

INTERVIEW WITH
Herbert Brownell

by

Thomas Soapes
Oral Historian

on

February 24, 1977

for

Dwight D. Eisenhower Library



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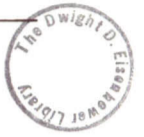
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Herbert H. Brownell
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James B. Rhoads
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This interview is being conducted with Mr. Herbert Brownell, in his office in New York City on February 24, 1977. The interviewer is Dr. Thomas Soapes of the Eisenhower Library. Present for the interview are Mr. Brownell and Dr. Soapes.

DR. SOAPES: First I want to talk a little bit about the '52 campaign. At what point were you sure you had a candidate?

MR. BROWNELL: Well I went over to visit General Eisenhower at the SHAPE headquarters right after the New Hampshire primary and at the end of that day's conference I was sure that I had a candidate. Of course he didn't say so expressly, but we discussed enough about plans and problems that would be involved so I felt it was worthwhile for me to spend my time from then on trying to obtain his nomination.

DR. SOAPES: In looking through some of his correspondence from that period and just before, late '51, early '52, I've gotten an impression that he seemed to sense that he was going to be a candidate perhaps earlier than that. Were there others in the group who were working on this candidacy who felt that he was going to be a candidate earlier than you did?

MR. BROWNELL: Well we all hoped that he would, but I don't think we had reason to say that he would until then.



SOAPES: What was your assessment of Taft's strength at that point?

BROWNELL: Well it was that he was going to be a runaway nominee at that point, and unless Eisenhower had gotten into the picture he would have probably been nominated by acclamation. And I knew enough about the makeup of the national committee and the national convention delegates to know that he'd be a hard man to beat in any event. So he was certainly in the lead at that time.

SOAPES: Once it was clear that Eisenhower was going to run, it was going to be Eisenhower versus Taft, what was the or the several biggest obstacles that you then had to overcome?

BROWNELL: Well one was the fact that Taft was considered Mr. Republican. He had an overwhelming strength in the Republican membership of the Senate and the House and he had the, well at least forty percent and I'd say forty-five percent assured strength so far as the delegates were concerned. And the point that they made against Eisenhower, of course, was that nobody knew whether he was a Republican and nobody



knew whether he was going to run. That was very appealing to the state leaders because they didn't want to sign up with somebody and put their leadership in their own state on the block, so to speak, then find out that they didn't have a candidate. So our biggest obstacle was to assure them that he was going to be in it to the finish. And that was not overcome until very shortly before the convention. There were great doubts as to whether he would actually come back. It wasn't until he actually came back that that was quieted down.



SOAPES: Did you have to sell him on that point?

BROWNELL: Yes, we had to convince him that he had to come back. I think he had it in his mind originally that it would be a possibility that if he ran that he would stay in Europe and there would be a draft by the convention and that then he could make up his mind at that point whether or not he would accept, and my job was to convince him that that was not so, that Taft could easily be nominated under those circumstances and that he would not carry out Eisenhower's ideas on the international front. I'm sure that that was the argument

that persuaded him finally to leave SHAPE and come back to the United States and have a campaign on his behalf as a declared candidate.

SOAPES: Once he was back and campaigning, what was your assessment of his skills as a campaigner?

BROWNELL: Oh, it was an absolutely magnetic personality so far as crowds were concerned. And they didn't care too much, you know, what he said or how he said it. But he was a national hero of the first magnitude so that he had a ready audience. I think it was just an emotion, really an emotional sweep across the country that they were so glad to have a man of his background and caliber as a candidate that they accepted him.

SOAPES: One figure of whom we have a great deal of correspondence that he sent to Eisenhower at this time was Lucius Clay. What role was he playing at this time?

BROWNELL: Well in my mind he was more responsible for Eisenhower agreeing to be a candidate than any other individual. He had Eisenhower's complete confidence and he also had enough



experience on his' own to separate the phonies from the genuine people and so he never subjected Eisenhower to having to deal with the phonies. And Eisenhower had had this very intimate relationship with Clay over the long period of time and accepted at face value anything that he said. It would have, I think, been impossible for any other individual to convince him that he should run. I know that many people have taken the credit for it, but in my mind he was the key man. He certainly was the man that I relied on both before and after my trip to Europe to tell me what was really in Eisenhower's mind.

SOAPES: Were you giving him information that you wanted him to pass on?

BROWNELL: Oh, yes. It was a period of, I'd say from recollection, six months before I went to Paris to meet Eisenhower that I worked with Clay almost on a daily basis.

SOAPES: What amount of credit should go to Tom Dewey for getting Eisenhower the nomination?



BROWNELL: Well, he had an important role because he controlled the New York delegation, and without that we would never have been able to nominate Eisenhower. I think the importance of it is shown by the efforts Taft people made to break down the New York delegation. And Dewey used all his political power, strength, to have a solid New York delegation, and that was absolutely essential to overcome the lead that Taft had.

