is what we've got to do. But what I'm going to do is two things. One is I'm going to do it in such a way that is effective and makes it clear that, you know, we're not coming in and ramming this down your throat." That's why they set up the state advisory council, that's why they held all these meetings, to bring the local people on board. Because after Harold Howe, who had been Johnson's commissioner of education, whose idea of dealing with the South was simply to issue an edict saying we're going to cut off your federal funds. The Nixon program was to try to build the support and institutionalize the structure which would do it. The second thing he said to him was that we're not going to do these things with a bold executive edict that just covers the board. We're going to use the Justice Department, we're going to get through the courts, we're going to get court orders. It's got to be worked out. The party's going to be heard. And it's got to be -- and the procedure is going to be worked out that everyone can live with that the court will say meets the legal requirement. And, you know, so that was the procedure. And I think what Nixon did was to convince Strom and convince John Tower that this was what he would deal with. It was more important to Strom than it was to John. John clearly was more interested in Nixon's strong position on military and military defense and foreign policy. Barry was motivated largely by, I think, in some respects, by a sense of gratitude, because Dick Nixon was the only prominent national Republican that lifted a hand to try to help him in the '64 campaign. And, you know, so I think that what -- you know, the bottom line was, is that Nixon effectively -- well, he integrated the schools in the South. He did more in four years than had been done in an entire history prior to that, and did it in such a way as to minimize the violence. Where was the violence? It was in Boston, it was in Chicago, it wasn't in the South. And I think he deserves credit for it, not cynical criticism that somehow he was pandering to the South.

Timothy Naftali

Leonard Garment told us that he was very concerned there would be a lot of violence when the schools opened in September of 1970. Do you remember the concerns?

Tom Charles Huston

Well, there were concerns, and -- but part of the concern was tied not to the -- the problem we had there was it wasn't just that we were dealing with the integration in the Southern schools, because we had the broader problem of the overall protests, student protests, which had gone and dropped down into the high schools. We were having incidents of violence, you know, people getting hurt, our police officers getting hit with stones, rocks, in the high schools. And so in the South, we had the unique phenomenon or concern that we would -- could end up having two different groups of people upset at the same time, the hard segregationist types over the school integration issue, and the antiwar types that were concerned about the war, and then to the extent that the other revolution protest movement people were in there. I mean I was concerned about the [unintelligible] school across the country. I did a memo to Haldeman and the president and said I'm concerned about it, and I think we need to be prepared for it. But I think that the groundwork -- of course, Len was greatly involved with Ray, and,

you know, with working on putting that program together. But I just think in fairness, if everyone ever wants to be fair in trying to deal with Nixon. In fairness, I mean, if you look at the people who were the driving force behind this implementation, devising the program and its implementation, the key driving -- George Shultz was probably number one. And certainly, Len was involved in it, and Ray Price. I mean these were, you know, people who were not associated with the hard cynical right, you know. And, you know, we had -- some of us, I did, Pat had some differences of opinion with them on certain aspects of it. And they were mostly cosmetic; they weren't substantive. And they were mainly, you know, steps that we felt -- words that we thought you could avoid, could rephrase it this way. Steps you could take to minimize the political impact. And, you know, I don't have -- I never had any hesitation -- Ervin here, these Watergate hearings, they made it sound like the Nixon White House was the first White House in American history to have people sitting there that were thinking politically. I don't know where these people came from. I mean, you know, I mean, yes. That was part -- I perceived that as being part of my job, and that was part of Pat's job. Clearly that was part of Harry Dent's job, you know. Because no president can be effective if he can't rely on the confidence that he has, the support of his own national constituency. And Jimmy Carter demonstrated that, and George Bush has demonstrated that. And so I think it's a perfectly legitimate part of the operation and so our involvement was basically on the periphery, and was on simply the nuances of the thing. I never heard any dissent in the White House to the overall thrust of the policy. And all of us, as far as I know, from the president on down, were opposed to busing. And I think we were right; I think we predicted what the consequences were going to be. The consequences were disproportionate to any benefit. And the president greatly regretted, you know, that the court finally forced him to do that.

Timothy Naftali

Who was Harry Dent?

Tom Charles Huston

Well, Harry was -- had been on Strom's staff, Senate staff. And then when Strom changed in '64, when Strom -- or '63, I can't remember if it was '63 or '64 -- when Strom crossed the aisle and became a Republican, he took control of the South Carolinian Republican Party, much to the chagrin of the old line Republicans down there. And he put Harry Dent in as Republican state chairman. So Harry was the Republican state chairman. And Harry, you know, was a very astute guy. There wasn't anybody around that understood Southern politics better than Harry. I mean, he knew all the players. He knew -- on both sides, because he had spent the greater part of a year working for Thurmond when he was a Democrat. So he knew all the Democratic senators, he knew all those people. So he was really very valuable in that respect. And so, you know, he was helpful, I think, in -- during the campaign in reaching to the -- out to the South. I don't think -- the bottom line is that the only question about the South was whether it was going to vote for Wallace or whether it was going to vote for Nixon. I mean, Humphrey was not a player. And so there wasn't any reason for Nixon to, quote, pander, you know. I mean the reality was, I mean, he was to the left as it was. He was the guy that was talking -- I think, talking sense in the South. And Wallace, was a wild-eyed populist, you know, running around talking nonsense. And so looking forward to '72, the question was, is this guy going to be doing this again? And obviously, the hope was that he would not. And that was not in part of my portfolio. I never had anything to do with George Wallace or any of that. But clearly, the reality of it was, and then so after -- and the administration, Harry was brought in as what was essentially -- I don't know what, he was a special assistant, but I don't know for what. But he was brought in as the political guy, not the patronage guy. That was --

Timothy Naftali

Malek?

Tom Charles Huston

Malek succeeded him, the guy who is behind him, I forgot his name before, He was secretary of HEW and Eisenhower. But anyway, he was the -- it was a disaster. The patronage shop was an absolute disaster. But he -- Harry's job was liaison with the national committee, liaison, unofficial political liaison with the Congressional guys. And the South, keeping -- keeping those people tapped down, trying to keep them happy down there. And Harry, you know, was -- I thought was a very impressive guy, a practical guy, an honest guy, loyal to the president. I never heard him make a suggestion that I thought was off the wall. You know, I guess that's not much of a character reference, maybe, for some people. But he was not, you know, a wild-eyed guy. But the bottom line was that all of us on the political side understood, just as Nixon understood, that he had to keep the South, period. And the question -- the only question was how you do that at the same time you meet your constitutional responsibility? And our opinion was there is no reason you can't do both, but you can't just say I'm going to do my constitutional responsibility and forget about the rest of it, or you're going to be in deep trouble. And that's what drove it.

Timothy Naftali

Where -- where was Mitchell? Was Mitchell [unintelligible]?

