

## WH6401-15-1383-1384\_scroller

**Date:** 1964-01-16

**Participant:** Lyndon B. Johnson

**Participant:** Roy O. Wilkins

**Start Time:** 13:20

**Place:** Oval Office

SCROLLER TITLE: "Find Some of the Top People"

SCENE SETTER: Seeking to appoint more Black Americans to federal positions, President Johnson spoke with NAACP national director Roy O. Wilkins about obstacles to their further employment abroad. In this case, Johnson wanted to appoint Carl T. Rowan, the current U.S. ambassador to Finland, to succeed legendary journalist Edward R. Murrow as the director of the United States Information Agency.

**President Johnson:** Now, do you think the community—What would be the reaction in the community to naming him [Carl T. Rowan]? Do they know anything about USIA [United States Information Agency]?

**Roy O. Wilkins:** I think they would be proud. You see, they don't have to know much about USIA—they know [Edward R.] Murrow.

**President Johnson:** Yeah.

**Wilkins:** And a man to follow Murrow, in their estimation, would make them proud. [*President Johnson acknowledges.*] I think they know about USIA. I think enough of them have done broadcasts overseas, and they know that this carries our message abroad.

**President Johnson:** Now, let me ask you this: they tell me that we shouldn't send a Negro to an African country as an ambassador. Is that true?

**Wilkins:** The Africans have strenuously denied it when we have confronted them with it. I don't know whether it's true or not. All I can say is that diplomatically they have said no. Some of them have been *vehement* in denying it. Others have said this is silly. And I don't know exactly how they feel about it. I would say that if you made a uniform practice of assigning Negroes or such Negroes as you had to African countries, they would resent it, not—you understand?

**President Johnson:** Oh, I agree with that, [*Wilkins acknowledges*] but we've got them in Scandinavia, and we've got them in other countries.

**Wilkins:** Right.

**President Johnson:** And what I want to do is enlarge them a little more. They don't have their 12 percent [in public office], and I'm not a percentage man—

**Wilkins:** No.

**President Johnson:** —but until—if we can find some of the top people in this country—I mean, you take—either of the Nabrits [James Madison Nabrit Jr. and Samuel Milton Nabrit] would be

wonderful ambassadors to some country. But top men. [*Wilkins acknowledges.*] I would like to get them up to where they're at least in walking distance of the rest of us.

**Wilkins:** Exactly. And—

**President Johnson:** And I can't do it, though, if I've got 20, 30 Latin American countries and 30-odd African countries, and they're just barred, because somebody says so. Now, I thought it was the Negro community in this country that was objecting to it. It's—

**Wilkins:** No, they wouldn't [*unclear*] like the Africans would object if it became a uniform policy. [*President Johnson attempts to interject.*] I don't believe they would object. The Africans are the ones.

**President Johnson:** We've got one in Sweden now.

**Wilkins:** Yes.

**President Johnson:** And a good one on my Scandinavian trip—a Negro.

**Wilkins:** Yes.

**President Johnson:** Now, so I'm going to try to add one or two. And you might get one or two of the most outstanding ones that you know in the United States. You ought to have me a list of that. You better just go work, and if you want Whitney [M.] Young [Jr.] or somebody, get me some real outstanding le[aders]. The worst job I can perform is to name one that's a failure.

**Wilkins:** That's true. That's very true, and I agree with you 100 percent.

**President Johnson:** And I don't know this field as well as you do. I'm going to rely on you. [*Wilkins acknowledges.*] So you get me four or five of the top ones that are like [Robert C.] Bob Weaver or like Carl Rowan.

**Wilkins:** Very good, Mr. President. And meanwhile, I'll make additional inquiries among the Africans.

**President Johnson:** You just—you do that. And you talk to anybody that you want to about Carl. Just say, "Wouldn't it be wonderful if he succeeded Murrow?" and see what their reaction is. If you get any different reaction, call me, collect.

*End of excerpt.*

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