SOAPES: What type of pressures were the Taft people using on the New York delegation?

BROWNELL: Personal contact of course, and they used the argument that Dewey was a loser and that the country at large didn't like New York, and that it wasn't really a Republican state, that Dewey wasn't really a Republican--he was a liberal, in quotes, and that he had led the party to defeat twice before and that that was not the future of the Republican party. And then there was a personal antagonism between Taft and Dewey that accentuated all those arguments.

SOAPES: And how was Dewey countering those arguments?



BROWNELL: Well, he had developed a very strong position here in New York state. He'd been a remarkably fine governor and he had complete control of the Republican organization and was skillful in his political moves as well as his governmental moves in that he punished people that were opposed to him and rewarded people that were for him. And he kept a very strong hold on the Republican organization all the time he was governor, even apart from the Eisenhower campaign.



SOAPES: When you say punish, what was his way of punishing those who opposed him?

BROWNELL: Well they would not get appointments and would not get advancement within the Republican ranks.

SOAPES: It's the traditional use of patronage power.

BROWNELL: Patronage, yes. A very, very unusual way of handling patronage without sacrificing the quality. Sometimes you think of the use of patronage as being putting in hacks that would just obey anything that you said. He, of course, didn't make his reputation on that basis. He had a very high quality of

people in office. And that was because he had young people of quality, educationally, and who would go into government service. He really inspired them right from the days that he was district attorney, and that stood him in good stead, of course. He had strong bipartisan support because he was able to do that.

SOAPES: One subject that's mentioned in your interview that you did with Columbia University was the Texas affair. And one thing that did not get discussed in any detail was the role that you played in Texas. I think you said in there that you spent a great deal of time on Texas. Could you narrate for us how this Texas affair began and what role that you played?

BROWNELL: Well, I think it was quite clear fairly early that we needed support from some of the southern states to enable Eisenhower to be nominated. Taft had a great head start there and traditionally he and his father before him had always controlled the Republican delegations from the southern states. So about a year, even before it was at all publicly known that



Eisenhower would be interested in the nomination, I worked with the Texas Republican leaders to get a change in the law in Texas which would enable the precinct caucuses and county conventions to be held on an open basis. Under the old law, the county leaders could pick the time and place of the local conventions and change them on the day of the convention, move then from one position to another; they didn't have to publicize them. And we--I say "We"--the local Republican leaders there consulted me. I advised with them on the passage of a new law which would make it possible for anyone to come into those conventions and make it impossible for them to change them immediately before the convention was held so the people could find the convention and vote there. And that change in the law turned out to be very important. This was a year before--it must have been in the 1951 Texas legislature. And so when the time came for caucuses there in Texas, it was possible for the first time for the non-organization leaders, or the anti-organization leaders within the Republican party to attend these caucuses and make their voices heard and not necessary for them to show that they had been Republicans before. That, of course, was what made the Taft people very unhappy because they said, "The Democrats and the



Independents were dominating the Republican caucuses." And I took the position that how was the Republican party ever going to change itself from a minority party to a majority party down there unless we got some recruits from outside the party ranks. And so that was the basis of our planning. And then when the time came for the precinct meetings, I kept in close touch with them and I went to their state convention and worked with them on their strategy as to how they were going to present their case to the national convention. There was strong feeling among the Eisenhower people in Texas that they should walk out of the state convention in protest against the nomination by the Taft forces who rejected all of their delegates on the ground that, while they had carried these precinct caucuses, they were not really Republicans and therefore their vote should not be counted. And I tried to show them the importance of staying in and fighting and presenting their case legally in a way that would be acceptable to the national convention. And that, of course, is what happened and they prepared a case very carefully to show exactly how they'd been squeezed out or how, as we called it, how the votes were stolen. And they presented that case to



the national convention and the convention upheld them. It took a lot of preliminary work to see that a good case was prepared that would comply with the rules of the national convention and get a hearing for them. That was really my role.

SOAPES: Who were the major people that you were talking to in Texas?

BROWNELL: Well, Mrs. [Oveta Culp] Hobby was one; mentioned her name a few minutes ago in another connection. Jack Porter who was the leader of the Eisenhower forces there who deserves the credit really for getting the Texas legislature to change the law back in 1951, and he had a good group of young people working with him in opposition to the regular state Republican organization.



SOAPES: But your contact was primarily with Porter and Mrs. Hobby?

BROWNELL: I would say that those two were the ones that I worked with most.

SOAPES: The names, of course, that we hear most often in connection with the '52 nomination are Brownell, [Henry Cabot] Lodge, Dewey, Were there other people who were not quite so well known whose names should be mentioned in regard to the effort--I'm talking about on the national scale.