Tom Charles Huston

Well, Mitchell, I don't know. I never really had many dealings with John. I had more dealings with Mitchell during the campaign than I did after he became attorney general. You know, I think -- I think that -- you know, obviously Mitchell was involved in the whole civil rights question, because the president early on made a decision, which I supported. I think it was the correct decision, was to try to take this problem out of the conspicuously hostile environment in HEW, in the office of education. Get it out of there, and move it over to the civil rights division in the Justice Department. And Jerris Leonard was the assistant attorney general. He was a moderate Republican. He was not a conservative Republican; he was a moderate Republican, and if not a liberal Republican. But to get it over to the Justice Department and do -- proceed according to the rule of law and not according to administrative edict. And so that decision was made early on, and that was the president's decision. And so the question then became how do we do it? What do we do? And of course Mitchell and Leonard were both heavily involved in those discussions working with Shultz, and Shultz was brought in to kind of being the mediator guy to put the whole thing together. It was kind of -- he was -- his position was really kind of interesting, because he made a very strong impression on Nixon early in the administration with the way he handled the labor problem. And then Nixon really started getting these other portfolios. This really had very little to do with the labor department, not the kind of thing you'd expect the labor secretary to do.

Timothy Naftali

Did you play any role in the Supreme Court nominations in 1970?

Tom Charles Huston

No.

Timothy Naftali

Tell us a bit -- you were friends with Bill Buckley.

Tom Charles Huston

Yes, mm-hmm.

Timothy Naftali

He finally gives up on this administration, or at least there is some tension between him and the president. By 1972 you were out of the administration. What happens? Why --

Tom Charles Huston

Well, I think -- you know, Bill and I were friends for a long time, and I had -- I had forgotten all about it, until I was packing some stuff, and I found this LP record for -- "The National Review's" 10th Anniversary Dinner. It said on there, "Narrated by Tom Charles Huston." I'd forgotten Bill had asked me to do that. But, you know, I mean -- and I had -- you know, I had -- you know, reached out particularly to Bill in '67, '68 as part of the effort to try to get Nixon, you know, support among the movement conservatives. And Bill Rusher, who was the publisher of "National Review," had a visceral dislike for Nixon. And he never wanted "National Review" to have anything to do with Nixon, and, of course, he was among the early people pushing Reagan to get into the race. But Bill wasn't like that. Bill was more amenable. And Nixon, you know, had made some disparaging comments about Buckley, but I think he, notwithstanding that, I think you always take that with a grain of salt, because I don't think an isolated statement like that necessarily ever represents this guy's considered opinion. But clearly in my mind, you know, based on what I know from my concern about making sure that was a good relationship, that Nixon respected Bill, and understood it was important to keep Bill on the reservation as long as he could, consistent with what the president wanted to do. And I know he had Bill down several times at least for lunch or small dinners or whatever, and then, you know, at some point, I don't remember, '69 or '70 when Bill published Whitaker Chambers' letters, that Chambers' correspondence between Chambers and Buckley, which is, I think, one of the classic volumes of literature in the Cold War history.

But it was privately published, because, you know, Mrs. Chambers obviously had the copyright, and she was unwilling to agree to let those be published. So Bill published it privately, and, you know, he was kind enough to send me a copy of it, and also, I forget, I think he called me and said, you know, I'd like to see if we could get the president to ask Esther, Mrs. Chambers, who the president knew very well going back to the Hiss days, if we could get the president to ask Esther to give permission to publish these letters, because they're really important. And they need to have a much broader circulation. And I said, "Well, absolutely. You don't have to tell me. I agree 100 percent." I said I just -- you know, I can't believe that the president wouldn't agree to do that. And, you know, so Bill came down and we met in my office and talked about it, and I said, "Look, you know, you just draft a letter

that -- the way you think it should be, and give it to me, and I'll look at it. And if I think there are any changes, anything quirky that I know the president is concerned about -- and I'll send it over and ask the president to do it." He did that; I sent it over. It was probably one of the few times I ever got anything done, you know, quickly. But you know, a day -- two days. The president signed the letter, and it went out to Mrs. Chambers, and she, then, based on the president's request, agreed to let the letters be published. So Bill was grateful for that.

You know, all conservatives going back -- I mean, you know, I remember a session we had in Washington, a group of us sitting around a hotel room in October of 1980, back before the Reagan election. And Bill was there, a bunch of conservatives, and we were laughing, and Bill said he wondered how long, if Reagan won, how long he would be in office before the conservatives turned on him. I said, well, with Nixon it took them 60 days. I said I think Reagan ought to get at least 90, and that was true. Within 60 days, I mean Battle Line [unintelligible] American conservative news letter was all over our case, and "National Review" started opening on us, and "Human Events" started opening up on us, and, you know, and my job -- and Pat's job, I mean, Haldeman looked to us, and the president looked to us. We were the house conservatives. Our job was supposed to be to keep these people happy. Well, you know, I mean could do so much. I, you know, couldn't tell them the how to be excited about something that they'd opposed all their lives, because Dick Nixon decided that what was he wanted to do. But what I would do is call them and talk to them and say well, yeah, okay, I understand that, you know, this is not something we'd like to do. But look at this, and look at this, and, you know, and particularly on the foreign policy and stand up on this deal with the Soviets and Vietnam, because these people were all still hawks, and so we were pretty effective, I think, in keeping the key people, I mean they didn't have to keep -- if I had Bill Buckley, I could care less what Bill Rusher thought. As long as I had Buckley, "National Review" wasn't going to do anything that was really outrageous. I mean they're going to articulate their opposition like they should do, but they weren't going to do anything outrageous. And as long as Tom Winter and Alan Risk [phonetic sp] and "Human Events" were reasonably on board and not, you know, completely ready to write us off. They were going to attack us, but it wasn't going to get out of hand. My problem with American Conservative Union was that Bob Bowman was chairman, that congressman from -- [unintelligible] elected to Congress from Maryland, and Bob was an inveterate Nixon-hater. He had opposed me when -- he had been my predecessor as national chairman of YAF, and when I tried to -- when I started moving, he offered to at least where it was open to consideration, and Nixon, he opposed me. The irony of that is his wife, Carol, who was pro-Nixon, and Pat -- we hired her to work on the president's daily newsletter.

So -- but -- so ACU with John Ashbrook, and Ashbrook was a hard liner, and, you know, I mean John and I had some nasty words, you know. Because again, I mean my job was to try to, you know, keep these people on the president's side. I was there -- I was representing the president. I wasn't there as a conservative, who incidentally, happened to work for the president. And, you know, so what happened with Buckley, though, I think, you know, all conservatives were against the -- Moynihan's guaranteed income plan. I mean there wasn't -- you couldn't find anybody that was for that. So I mean that was just -- you didn't even talk about it. You just spoke a -- "I agree that's off the table, let's talk about something else." And everyone was basically happy with that. Where they lost Bill, it was after I left. I know enough about both Buckley and the White House, I know what happened. Where they lost Bill was on China. And, you know, when Nixon came out in China with his two China policy and with the Shanghai statement, and that was it. I mean Buckley could put up with some of the domestic heresies, he could put up with, you know, some of the other things, but he couldn't put up with that. He -- you know, because the free China element within the conservative movement went back to, you know,

before the Friday "National Review." And Lieberman, who was kind of the Willie Musenberg [phonetic sp] of the right, wherever Lieberman had organized the committee of one million against the mission of China, the U.N., had been a major effort, had a lot of congressional involvement, a lot of congressional support across party lines.