BROWNELL: Oh, yes. A great many. The Eisenhower movement started in Kansas and Harry Darby and Frank Carlson were the Eisenhower leaders there, and we wanted to take advantage of Eisenhower's connection with Kansas and have him run as Kansas' favorite son, you might say. Well they deserved a lot of credit, worked very hard on it. And in Pennsylvania there was Senator [James H.] Duff. In New York state besides Governor Dewey there was Russell Sprague. Up in New Hampshire there was Sherman Adams; Massachusetts there was Lodge and [Sinclair] Weeks. Weeks was important because he'd been a strong Taft man before and he came out for Eisenhower, and I think had an influence beyond the boundaries of Massachusetts in persuading Republicans that Eisenhower had a better chance of winning the election. Then, let's see, who else was in the group that I worked with? Of course after it was known that



Eisenhower was going to run, a great many other people we expanded to--in Texas there was Jack Porter, Mrs. Hobby; in Louisiana there was John [Minor] Wisdom; in Georgia there was Elbert Tuttle. I'm sure I've left out some important names because I'm speaking from memory now without any chance to prepare for this particular question.

SOAPES: Well the fact that they stand out in your memory is significant. It suggests that these were the people that perhaps did the most.

BROWNELL: Yes, Christian Herter in Massachusetts should be mentioned. Thinking now more of those people who participated in the strategy of the national campaign. There were many people of course, on the state level who organized their own states. But that would be quite a list.

SOAPES: There's one fellow from Missouri who shows up in some of Lucius Clay's correspondence, Barak Mattingly.

BROWNELL: I should have included him in my list. He was an old Dewey supporter who came along with us, and he had extensive contacts in other states and was a key strategist



I would say.

SOAPES: In fact there's one letter--I've forgotten who wrote it--that said that he had been suggested as someone on the level with Lodge as a potential head of the operation. Do you happen to recall that?

BROWNELL: I don't recall it, but I think it would have been very natural that his name would have been put forward because he had been in several national campaigns before and was a very personable man and also knew the inside of Republican politics.

SOAPES: Certainly a very forceful operator in Missouri.

BROWNELL: Oh, yes. He had a very good relationship with Governor [Earl] Warren I remember.

SOAPES: That brings up another question in regard to smoothing over feelings after the nomination. Earl Warren was one person, of course Taft another with whom there had been some conflict. Were you involved in the preparations for the Morningside Heights meeting with Taft?



BROWNELL: Only that I approved it as being a good move, but I was not present because Taft looked on me primarily as a Dewey man and we didn't work well together. But I thought it was a good move to make and approved of it highly.

SOAPES: How successful do you think Eisenhower and his people were at smoothing over the--

BROWNELL: Oh, very successful. I think that Taft worked genuinely for Eisenhower's election and that meant that all of his crew did and they were the biggest, the strongest, by far the strongest group within the Republican ranks. And I think Eisenhower got along very well with Earl Warren when he campaigned out in California--there was every evidence that Warren was genuinely trying to help him. The problem there was getting the Taft people enthused, and that was the biggest job we had during the campaign. And Eisenhower did that himself.

SOAPES: What was the nature of the appeal that had to be made to those people?



BROWNELL: Well they had to satisfy themselves that he wasn't a left-winger and that he really believed in the Republican platform. Many of them were isolationists but they accepted Taft's assurance that he felt that Eisenhower should be elected. I don't think they ever changed their views. I think that was shown after the election that many senators and congressmen never really supported Eisenhower's international policies in the Congress. But they did go along and at least acquiesce during the campaign with a united front.

SOAPES: What were the principal considerations in the vice-presidential selection?

BROWNELL: Nixon was the leading contender or at least the leading name that was discussed on the ground that he would complement Eisenhower's qualities. Eisenhower was old for a candidate, Nixon was young; Eisenhower had never had any experience in the Congress, Nixon was an influential senator; Eisenhower was, while he technically was from Kansas, was considered an easterner and Nixon had very strong political following in the West. And then one of the chief issues in the campaign, stressed by Eisenhower during the campaign, was



the communist issue, and Nixon had gained a national reputation in connection with the Hiss case and the general opposition to communism in government ranks, things of that sort. So it was a, you might say, a natural, in that sense, complementary ticket meeting certainly all the political requirements.

SOAPES: What role did Eisenhower himself play in that selection process?

BROWNELL: Well he approved the practically unanimous vote, caucus vote of the Eisenhower leaders in the convention. He did not sponsor anyone for the vice-presidential nomination.

SOAPES: Who were Nixon's principal sponsors?

BROWNELL: Well he was the consensus of a meeting held after Eisenhower was nominated--I guess that same night probably. All the state leaders who had supported Eisenhower were called in to a meeting. I think it was a consensus. I don't think there was anybody from California, for example, that was sponsoring him. Warren was the head of the California delegation. The normal thing would have been to have someone from that state sponsor him, but, as I recall it, there was no such



sponsor from California. Rather a group of the Eisenhower leaders from all over the country. I think that's been written up, that particular meeting; there must have been twenty, twenty-five people in the meeting.

SOAPES: Was the lack of a sponsor from California indicative of the Nixon-Warren friction?

BROWNELL: Oh, I think so, yes. Warren would have been the one, naturally, to sponsor anyone who was being considered from California for vice-president.

SOAPES: One of the stories that's been written up is that Nixon had opposed the continued support of Warren by the California delegation and was working to switch the votes to Eisenhower. Is that an accurate--

BROWNELL: I don't think so. I looked into that at one time with some care and I never could find out any evidence that Nixon didn't support Warren as long as there was a chance, reasonable chance for him to be nominated.

[Interruption]



SOAPES: Were you involved in the decision in that Milwaukee speech to withdraw the reference to General [George C.] Marshall in deference to Joe McCarthy?

BROWNELL: No. That was done by the people on the train with Eisenhower.

SOAPES: You were not consulted on this question at all.

BROWNELL: That's correct.

SOAPES: Of course the big flap was the Nixon fund.

BROWNELL: Yes.

SOAPES: When did that first come to your attention?

BROWNELL: Well I think when it was first publicized--I think it was probably in the New York Post. I don't remember the dates; it would be easily located, right immediately after that was exposed in one of the papers.

SOAPES: I assume you were consulted in how to handle that. What were your primary considerations?

BROWNELL: I think I've told this story before, but right



after the convention I dropped out of the campaign. I'd done my job and Eisenhower'd been nominated. So I was not in the campaign in any important way until the time of the Nixon episode. And then Eisenhower called me from the train and asked me to come out and consult with him on that, and at that time he asked me to come back into the campaign. So from then on until election day I was in the campaign full-time. Well that was the event that triggered my coming back in.

SOAPES: What kind of advice did you give him on this?

BROWNELL: Well I advised him to wait and see what the facts were, which he did. And I advised him as far as the political consequences were concerned, that if there had to be a change in the vice-presidency that that would mean going back, having another convention situation with the Taft-Eisenhower battle and under the most unfortunate circumstances, and that it would be an adverse factor in the campaign and might defeat him.

SOAPES: Was it your estimate then that he essentially handled



the episode in the correct way?

BROWNELL: Yes. I don't know how he could have done any better. He'd first made it clear that he was going to wait and see what the facts were, and the public was convinced that he had done that. And then we were also helped fortuitously by the fact that it turned out that Stevenson also had a fund, and that took that heat out of the Democratic attack. We would have been prepared to disclose that, which was just as serious as the Nixon fund episode. So it, in effect, stopped the attacks the minute they found out that Eisenhower was going to support Nixon.



SOAPES: Were you communicating with Tom Dewey on this matter at all?

BROWNELL: Yes. All the time.

SOAPES: Was he anxious to see Nixon leave the ticket?

BROWNELL: I was not there when he was supposed to have made the telephone call. I recall there was quite a lot of discussion of it afterward. But I think he wanted Nixon taken

off the ticket.

SOAPES: Did he have a replacement in mind?

BROWNELL: Oh, not that I know of.

SOAPES: He just felt that the adverse publicity was such that--

BROWNELL: Yes.

SOAPES: --the ticket could not recover.

BROWNELL: I assume that was his thinking, yes. He went along with the decision.

SOAPES: One of the first major problems of the administration, once it was underway, was Joe McCarthy. And the debate that historians have begun now on this, about Eisenhower, is did Eisenhower simply ignore the issue and not take leadership, or did he have a strategy that he was following in regard to McCarthy?

BROWNELL: Well I think you have to preface any discussion of this with a discussion of how Eisenhower approached all of



his problems in the presidency. He was not an orthodox politician and he couldn't have cared less for the partisan aspects of any question that came before him. He was probably as nonpartisan a President as we ever had. The second factor was that he had a very well thought out view as to the role of the presidency and the Congress and the courts, and he was well versed in the theories back of the Constitution and well read in the Federalist Papers and so forth. And he knew that it was a violation of those fundamental principles, the separation of powers, for him to try to get into a fight as to whether or not a senator should be expelled from the Senate. So that he took the position right from the beginning, almost without regard to personalities involved, that that was a problem for the Senate to take care. And of course he was fundamentally right from a constitutional standpoint. I thought that from a legal standpoint he made the correct decision. Now that was unpopular at the time because he and everybody else thought that McCarthy's tactics were pretty outrageous. But he felt that first, that the basic thing was to get the Senate to act on the matter. And so with that background, I guess your question was--