It was probably one of the issues that allowed conservatives to reach out to Southern Democrats. And so the free China lobby, if you will, which is often portrayed in sinister terms, by progressives, but looking at it from our side of the table, the reality of it was a free China lobby was a major player, you know, among the various constituencies, that if you were going to try to do as Bill set out to do, to unify what we called the responsible -- at least what we thought was the responsible conservative organizations, which was most everybody except the kooks and like the Birchers and others, you know, these people were a key point of that element -- coalition. And so there was, I think, a certain institutional imperative there. But I think it was broader than that. I think there was the appeal, the moral issue to Bill. I think Bill felt like that Mao and his government were -- and Zhou Enlai -- were -- their hands were so washed in blood, that it was just morally unacceptable to not only open up with them, but to put them in a position of equality with everyone in Taiwan and to basically isolate what we call the free Chinese government. And that was the cause of the split. Now, you know, when the '72 thing came around and the Ashbrook thing got under way, which was exactly what I had warned early on, would happen, if they weren't careful.

You know, I think Bill's -- you know, Bill gave formal support of that because it was Rusher's deal, and I don't think Bill was ever under any illusion that John Ashbrook was going to, you know, win the New Hampshire primary or any other primary. But I think he felt like it was a legitimate expression of conservative concern, and that it was useful to fly or that shot across Nixon's bow to say, you know, we're still out here. Don't forget us in your eagerness to appease the other elements in your consistency. And -- but I think after -- by the time after the election, and going into the early stages of Watergate -- again, I'm viewing this at a distance. And I didn't see Bill during that period. But watching what he was writing, what was going on, I think during that period and the early period, I think Bill's natural instinct was to circle the wagon around Nixon. Because, A, Bill is a lot like me; I mean, Bill's view was that, you know, those guys out there, I know them, and they're our enemy. They had never done anything except to try to poke us in the eye. And if they're after this guy, then they're probably after us, too, and so, you know, we're going to draw the wagon. And -- which is a position I think he should have taken. In fact, I fault so many conservatives for not similarly taking that position. And one of the things that I regretted more than anything was the ease with which they all fell off the wagon when the going got tough, before there was any reason to believe that the president personally was involved in any of this. I'm not quarreling with after the smoking gun and everybody doing what they wanted to do. But people were jumping off the ship long before there was any reason. And partly that was, I think, a function of the fact that Nixon had not created that sense of personal loyalty in that constituency, that for example, Bill Clinton had established, who -- his key constituencies, so that when Clinton was under attack, his people all circled the wagons, and they never bolted. And I respected that, you know. I mean, I thought, you know, a lot of people complained, but I respected that.

And I thought it was shameful the way in which so many people, particularly a lot of people who owed a lot to Dick Nixon, you know, owed their office for Nixon campaigning for them, owed their position in a law firm because Nixon had brought them in and given them a position in the government, you know, jumping overboard early. But Bill, I think, held out until -- his brother jumped first, and, you know, I had a problem with that. I mean, it was close enough to the time where the evidence was beginning to be -- where you had to be almost woeful not to want to see it, but a little early, I thought,

and if there was anybody that owed his position to Dick Nixon, it was Jim Buckley. And if Nixon hadn't intervened in that senatorial race, I mean he didn't do it publicly, but he intervened decisively, without any support whatsoever. He leaned on Rockefeller and he made sure the money got to Jim Buckley in the Conservative party. And that's why Buckley was in the Senate. So when Jim jumped overboard, my first reaction: "Come on!" But Bill held out pretty much until the end, but he was like Goldwater. Once he was convinced, then he felt like he had been betrayed. And when he felt like he was betrayed, then he was incredibly bitter. And Goldwater, you know, when -- once Goldwater felt like that he had been betrayed, had been lied to, as he said, you know, this guy lied to me, looked me in the face and lied to me, and so it became personal, it became bitter, and Barry particularly is one that these things are always personal. I mean that was part of his problem, but he took all these things personal to him. So he turned hard and decisive and never gave Nixon, you know, the benefit of the doubt on anything to the day that Goldwater died. Buckley, I don't think, was as harsh, but he was harsh, and he was hard and, I think, was a little more willing, after a while, to focus a little bit more on some of the things that Nixon did that were worthy, and not focus just exclusively on that situation.

Timothy Naftali

Do you think the roots of what became Watergate were clear in '70 and '71?

Tom Charles Huston

I never saw any -- I mean, obviously, I mean if you look back at the kind of thing that Ehrlichman had --

Timothy Naftali

Caulfield?

Tom Charles Huston

-- Caulfield doing, I guess he would have to say yes. But I can say in all honesty that I never saw any -- I mean I saw things I thought were stupid, but I never saw anything or anyone suggest anything that I thought was illegal and -- or even anything that I thought was reprehensible. I mean I saw things that were stupid. I had people ask me to do things I thought were stupid. I just didn't do it. Now, I did things that other people would have thought were stupid that I did do. I didn't think they were stupid. I thought they were legitimate. I'm willing to say I was wrong, but I thought that -- so that when people say, you know, I somehow changed my tone from, you know, what my articulated position was before I went to the White House to when I went into the White House, that's just simply not true. The fact of the matter is on executive power, the question of executive power, which is at the heart of the so-called Huston plan. I had -- I was a Wilmore Kendall conservative the day I walked into the White House. And -- which means that I believed that the Constitution had vested in the Federal Government all those powers necessary to accomplish the objectives that are articulated in the constitution. And within that allocation of power were those powers in -- Wilmore and I would have disagreed on this, although I'm not sure he would have, because he was clearly like most conservatives of his era, a big "Congress is the first branch" type of guy.

But my view was that those powers that were necessary, that were clearly within the group of powers that were vested in the Federal Government that needed to be exercised, to the extent that they weren't

clearly vested in another branch, were vested in the president, because they had to be vested somewhere, and that therefore, the president, in terms of dealing with the security of the country, had those powers that were necessary, that were denied to him somewhere else. And, you know, people will say that's not a conservative position. No, that's not true. It is conservative, it's just not -- there is no uniform conservative position on that question. There are other more of the libertarian wing of the conservative move, would have been completely, you know, against any of it, by whoever -- but to try to articulate a theory that some had, that somehow -- that anybody who was an honest to goodness conservative had to be, you know, this, in this narrow area, anti-executive nonsense. And so there were many tents, you know, spread on the battlefield out there on the conservatives divided side of the battle line, and, you know, so -- you know, and that's why Nixon could appeal to different elements of the conservative movement on different issues that were of concern to them.