SOAPES: Was there a strategy that he--

BROWNELL: I don't know whether you'd call that a strategy or a policy which went far beyond the McCarthy incident. But then when there were opportunities for him to express his views within that framework he did so. He made a speech up in New England someplace about book burning. I remember consulting with him, showing his approval, enthusiastic approval, for the action of the committee chairman who was considering whether or not McCarthy should be censured--I think it was Senator [Arthur] Watkins. And he made a great point of inviting him over to the White House and having a friendly talk with him when Watkins came out with this committee report opposing McCarthy. So in areas like that where he could do so without interfering with the essential fight, which was the Senate fight, he always came out on what I thought was the right side. And then, of course, when it came to an attempt by McCarthy to interfere with the operations of the executive branch, then he came down very strongly and very heavily in supporting the independence, separation of powers. In that case it was congress attacking the executive. So he not only didn't, as



the executive, attack Congress's prerogatives, but he fought very hard for the executive when the Congress did attack the Executive branch. He refused to turn over records of the Army under circumstances where it was perfectly obvious that McCarthy's real objective was to establish legislative control over management policies of the Army.

SOAPES: So then it is appropriate to describe his approach to McCarthy as a legal and constitutional approach as opposed to a political?

BROWNELL: I would say so.

SOAPES: You said earlier that he was not in sympathy with McCarthy's tactics. What was his assessment of the substance of McCarthy's charges? Did he think that there was some fire where there was smoke?

BROWNELL: Yes, I think if you examine his campaign speeches, his approval of the Republican platform planks on Communism and his approval of the Harry Dexter White exposure, they indicate that he did feel there had been subversive elements in the government. He approved, as



you know, employee security program to eliminate them on the basis of one by one where it was shown that they were security risks. He strongly supported the security risk program. But that was, he thought, the proper way to go about it instead of smear tactics that were used by Senator McCarthy indiscriminately.

SOAPES: One of his appointments that has gotten, of course, a great deal of attention is the Earl Warren appointment.

BROWNELL: Yes.

SOAPES: And he's quoted as saying, "It's the biggest damned fool mistake I ever made." Do you think that's an accurate summation of his view of Warren's appointment?

BROWNELL: No. I have given to the Earl Warren Oral History Program a rather detailed statement which, like this interview, is restricted not to be used while I'm alive, but I've told that in some detail--I have no hesitation in repeating parts of it here if you like.

SOAPES: Okay, fine.



BROWNELL: He studied Warren's record long before he was appointed. In fact he discussed Earl Warren with me at the meeting in SHAPE that I was talking about right after the New Hampshire primary in 1952. He admired the way that Warren governed in California on a nonpartisan basis.

SOAPES: Actually running on two tickets at once.

BROWNELL: I meant the nonpartisan program he espoused as Governor. Eisenhower knew he was a strong governor and that his international views accorded with Eisenhower's. And he knew about his civil rights record--all of those things even before Eisenhower was a declared candidate for the presidency, let alone President. He was ready to appoint Earl Warren as solicitor general. And then when Chief Justice [Fred] Vinson died he concluded that he would rather have someone from outside the membership of the then-existing court and soon focused on Earl Warren. He was a strong supporter of Warren all during the confirmation proceedings, which were lengthy. And so up to the time, I'd say, that Warren was finally confirmed, which is about six months after he first presided as Chief Justice,



the record is clear that Eisenhower approved Warren's record. I never heard him say anything approaching the statement: "It's the worst appointment I ever made." This purported statement is attributed to Eisenhower in a recently published book. I wrote to the author and asked him his source for the statement. He wrote me back that he was sorry to say he had no source for the purported quotation. And the only two places that I've ever heard--I have heard recently that there's something in Justice [Harold] Burton's papers, which are now, I believe, open, that indicates that he had a talk with Warren about Warren's judicial record. I don't know when that talk was, and, of course, Burton himself had been under consideration for the chief justiceship when Warren was appointed. So whether it was at that time or later I don't know. I myself have not verified this and it's only come to my attention since I gave the Earl Warren Oral History interview. The only other purported source that I've ever heard was a supposed conversation between Eisenhower and Ralph Cake, who was once the Republican national committeeman from Oregon, in which he quotes Eisenhower after the meeting as having said this. Of course, Cake was a political enemy of



Earl Warren from way back in Republican affairs. So those are the only two places that I've ever heard that this had been said, and whether the Eisenhower papers will turn up anything additional, I just don't know. But I'm sure that if it had been anything but an offhand statement, that I would have heard about it because I was consulted regularly by him when it came to the question of judicial appointments or judicial conduct. Now I know that he--am I going too much into detail?

SOAPES: No, fine.