And probably the issue, the thing that was most interesting, though, on dealing with conservatives, is that the so-called social issues, which came to be identified with a new right and became so important in the 1980 election, were issues that weren't even on the table, you know, in this time period. Now, abortion was -- became -- it started a service, and it was funny, I was just looking at the issues book that we did for the '68 campaign, and I noticed in there that I drafted the abortion -- proposition on abortion. And, you know, my position was, which has always consistently been my position, that this was not a federal issue. This was an issue to be decided by the states, so there was no -- the Federal Government shouldn't be involved in it. And that was Nixon's -- that was his official campaign position, and that was his -- basically his position in the presidency until, as part of the broader issue of the middle America ethnic thing, the issue of abortion began to percolate up in New York and caught the attention of Cardinal Cooke, and got back to Colson, and so that issue then becomes involved in the broader context of how do we bring these ethnic Democrat -- most of them were Catholic -- into the movement. So on that basis, you now begin to see abortion become an issue that gets up into the Oval Office. And the president's issue, at least my perception at the time I drafted it in '67 or '68, whenever, '68 I guess, you know, because you didn't just draft up your position and stick it in the book. I mean you drafted a position and Nixon looked at it and said, okay, this is our position. You know, I was personally opposed to abortion, and I presumed that Nixon was personally opposed to abortion. That wasn't the question. It wasn't what was our personal preference. The question is, as a political issue, what is the issue. And is it a state problem? And then because of the debate that arose in New York, becomes -- becomes an issue that's on the president's plate. And, you know, this is -- started to happen while I'm there, but it really moves on after I'm gone. But that's kind of how that -- that went. And so there, Nixon had, as that issue became more important, that gave Nixon another way in which to connect to a certain element within the conservative movement that might be mad as hell about China, but was really happy to know that this guy wasn't in favor of, you know, the legalization of abortion. And so that's kind of how that worked out.

Timothy Naftali

Who wrote the ERA position?

Tom Charles Huston

Well, he was for ERA, the president -- and I was against it. I told him I thought it was stupid. And I was wrong, and his answer was -- I supported it and most Republicans in Congress had supported it, going back to the Eisenhower administration. It wasn't called the ERA then, it was called something else. And, you know, he had voted for it, and, you know, I'm not going to change my position. And, of

course, he has Kipper and what's the gal from New York that he sent to the U.N., I mean he's got a couple heavy hitter feminists, you know, and the Ripon people there that are whispering in his ear about it, but he believed that. And, you know, I wasn't about to -- I mean the guy -- that's his position, that's his position. I just didn't talk about that position. Of course it wasn't really a big issue until later, until, you know, it was down the road when Phyllis Schlafly, really, you know, got in the picture. That was after that.

Timothy Naftali

Just to end up, you were talking about the -- your perception of the threat in 1970, which led you to be supportive of the efforts of the agencies to get more power to collect information. What did you see as the threat to the United States in 1970?

Tom Charles Huston

Well, there was -- I believe there was an immediate threat and a strategic -- there was a tactical threat and a strategic threat. The tactical threat was simply that people were getting killed. And, you know, there was no reason to believe it was going to get any better. It was fine after the fact for, you know, after they were unsuccessful, and after it was all over, you know, for Bill Ayres to say, well, we didn't really mean it. We weren't, you know, doing anything. The fact is, everything -- every so called communiqué that they issued, you know, indicated that it was their intention to launch, you know, a major bombing terrorist campaign. And --

Timothy Naftali

This is the Weathermen.

Tom Charles Huston

The Weathermen. And when the townhouse in Greenwich Village blew up, I mean it didn't take very long -- you didn't have to be a great forensic scientist to figure out what was going on. I mean, these people were building bombs. I mean, they weren't just regular bombs; they were antipersonnel bombs, and because there were nails and screws and all these things -- and it wasn't too long after that, that we were able to figure out -- find out that the initial target was the PX at Fort Dix. It was when [unintelligible] had that happened, there would have been massive casualties not just of military personnel, but wives, children, daughters, whoever happened to be in that facility at the time. So, you know, this threat to me was very real. At the same time that that happened, you know, there were -- shortly after we had raids in Chicago and in Detroit, both of which uncovered Bomb making up here. So that was an immediate tactical threat that I thought was real that as, you know, as obvious in Iraq, it's obvious in Israel that it's easy to do and very difficult to combat. And then the second threat was largely a Black Panther threat. And that was urban warfare. I mean, police officers were being shot. I mean, there was all sorts of violence going on in these areas, and "off the pig" was kind of the facial motto of these people, and that was a real threat. And it represented a potential for the whole revitalization, reactivation, if you will, of the kinds of urban violence and riots and problems that Lyndon Johnson had had, that we hadn't had. And so my view was that we had -- we had to be able to do whatever we could to keep either one of those problems from getting out of control.

Now, my preferred solution to do that was intelligence. And my preferred solution was to penetrate and to do whatever you have to do to identify who these people are, where they are, what they're up to, and stop them before they do it. The other option, which was the option that the Justice Department selected, and which Mardian implemented, was prosecution. You know, if we're going to start getting indictments on all ranges of people, without knowing who you're getting, or what evidence you got, how tainted it is, whatever, and pursue that, which I thought was insane and wrong, and unproductive, and not likely -- not going to get the result we wanted. The longer term, you know, what was the threat? The more strategically nuanced leadership among the Weathermen, particularly, understood that -- what I understood, what I believed, and what Bill Sullivan believed. And Bill and I talked about it a great deal. That for this to become anything more serious than, you know -- which is serious enough. I mean, you know, you can't walk down the street if you're a police officer or patrolman, worrying about getting shot, or you can't walk into a PS and worry about getting bombed, or into the Pentagon without getting bombed. But the longer term threat was -- and their objective, in my mind, and several of them articulated it, I think either Abby Hoffman or Jerry Rubin, probably Hoffman, because Rubin wouldn't have been straight long enough to do it, but that the real objective was to precipitate the kind of reaction, the kind of response that they got from Daley. And that was to have the law authority, the police, cracking heads, you know, hauling people off, and that, you know, would engender sympathy and broaden the base of support for these people.

And that was what Bill and I were most interested in avoiding, was to have that kind of thing, because all that was going to do would be to take these people out of the margin and broaden the base of support, and that -- but the concern was that if we were unsuccessful in stopping this stuff and it continued, then the public wasn't going to sit by and say, well, that's all right. We'll take our chances with going to the shopping center and whether we're all going to get blown up or not. The demand was going to be that you do whatever the hell you have to do to stop it. And so our view, which may have been wrong, silly, not unintelligible], not intelligent, but our view was that the effective thing to do, if you stop it quietly, underground, no publicity, you don't make martyrs out of these guys, you know, you just get them off the street or if somebody is planning to do something, you pick up the phone, you alert the local constabularies, say you might want to go check so and so, you know, at this address. I mean you stop things from happening, preventively. And that, I think, was the -- was the objective. And I will say this, you know, of all the criticism we had, there was not any casualty, one casualty at the hands of a federal law enforcement or military official, among all these protests, demonstrations, acts of violence, whatever, during the entire term that Nixon was in office. ow, we had Kent State, that was the National Guard, we had Jackson State, but, you know, we had not one incident in which anybody, you know -- and the fact of the matter is, when you look at the statistics of violence during this period, and you compare the reported incidences of which protesters were injured and the number of instances in which police officers or National Guardsmen were injured, there were more police officers and National Guardsmen injured than there were protesters during this period. And so, you know, it was a difficult time.