BROWNELL: I know that when the Brown against Board of Education decision came down, Eisenhower said to me in effect, "Well, isn't it true that Andrew Jackson said when a Supreme Court decision was handed down that resulted in an awful headache for the executive branch in the area of enforcement, 'The Supreme Court has made its decision, let them enforce it.'" And he, I think, had that kind of reaction: it was going to be a terrible long-term project of carrying into effect that decision. And, I wrote him a memorandum--which must be somewhere in the files--that



Andrew Jackson did say that, but when it came to the actual enforcement, why, he enforced it, just as any other good President would do. So that there may have been moments of exasperation, is what I'm trying to say, on Supreme Court decisions, that were handed down while Earl Warren was chief justice. I could well believe that he or any other President would have had the same reaction when they had a hot potato handed to them by the judiciary. But that's a very different thing. So that I think if I answer your question shortly, which I haven't done up to now, I don't know of any corroboration for this reputed statement. And I don't believe that it reflected his considered views.



SOAPES: I've been told by some others who were around Eisenhower a good deal during the administration that they would frequently come across situations where he was self-contradictory--as in this case, if he had made these statements to the other people, it would suggest that he had contradicted himself. And their conclusion was that while his heart might have been in the right place, he was not a tough-minded fellow. Was that your impression of him--that he was not a tough-minded figure?

BROWNELL: I would just say the contrary. I think he was very tough minded. You know it's a question of definition--I don't know what you mean or what they mean by being tough minded. But he certainly knew the basic directions in which he was going, and when he was crossed by someone in carrying them out he could be very direct and very tough. With that background I would say was a very tough-minded individual. But it may be what they had in mind is that he could blow up, you know, when faced with a difficult situation. He had a good fancy language for knowing how to blow up, but that didn't divert him from carefully considering the problem, coming to a considered conclusion and carrying it out. I know in my own experience I had the chief people in the justice department--had lunch with them five days a week--and I'm sure that if anybody took down my words when I got, you know, mad about some problem that had been dumped in my lap, they really had nothing to do with the way the problem was handled or the decision that was reached, or how it was implemented. I think it's just a human characteristic that he had along with a lot of other people that I know that I admire, of blowing up when they're faced with a tough



situation, one that has to be handled and you don't know how to handle it to begin with. That's the type of thing where it might give rise to some views, people who heard those explosions, that he was inconsistent. To my mind, that's far from being an accurate description of how he operated. Does that do--

SOAPES: Yes. I think it's clear what you're saying. In regard to his reaction to the Brown decision, was it his view that the decision was a right decision but impossible to enforce or did he think it was a wrong decision?

BROWNELL: I never heard him say yes or no on that. I know he felt that it would be years and years before it would be implemented and that there would be many attempts made that would be unsuccessful and that the problem would be there long after he was, because it meant taking a whole area which had formerly been in the hands of the states, turning it over to the federal government against the wishes of the communities involved. I think he was realistic where a lot of other people weren't seeing the difficulties, long-range difficulties of changing the whole attitude and characteristics of a large .



segment of the country. There again I think that these expressions, realistic expressions along that line would have been taken as expressing his views toward the wisdom of the Brown decision itself, but he--to go back to my remarks a few minutes earlier--was a great believer in separation of powers and that he was not going to inject himself into a problem which was up to the court. After the court decision, he realized that it then became his job as head of the executive branch of the government to enforce it. And he went about doing that in what he thought was the right way--it was a long-term way. He didn't think there was any instant solution for it. But as you know when the time came where there was defiance of the federal authority at Little Rock, he took as strong an action as any President ever took to say "no." He said in effect that the court has decided that school integration is a federal question and he would not allow the states to challenge the supremacy of the federal government in this area.

SOAPES: I'm getting an impression from what you're telling me that the constitutional and the legal considerations were paramount in Eisenhower's mind when it came to making the



decision of whether he should involve himself in an issue and the extent to which he should involve himself in an issue rather than the other substantive aspects of the issue. Is that a correct impression?

BROWNELL: That is a correct impression in part, and that's the thing that hasn't gotten over with a great many commentators. They like to say the President of the United States should express himself emotionally on every question that comes along; he's supposed to be the public opinion leader of the country on all issues. He didn't believe that that was the way to govern the country, one that's as big and varied, has as many interests as our country. He felt that the role of the President was to lead the executive branch, cooperate with the other two branches. And you'll find a great many commentators that feel that that's an inadequate way of running the presidency. So it wasn't as though he didn't know; he knew exactly what he was doing. But that was his conception of the way that he could most effectively operate. And I think that a good many people would say today that those were "the good old days." He had not only eight years of peace and good



times, but he left a lasting favorable impression on people in the country. I think he could easily have been re-elected President again if it hadn't been for the constitutional two-term limitation. In other words, he really fostered domestic tranquillity, which was part of his constitutional obligation.

SOAPES: Over a period from '44 through '56 the Republican party had two nominees for President, Dewey and Eisenhower, both of whom you knew very well. Could you compare and contrast the two men personality-wise for me?

BROWNELL: Well I've never thought of that. They were not "simpatico," the two men themselves. There were clear differences in their characteristic approach to problems. They cooperated toward common goals when they both decided to do it. They were both strong men and were leaders. It was a cooperation situation rather than one dominating the other. Dewey involved himself more in the



mechanics of government and the operations of his subordinates to a remarkable degree. Eisenhower, I suppose partly because of his military background, delegated authority--took the position that this is your job, you go ahead and do it. Now if you do anything wrong, that's different; you're held accountable for it. And that's always the position that he took with me and with all of his cabinet members. And that, of course, resulted in his having more time for the particular problems of the presidency that are peculiarly the President's job, like international relations. So their approach to government was quite different from that standpoint. Dewey had a very difficult time in dealing with people who weren't very smart, and he usually told them so. And that created antagonisms and created problems for himself as he went along, especially in his presidential campaign. Eisenhower listened more patiently to all shades of opinion and to people that he didn't like personally. And that was a noticeable distinction between the way the two men operated. A great similarity between them, of course, was their integrity and their fundamental agreement on international affairs. And that was a bond between them right from the



beginning.

SOAPES: Did Dewey ever have anybody else in mind as his candidate in '52 than Eisenhower?

BROWNELL: No, he was one of the very early proponents of Eisenhower's nomination, long before Eisenhower agreed to become a candidate.

[Interruption]

SOAPES: Eisenhower held almost weekly cabinet meetings. What was the purpose of meeting that often with the whole cabinet?

BROWNELL: I think that was his way of keeping in touch with the cabinet departments and contrast it with, you might say, interfering with their operations. I think he learned a lot from those meetings in the preparation for his budgets and things of the sort. He also was a great believer in collective judgments. He allowed everyone to speak pretty freely as to what they thought about all the questions that came up. That was, I know, very hard for me to get used to. In fact I



never did quite get used to it. I didn't make a point of speaking up in the cabinet meetings about the problems of other departments. But he liked that idea of having them do that. I found it very difficult to do and not in accordance with my temperament or wishes, and I think that was the hardest adjustment I had to make to his way of doing business. If I had a difference with another department, I liked to go to the head of that department separately and discuss it with him. But that was not his way of doing things. He appreciated comments that were made on all subjects that came up. I think that's one reason he liked Foster Dulles and George Humphrey because they were gaited the same way. They freely commented on other departments' operations.



SOAPES: So you felt that these weren't just exercises, that they were useful sessions?

BROWNELL: Oh, yes. And, of course, I think more useful to us than they were to him.

SOAPES: That was going to be my next questions--more useful to you or to the President?

BROWNELL: Yes. Well it created a sense of unity that was almost unprecedented in Washington, I think, at least in my lifetime, whereby we felt a loyalty to our colleagues as well as to him.

SOAPES: In terms of the people that you dealt with on the White House staff, with whom did you have the greatest dealings directly; or did you go directly to the President most of the time?

BROWNELL: Well as to all my departmental things I went directly to the President. But on matters that were inter-departmental which I had a part, I dealt mostly with Sherman Adams and General [Wilton B.] Persons.



SOAPES: Adams, of course, has the reputation of having a rather severe bark. Is that a deserved reputation?

BROWNELL: Not in my own experience. I know that is his reputation and as to how he handled his staff, but I have no first-hand knowledge. As far as I was concerned, I was in a different area and I never had that type of experience with him.

SOAPES: You never saw Sherman Adams as an obstacle to you in getting to the President.

BROWNELL: No. He was very, very careful not to interfere in anything that involved the justice department.

SOAPES: Was he that way with all cabinet members?

BROWNELL: I don't think so from what I've heard. He reviewed their work in many instances. He felt that he had to in order to be able to give dependable advice to the President. I never heard of anybody who resented it, but I think he did operate that way with a number. Of course you have to distinguish between the, you might say, the state, defense, treasury and attorney general who had overall governmental jurisdiction and the other departments which are really administrative departments for a particular specialty. And there I think his relationship with those cabinet members had to be different. So I think that probably is the origin of the--but as far as the four that I mentioned I don't think I ever heard of any complaint that he interfered with direct access to the President or tried to circumvent them.



SOAPES: I'm going to turn our attention for a few minutes to the Republican party in general. In the period of the 1940s, the party did make a resurgence that it was unable to sustain. Why do you think the party was unable to sustain resurgence that they began in the '40s?

BROWNELL: Well--you mean after Eisenhower?

SOAPES: I mean after 1946 for instance when they gained control of the Congress. Then comes '48 and the party doesn't really, except for a brief majority in the Congress in '53-'54, it never really comes back again until the late '60s.



BROWNELL: Well I think the upward trend of Republican strength from the end of the war through the Eisenhower administration was pretty steady. Sure it had its ups and downs; it probably would show a jagged curve, but it would be upward, the trend would be upward. Then after Eisenhower there was a drop there in the number of--you can say there was the Kennedy-Johnson era, then the Republicans came back. I don't know how to answer your question. But in these years the Republican party, whether or not holding the Presidency, was a powerful factor in the national government.