You know, we weren't trying to -- and the president wasn't trying to repress anything. You know, I mean he was impatient with the war. I mean I -- you know, I didn't see the war thing -- my concern with the war thing was to make sure it was contained so it didn't trigger any kinds of violence that would play into the hands of the hardcore of the people. And that was -- that was, you know, my main concern. The rest of it was a political thing. I mean, I could have -- there were plenty of ways to deal -- we didn't need intelligence to deal with the political problem. It was out in front, I mean, you could see, you knew what the political problem was. But you needed to know as much as you needed to know to make sure that you had it contained and there wasn't any acts of violence. Hoover was, you know,

convinced, of course, it was all a communist plot. I mean he was convinced that -- you know, and he didn't distinguish between the Trotskyites and the CPUSA. And of course there was no question that both of these elements were major players in the leadership cadre at the top of the antiwar movement. But my view of that was that's true, but the reality is, the broader issue that we're dealing with, the extensive problem -- and these guys are, you know -- I mean it's like they're claiming that the ocean came in because they stood on the beach and yelled "Come in." I mean this thing would have happened whether they were out there doing it or not. And so -- and it was a political problem and our response had to be a political response. And it was a political -- and Nixon did that well. I mean he went -- he went on the national television, he gave an effective speech, turned it around, and the irony of it is, is that effectively, he was able to hold that whole thing at bay until he got where he wanted to get on Vietnam. So when these people somehow think that they can claim, well, we drove this guy either out of Vietnam or out of office, at least as far as Vietnam is, I mean he effectively held it at bay while he was able to do it. The bigger problem, of course, was Congress, and -- but you know, I think that the interesting thing to me is that from that experience, you know, with the Church hearings, basically evolved this notion that any kind of proactive intelligence is illegitimate, and that to the extent that you've got acts of terrorism, bombings, or you've got snipings or whatever, it's a criminal problem. And therefore, it ought to be approached through the criminal justice system. And that was the way in which subsequent administrations handled the problem. And that was the basis on which the first World Trade bomb case was handled. And it wasn't until September 11th that people -- some people said that system isn't working, and so I think that -- and it wasn't until then that people really, even though other presidents, particularly Reagan, tried to figure out some way to get the agencies to work together, it was obvious, again, you know, but that on September 10th, these guys were operating with the same rules, according to the same policies and same procedures that they were operating with in January of 1969.

Timothy Naftali

It's interesting, with this concern that you had, or shared perhaps by the president and certainly by others in the West Wing, that they just accepted that no real intelligence coordination would occur on domestic matters after Hoover objected.

Tom Charles Huston

Well, they thought -- you know, they thought they were going to get something. And, see, that's what they gave Dean -- you know, he later claimed that wasn't true, but I mean, you can't read the documents. The documents tell the story. Basically, what they decided in San Clemente is we'll give the portfolio to Dean, and Dean will have to work with Mitchell and Mardian to figure out how we get something put together on a structure basis, and then we'll -- we'll address the restraints on a case by case basis as we need to. And so they took the -- they set up an operation in the Mardian's office, the attorney general -- assistant attorney general internal security division's office, that was supposed to be a coordinated analytical thing. Well, I mean, you know, Hoover was no more willing to cooperate with that. I mean no one talked to me about this, I mean, except Bill Sullivan. And Bill -- we would have lunch, and Bill said, let me tell you what they're -- now what they're doing. He said he isn't going to -- he hates Marty. He's not going to cooperate on anything. And so he assigned one of his desk officers to be the liaison in Mardian's operation, well, this guy's a great guy, good guy, and professional. But I mean he wouldn't go to the bathroom unless J. Edgar told him to go, and so nothing happens. And, you know, Mitchell meets with Helms and the people out at the agency, and, you know, we've got to do something to try to get this thing back. Well, you know, in typical bureaucratic fashion they say,

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"oh, we agree, and we'll cooperate however we can. But by the way, we need the Bureau to do these dirty deeds for us. And, you know, we need your help." So Mitchell said okay and he sets up a meeting with Hoover and Helms and Gayler. And they make their case as to why Hoover ought to do the things that these guys have been asking for, you know, since pre-1969 that I told, you know, I said they could do and I recommended that they be able to do, that the Bureau do for them. They make their case, and the attorney general is sitting there now, you know, the criticism before was Huston wasn't smart enough to get the attorney general into the picture. The attorney general is sitting there absolutely no, no movement. We're not doing diddley.

per sec. 1.4 (c), 1.4 (d), 3.3 (b)(1), 3.3 (b)(6)

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And so Mitchell said, well, once we recess, we'll all think about it and we'll meet again. Well, Hoover -- there is no sense meeting again. So what Mitchell did then was that he ordered Hoover to impose a electronic surveillance [REDACTED] And he did it, I mean, when he was ordered to do it, he did it. But until somebody was willing to stand up and say directly, you are ordered to do this, he wasn't going to do it. And so they allegedly tried, but the problem was, I think, you know, if you read the -- you're familiar with the literature unlike most people, but if you read what particularly Jim Angleton has to say, and you read what some of these others have to say, you know, for all my faults, and I was really somebody that understood what these guys were doing, you know, how they were doing it, what they wanted to do, why they were doing it, what some of the problems were, what some of the challenges were. Well, John Dean, he didn't know anything about it. He could care less about it, you know. I mean, it was just a job he had been given. You know, he needed to impress Haldeman and the president he could get that job done. I was given a problem, let me solve it. Bob Mardian had no experience, had absolutely none. And so there was no one in the White House at that point who had any knowledge, any experience whatsoever. And so the focus just naturally drifted into the Justice Department and at Mardian, and there, after a while, Mardian figured out -- apparently he was smart enough to figure out that, you know, you're not going to get anywhere with Hoover. And so he just trots off down his grand jury route, and it basically falls through the cracks. Now, what was interesting is that when Hoover dies, and Pat Gray gets appointed, damn near the first guys he gets to see in his office are Lou Torella from NSA and the director who show up and say, you know, we want to talk to you about some good work your Bureau used to do for us. And he walked out with the assurance that the Bureau would continue -- would reinstitute doing what they needed done.

Timothy Naftali

Particularly I'm interested, was the Vietnam Veterans Against the War group considered potentially violent?