SOAPES: What I'm referring to is that many of the commentators have observed that Eisenhower was elected easily twice. He only carried the Congress once. The Republican party was unable to elect his successor. The suggestion then is that there was something missing from the Republican party's strategy in terms of using Eisenhower as a way to expand the party base and that sort of thing. Was there something, as you look back on it, that was missing from the party strategy?

BROWNELL: Well the party has always had two wings just as the Democratic party has, and the congressional wing of the party, the conservative wing as far as the leadership goes, and they never really supported Eisenhower with enthusiasm. So when they came up for election in a non-presidential year it wasn't the same thing as an Eisenhower candidacy because they represented different policies. And to that extent when we didn't have a presidential candidate at the head of the ticket there was nothing that the congressional leadership could do to stir the independent voters. I think that's still true. We have to have a very popular candidate in order to elect a Republican President, and I don't see any



progress toward recovering Republican leadership because of the ultra-conservative approach of Republican leaders in the House and the Senate.

SOAPES: You mentioned a couple of times that some of the congressional leadership, of course, was more conservative-- Taft-oriented--and that there were problems. Was Bill Knowland a problem for the administration in the Senate?

BROWNELL: Well I wouldn't pick him out as one of the leading opponents, although Eisenhower used to get really exasperated with him. Many times he supported Eisenhower magnificently, but both he and Taft before him had certain policies opposed to Eisenhower's and made it very much harder for Eisenhower to get his legislation through. Many times the Democrats supported Eisenhower's legislative proposals more effectively than the Republicans did. And some of the leading opponents of Eisenhower's legislation on certain issues were Republicans.

SOAPES: So it would be accurate to say that the Democratic leadership, Johnson and Sam Rayburn, were at least as important in getting the Eisenhower administration's legislative package through as the Republican leadership, if not more.



BROWNELL: I guess that's right, although they opposed Eisenhower on many domestic issues. At that time, in the field of foreign affairs they were pretty cooperative, much better than some congressional leaders of the Republicans, in that area.

SOAPES: One way in which I frequently bring these interviews to a close is to ask for a general assessment of your own about the Eisenhower administration. When historians write about it, from your perspective what are the most important things that you think historians should recall about the Eisenhower administration, and I'm thinking both on the plus and the minus side of the ledger.

BROWNELL: Well I really haven't got my thoughts together to give a quick answer to that. I think that his leadership in foreign affairs is outstanding and has not been fully appreciated. I think all the books that have been written about the Eisenhower administration so far are not much more than a collection of newspaper clippings and they do not show to me any knowledge of the actual inside workings of the Eisenhower administration. I suppose that will be cured with the sensitive documents of that period when they become



public. There is certainly nothing written that I consider a realistic commentary on the Eisenhower policies. But I think you'd have to say that his international policies were the outstanding feature of his administration; that's of course, where his chief interests lay. He stopped the Korean war. He kept the peace. In his international dealings he dealt from strength all throughout the world and thereby prevented wars several times. Congress trusted his judgment in this area and did not interfere with his affirmative executive leadership.

On the domestic front he accomplished some very important, long-range policies like the opening of the St. Lawrence Seaway, and the successful development of an interstate highway system, things of major nature that are long-term in their benefits. He hated to get into the day-by-day legislative dog fights and didn't care about winning short-term battles. He'd made his reputation as the most highly respected man in the world before he became President. He not only wasn't personally interested in that sort of thing, but he never tried to claim political credit even for the good things that he did. He was not looking toward getting re-elected, even



making his place in history the way most Presidents are. He'd already made his place in history and his attitude was: I'm going to do the very best I can and as to how it will affect my reputation or the reputation of the party--those were subordinate considerations for him. And that's the thing that no commentator that I've seen has pointed out. It was not a political approach. And many reporters and many commentators will say that you're a failure in government, you know, if you don't win politically on a short-term basis. And this was of no interest to him at all. The best things about his administration were long-term policies that benefited the country in the long run.

SOAPES: Is there something on the minus side of the ledger, something that you would have hoped that his administration could have accomplished that it didn't?

BROWNELL: Well I thought it was pretty good, so--[Laughter]. While I was there I approved of his, you might say, nonpartisan, long-range approach to problems and it would be better if all Presidents took that viewpoint. That doesn't mean you can't



have good partisan fights to get elected, but when you're President I approve of Eisenhower's way of doing business so to speak. I don't know whether he himself commented on what he didn't accomplish that he would liked to have. I think probably within the financial area he felt that he had expected to do a better job of improving and strengthening the financial health of the country and approaching a balanced budget, and he was not able to do that. I think that if you looked at it from his standpoint he didn't accomplish what he expected to do there.

SOAPES: Thank you.