Tom Charles Huston

I don't really have any present recollection of that. You know, those groups -- I mean because of the, what I would say almost was a methodological problem, that is, because no one ever sat down and tried to analyze and sort these things out, and say you know, this is this pile, and this has got these characteristics, and this is this pile, has got these characteristics, you know, what happened is you'd get information under what might be new left caption, for example, that might include, you know, a Weathermen operation or might include a peaceful antiwar march on the IU campus in Bloomington. You know, and because of the way that the internal security division was organized, that they had a new left desk and a black radical desk, so those were the two categories that you had to deal with. And then so the antiwar movement kind of -- to the extent it had to be plugged anywhere, had to follow one of those two general categories. So when it came in, you know, which desk. So it was hard to

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define it and there wasn't anyone there who was in a position to do it. I mean, I guess the good example was after the New Mobe march or demonstration in November when there was violence at the Justice Department, and the Justice Department announced that they were going to seek indictments for violation of the antiriot act for the New Mobe leadership. And, you know, I mean I sent Haldeman and Erlichman both a memo saying, no, this is nuts. You know, I mean we think we've got pretty good handle on who's doing what where in this thing, and if anything, the New Mobe people lean over backwards to avoid, you know, violence. This violence we're talking about was created by, you know, the crazies, you know, who are outside the coalition and were under absolutely no discipline or control whatsoever by these people. And so the Justice Department was off base. The Bureau agrees they're off base. And this is damaging, because when you make these kinds of statements, knowledgeable people who know the facts recognize that we've got a government here where people don't know enough to be able to draw rational logical distinctions. I didn't get any reaction to that, but at least I felt I told them what they ought to be told. And there was no one to do that, you know, after I left. Maybe it wasn't important, but it seems to me it was.

Timothy Naftali

That was one of the criticisms of the Huston plan. Some people said all right, maybe these powers are required, but what are the checks and balances on them?

Tom Charles Huston

And I thought, you know, I thought that there were checks, because what did we really say? We didn't say to the Bureau, you go do these things. We said to the Bureau that the restraint that precludes you, under any circumstance, of doing these things, is being limited. To me, the heart of the so-called Huston plan was the proposal that actually upset Hoover the most, which was the establishment of a domestic intelligence operations board or a domestic intelligence board that would consist of the four directors would be the members, and then Hoover would be chairman. And then it would be just like the -- on the foreign intelligence side, the United States Intelligence Board, which all the intelligence agencies have input in. They do analysis, they do papers, the agencies review it, they sign off. They don't agree, they just say it. That was the model. What I was trying to do is to basically take the USIB model and say we need to do the same thing on the domestic side. Now, in that case, it's true. I mean the White House, whether it was me or somebody, but there would be a person in the White House whose job it was to represent the president in connection with that. Just like, you know, USIB doesn't operate independent of the staff of the National Security Council. But the chairman of that board was the director of the FBI. And any -- so what -- any decisions that would be made, any actions that would be undertaken, would be consequent to a study undertaken through this board, agreed upon, and then decided on by that board, not something that I ordered, and not something that Nixon ordered or anybody else ordered. There was never any discussion of that. But no one wants to look at the -- you know, the -- the whole thing.

Timothy Naftali

If Nixon ordered it, they'd follow it, wouldn't they?

Tom Charles Huston

Well, I presume they would, but it's like if Nixon ordered an agency to go do something and, you know, in Chile, I suppose they'd do it. But that's not the normal course, you know. I mean it's true, I mean if you take the position that only the president, if he wants to, can order everybody to do everything he wants, but that's not the normal course. You're less likely to have that kind of freelance -- in my judgment, you were less likely to have the kind of freelancing going on that was manifested by the Plumbers if you had a structure in place for the institutionalization of addressing what the president perceived to be a problem. The president's frustration was, he says, I see a problem. Now, whether it's right or wrong, it doesn't make any difference. He's the president. I see a problem. I think that this leaking of these papers is just the tip of the iceberg, a much broader problem, and I want to know who's involved, I want to know who's behind it, and get on it, and nothing happens. And, you know, Hoover doesn't allow people to interview people who ought to be interviewed, and nothing happens. So what's the president to do? He's got two choices. He can say okay, nothing is going to happen, I'll forget about it, or he makes what I thought was a wrong choice, but he made a choice, okay, if these guys won't do it, I'll get somebody to do it. But if you had had a structure in place that said this is an important national security issue, whether or not -- the blanket release of classified documents is an important issue, and we need to look at it and address it, and see what the problem is.

And here is the thing, and you let the people do that who are trained to do it, not hire some guys on the -- you know, I didn't see myself as qualified to do that. I wouldn't have undertaken to try to do that. I think I was reasonably well qualified to act as a liaison person to understand what they were saying, be able to translate their language into language that the West Wing would understand. But there was no institutional structure in place. And, you know, I still think that's a weakness, even today. And, you know, because our whole -- our whole system, from the way FISA had been made operative to the rules of engagement are all predicated on the concept of foreign terrorism. So if you had a situation that were to develop in this country such as has developed in England, where they're not dealing with a foreign problem. They're dealing with a domestic problem. That's an MI 5 problem, it's not an MI 6 problem. You know, now we're very -- generally very fortunate in this country, because we have such a small number -- a small population from whom such people could be recruited, and we have people who have been here a long time whose loyalty doesn't need to be questioned. But if for any reason things were to change, and you had what became essentially a purely domestic, so you couldn't pass a red face test before any FISA court judge that we're dealing with here as a foreign terrorist problem -- you can look [unintelligible] you don't need a statute definition. That's what triggers the thing. And so we're really -- if you ever had, in this country, what was purely an indigenous terror threat, we don't have in place today either the institutional structure to deal with it, or the authorization, the statutory scheme to deal with it.

Timothy Naftali

By the time you left the White House, was the Weathermen group still a threat?

Tom Charles Huston

Yes, they were, I mean -- you know, they were on the run, and I thought that was good. I mean it made it more difficult, because, you know, you obviously can't maintain surveillance of somebody when you don't know where the hell they are. And the Bureau wasn't very good at finding any of them, and one of the two they finally did find, they had to blow the only person -- undercover person that they had who was actually in at a level that could provide any useful intelligence information, which was inexcusable, but was typical Hoover. And so, you know, the problem with that is that as long as

these people were out there, and as long as they -- because those bombings were in 1971. And the Capitol bombing and the Pentagon bombing, I think both were later after I left. I think they were later in '71. So, you know, when those things are happening, and people are issuing so-called communiqués saying this, you got two choices. You can say, you know, this is a bunch of bravado, they're not serious, forget it, don't worry about it. But I think it's pretty hard to do -- I mean, pretty hard to testify before the Senate Appropriations Committee, you know, when they ask you, what the hell about that bomb that just went off down the corridor, or to convince somebody when, you know, it's a restroom, lady's restroom blows up in the Pentagon. So you say, well, those were obviously not targeted against people. Who wants to take that risk?

You know, so that's the real question. I mean, how much risk do you want to take. It's always good to be able to have the benefit of 25 years of hindsight to say, well, Lordy, these guys really didn't mean it, and they were just having fun. And, you know, you should have just left well enough alone and they would have gone back to their business, and it would have been all over. But, you know, the problem with intelligence and with those kinds of threats is that they're forward looking; they're not backward looking. I mean I remember one of the FBI people told Church, he said in our business we can't look around the corner, you know, there is no way. We haven't got the ability to look around the corner. And so that's the challenge you have. And so it's not that there ought to be a lawless regime, and it's not that you ought to have the kind of thing that the Bureau was doing on its own initiative, in my mind. I don't think a lot of what they did was either helpful, or effective, or reasonable or necessarily legal, some of it. And -- but, you know, the problem was is that they were being left alone to do whatever one man decided ought to be done based on his assessment of what the threat was. Now, to me, that is a hell of a lot more dangerous than any interpretation that anybody could rationally give to what I had proposed. And, you know, because what I was proposing was, A, that you use the institutional structure of the government, you know, the people were paid to do that were not political people, that are the driving force and the reviewer and the recommender. And the decision to the extent is controversial isn't made by them -- by one of them, it's made by the guy who's elected to make that decision. And I still think that's the best course.

Timothy Naftali

So a lot of the targeting would come from within, the decisions on targeting --

Tom Charles Huston

Well, I think all the tactical decisions would come from within. I didn't perceive that there would be any role at the White House -- there should be any role at the White House for any decision, you know, as to what tactically ought to be done. What I saw was that that -- to the extent that, for example, to the extent that we identified what we thought was a problem relating to the potential terrorism arising out of the Mid East thing, we identified that as a problem. What, in my scenario, would have happened is I would have given -- I would have told Hoover, or whoever was chairman of the board, this is the problem. I want you guys to look at, I want you to analyze it, determine how big a problem it is, what resources do we have on it, if we don't have enough resources, what do we recommend, and give us a recommendation. And they, then, would have done that, would have given us a recommendation instead of me writing to Haldeman and Flanagan talking to FAA and whatever, we would have had people whose job it was to analyze that problem. and make an intelligent -- intelligence assessment and give it. But I never had any involvement -- I've never had any knowledge -- I never wanted to have any knowledge of any tactical consideration. And the most, you know, that I

got involved -- where I got involved was -- other than ask for, you know, specific information that people wanted from the Bureau and different things or whatever, but it was to say, like in that case, this is a problem. Or on the Caribbean situation, where the president raised that concern in our meeting, you know. I went back to my office and dictated a memo to Dick Helms, said, "Dick, find out what the hell is going on down there." And -- you know, so that --

Timothy Naftali

This is the Venezuela --

Tom Charles Huston

This is when we met with the president, met with the directors he had met earlier in the day, were President Caldera out of Venezuela. And he had complained to the president about Stokeley Carmichael who was stirring up black power problems in the Mediterranean area off his coast down there. And the president asked Dick, you know, "Do you know anything about this?" Because obviously the president didn't know anything about it. I mean he hadn't been briefed on that. [Unintelligible] and so, you know, I'm saying in that case when something like that came up, yeah, I mean, I -- I immediately went back and said -- told Helms, you know, find out what the hell this guy is talking about, and give us a report. But other than that sort of thing -- I mean I did ask -- I would ask, for example, that when I would press that when we would know from other sources of intelligence that there was a major meeting going on abroad in Prague or Helsinki or wherever these turkeys would be meeting with the DLF people and the North Vietnamese, I would call and asked the agency to make damn sure that they had whatever coverage they could get, and to be sure to talk with their liaison people to -- with the corresponding services in those areas, you know, to find out, you know, what we're doing. I think, you know, that was legitimate. I think we had a legitimate reason to know. These people were over there, we wanted to know what they were doing. And, you know, that was Johnson's view, and that's why I felt on the equities of Johnson, you know, had the better of the case on the deal with the Chennault affair, was that in this -- you know, he's the constitutional guide who's charged with trying to negotiate a peace. And he needs to know whatever it is he needs to know that will help him do that. And I felt that way with Nixon. You know, he's the guy that's trying -- they're negotiating in Paris. They're trying to reach a peace agreement. We need to know what the North Vietnamese and the NLF are doing over here on this other forum. And not, you know, pure [unintelligible] interest. I think it was perfectly legitimate. We had some useful information but not a lot.

Timothy Naftali

You're talking about the members of the antiwar movement who were visiting with the NLF and were acting for the North Vietnamese --

Tom Charles Huston

And we had the same situation with the Cuban -- there would go -- Anyway, the question there was, when these people were going to spend the summer in Cuba, unless they were cutting sugar cane, was that all they were doing or were they, you know, receiving, you know, instruction from other Cuban secret services who were very aggressive. And so that was a concern, and we never really had that good of coverage there. We had some coverage, but, again, that was a, I think, a perfectly legitimate issue as to whether these people were being instructed and trained in all sort of types of activities that could be,

you know, a problem. I didn't care whether they wanted to cut sugar cane. They can cut all the sugar cane they wanted.

Timothy Naftali

We're talking about U.S. citizens here.

Tom Charles Huston

Yes.

Timothy Naftali

Do we have two minutes left? Do we have time?

Male Speaker

Yeah, we have 15 minutes.

Timothy Naftali

We won't use all of them. When did you find out that John Dean had taken information about the Huston plan and --

Tom Charles Huston

Well, I found out when Fred --

Timothy Naftali

Fielding?

Tom Charles Huston

No, no, Buzhardt, Fred Buzhardt called me. [laughter] And he said, by the way, you know Dean's walked off with -- and he listed a couple -- and oh, my Lord. I mean I had been -- obviously I was following very closely the whole Watergate business and I had read that, you know, Dean had secured, you know, [unintelligible] safe deposit box and papers, but I mean it never occurred to me that, you know, these documents that at least in my mind had absolutely nothing to do with anything that he was involved in as it related to the jurisdiction of either the Watergate prosecutor or the committee. So anyway, Fred says, you know, "We've got a problem." I said, "Well, you're damn right we've got a problem." So he said, "Well, anyway, Symington's [unintelligible] and wants you to come out to testify and we don't object." And I said, "Well, that's fine." He said, "While we're here, let me give you the name of the staff guy and give him a call and make an appointment." So I called him and made an appointment and flew out. It must have been mid-week Wednesday or Thursday maybe, and I flew out on, I think, Sunday night, and then I went to the White House Monday morning and met with him at least -- because I didn't have this stuff, you know -- and see what the hell it is that the committee is going to be looking at, if they ask me questions about it. I mean I'm, unlike John Dean, I don't claim to

have a photographic memory of something that happened two or three years earlier. And so I, you know, blast over and see, talk to him about it, and so it was obvious to me, you know, from our conversation that his attitude was that, you know, well, this was just another problem I got to deal with, and, you know, get it over with, and if throwing me under the bus was part of the way to get rid of the problem, that was perfectly okay with him, which was not exactly something that endeared him to me. But anyway, I felt -- I, then, went up to the Hill and, you know, testified before the armed services committee, intelligence committee, intelligence subcommittee of the armed services committee.

Timothy Naftali

There is a pattern, an interesting pattern when the president gets a report from Kissinger that wasn't good enough, he turned to you. When the president got a report from Krogh that wasn't good enough, he turned to you. Where did he develop this confidence in you, that you were the go to guy when he didn't like the first cut of a major issue?

Tom Charles Huston

I don't know, I mean, I think -- you know, I think Nixon, as I say, A, Nixon knew I was loyal. And I think he thought I was reasonably intelligent. And Brenda was remarking, I had forgotten all about it, that when we were up there, a place where the Christmas party in '67, we were going out the door, he asked Brenda, "You know, do you think your husband's mean enough to go through a presidential campaign." [laughter] Brenda said, "Well, I don't know. I don't think he's mean, but I think he'll do all right." But I think Nixon, you know, used words that are almost code words, but you know, he talks about, you know, he's a mean SOB and that stuff. I think what Nixon thought -- I mean what Nixon admired was toughness. In other words, I think what he -- he felt like, you know, he had been tough enough to get through a lot of bad situations of people beating up on him and leaving him pretty much on his own, and so he doesn't often talk about toughness that way. He uses other words, but I think that's what he really means. And for -- you know, I think that during the two years that I kibitzed on the campaign, I mean Nixon, you know -- you know, my method was, you know, to say, "Hey, this is crazy. This isn't working. You know, these guys don't know what the hell they're doing."

And so Nixon developed -- first of all, he developed the [unintelligible] -- Huston's always negative, you know. But on the other hand, I mean I remember one, you know, memo we did, said, you know, Huston is an organizational genius. We need to get these guys, get Haldeman to do something. But, you know, so he had this ambivalent, because he didn't like people, you know, telling him things weren't going well. But on the other hand, I think he felt that, you know, I wouldn't -- if there was something out there that any one could be reasonably expected to find, it wasn't going to be just rolling over backwards, because somebody was putting up a road block, maybe this Huston guy is a guy that will do it. And because it wasn't based on the fact that he heard from me what he wanted to hear. Actually, in almost every case, what he heard from me was not what he wanted to hear, or what I perceived that he wanted to hear. And even in the Huston plan, he didn't hear from me what he wanted to hear, because the only one item on that list that we considered that I had been told by Haldeman, he cared about, was to put the military back into domestic intelligence, and I recommended against it. So in every case, basically, I, you know, came back with an answer that was not what he wanted. But I think that testifies to what the guy's character -- I mean, the complexity of this guy. Yeah, I mean, he doesn't like this, so he's going to see if he can find someone else. But at some point, you know, he doesn't quit doing it. He doesn't say, okay, now, damn Huston, twice now I've asked him

and I expected him to give me this, and he hadn't done it. He came back -- he kept coming back. I felt my job was to give him the best that I could, tell him what I could find out, interpret it the best way I thought I could, be honest about it, and just give it to him, and it was up to him to decide what to do or not do. And that -- I think if we would have had more people who wanted to do that, we wouldn't have got in the problem. And they could have done it. I mean it was simply not true that you could not survive unless you just rolled over and hustled out and did any damn fool thing that somebody over there told you to do. And it wasn't easy, and you didn't, you know, get up to the first rank, and big talk, and get invited to -- you know, to ride on the yacht, but, you know, I felt like most of the things -- a lot of the things I did I thought were useful. I mean, some of them weren't, but some were.

Timothy Naftali

Do you blame Haldeman for not being a better policeman?

Tom Charles Huston

Well, I don't know the answer to that. At the end of the day -- my view has always been at the end of the day, it's the president's -- it was his responsibility. He knows what he wants, you know, he could have -- he could have structured his staff in a different way. He didn't want to have to have personal contact with any more people than he absolutely had to to function because that took up his time. And he had listened to stuff, much of which he didn't care about or he already knew. And so -- but I think the difference is that where Haldeman dropped the boat, Haldeman recognized what a loose cannon Colson was. And I think, you know -- and he tried from time to time to head him off at the pass. But what he didn't do was keep Colson out of the Oval Office. And so, you know, Colson would get back in there and the president would, you know, tell him more stupid things to do. And Colson would salute, and run out, and do it. And -- but, you know, the point that I'd often make is that most of what people are talking about are thought crimes; they're not real crimes. I mean, Nixon says, yeah, we ought to audit all these people. Well, yeah, there were some audits, but, you know -- and Dean was responsible for that, you know, or tried to get it done, but the best evidence says that none of them were done for strictly political reasons. You know, and he wanted to strike back at these people and do this and do that, but nothing ever happened, and that was good, I mean, in my view. And the problem was as they got some hard chargers in there that, you know, kept going -- I mean, you know, Liddy, particularly. And I mean, once they got, you know, him in there, I mean, there was obviously no one in a position either to know what he was doing or to control what he was doing. I don't -- I've never talked to Krogh about it. I don't know what Bud says about that, but I got to believe that Bud must not have been on top of what this guy was doing. Because Bud was a reasonable person. I would have thought he would have recognized right away, this was nuts.

So -- but at the end of the day, I mean, you know, the president, when you read that conversation, all this thing where he's trying to convince Colson that I ought to come back and Colson keeps resisting. But, what is he trying to do? He's saying I want to find out what this is, I want to get into this stuff. I want to, you know -- and for what purpose? He wants really -- my perception is he wants to get this thing -- of course, somehow he thinks he can embarrass his old enemies by it. He's going to get even with the Kennedys, you know, by releasing this Bay of Pigs stuff and the Diem thing and take some of the sheen off of that administration. And that -- you know, that side of Nixon is the ugly side. And fortunately, it's not the only side, but it is a side. And, you know, the reality of it is if he'd have taken me five minutes, having listened to, you know -- if they had said to me what they said in that conversation, I would have said I already made that decision two years ago. No way, I'm not interested

and forget it. And -- but he had people who, you know, like Hunt, Colson and the operation of Hunt, he wants something on Diem, we can't find it, we'll make it up. I don't know if I can blame -- I mean I blame the president for creating an environment where that can happen, but you can't really -- there is no reason to believe that he told them to do that, or even necessarily that he knew that this guy did it. But why did he have that guy there in the first place? I don't know. And most of these people were all people who came in, were never part of the older Nixon group, and, you know, I don't know -- I don't know what happened.

Timothy Naftali

Shift gears for two minutes. Why --

Male Speaker

I don't know if I have two or three minutes.

Timothy Naftali

That's okay, one minute is good. Tom, tell us why you collected political memorabilia.

Tom Charles Huston

Well, my first item in my collection was a campaign poster that -- "Nixon For Vice- President" campaign poster that was laying on the ground. My dad had taken me and my brothers, my mother, down to the train station in 1952. Nixon came through our little town, gave a speech in the back of the train. It wasn't stopped. I picked this sign up and handed it up to him on the back, and he signed it, and he gave it back down to me. And so that was the first item in my collection, and then so from that period, you know, in 1952 since, you know, I mean that's been my focus; my avocation is collecting. But that was my first item.

Timothy Naftali

Thank you very much.