Where Ambassadors Go

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In the nineteenth century, diplomatic appointments and government positions in Washington were mainly given out on the basis of political patronage. With each new administration, a long line of job seekers would form, and the president and members of his cabinet would spend many hours responding to the requirements of a system driven by patronage.

In 1891 Charles Guiteau, one such supplicant, wanted President Garfield to appoint him as the minister in Vienna, the highest-ranking position in that embassy at the time. Lacking any political connections, Guiteau saw his request rejected. He then asked to be named a consul in Paris but was again turned down. He chose to express his displeasure at being rebuffed by shooting the president.

Garfield's wounds, together with nineteenth-century medicine, killed him but gave birth to a reform movement. For the first time, laws were passed to move from a complete spoils system to one that filled most jobs on the basis of merit and that held the prospect of promotion and a long-term career working for the government for those who did their jobs well. That reform movement started with passage of the Pendleton Act in 1883 for civil servants but was not formally extended to diplomatic positions until approval of the Rogers Act in 1924.

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Because of these reforms, as well as the growing importance and complexity of foreign affairs, American diplomats gradually became more professional. As a result, the number and percentage of ambassadors who were career officers throughout the first half of the twentieth century steadily increased. By the time of the Eisenhower administration, professionalization had expanded to the point that only one-third of US ambassadors were political appointees and the remainder were career Foreign Service officers.

The criminality of the Nixon administration, which included the outright selling of ambassadorships, prompted additional reforms.[1] They were codified in the Foreign Service Act of 1980, which specifically states that political contributions should not be a factor in deciding who gets to be an ambassador. Since the passage of the Rogers Act, the ratio of political appointees to career officers has consistently been about 30/70 even though the question of who receives an ambassadorial appointment is still largely left up to the president. The one exception to that ratio occurred during the Reagan administration, which managed to make 38 percent of its ambassadorial appointments political. Regardless of the percentage, to join the ranks of political-appointee ambassadors, one must have an economic, a political, or a personal relationship with the president. Although these are not mutually exclusive, the predominant one will have a direct impact on the appointee's country assignment.

The single most important determinant of who goes where as ambassador, however, is whether the person is a career officer or political appointee. That fact is made clear by looking at the distribution of political versus career ambassadors broken down by region. Although the ratio is 70/30 career to political worldwide, in Western Europe and the Caribbean, it is reversed. In those regions, 72 percent of the ambassadors serving there since 1960 were political appointees, and only 28 percent were career officers. That proportion stands in stark contrast to Central Asia, where none of the more than 50 people named as ambassador to countries in that region since the end of the Soviet Union has been a political appointee.

Why the pronounced pattern of assignments? No social science theory could explain it, nor would any State Department or White House official admit it, but an explanation does exist: political appointees who give substantial amounts of money to buy the title want a country whose name their friends will recognize and will visit—one that poses very few risks to life and limb and that boasts a good quality of life. Such locations include Western Europe and the Caribbean, with a few other English-speaking nations in the Pacific like Australia and New Zealand thrown in.

Another feature of this peculiar geography is that the more money an appointee gives, the better the assigned country as measured in terms of both gross

domestic product per capita and the number of international tourists visiting each year. In other words, as per capita gross domestic product increases from $0 to $90,000 and as the number of tourist visits increases from 0 to 120 million, the chance of the ambassador being a political appointee increases from 20 percent to 70 percent.

A system in which the wealth of both the country, and the appointee, determines who becomes ambassador can hardly be expected to produce optimal results in terms of foreign policy. Nonetheless, this thinly veiled corruption is tolerated because, in the end, the president chooses whomever he (and some day she) wants as an ambassador. Although the chief executive is bound somewhat by the 70/30 tradition, no law or regulation places any firm restrictions on that power.

Such a system is just another indication of the influence of money on the American electoral system. Even though the president is the most powerful individual in the world, he has only a limited number of ways of rewarding those who help him get elected. Given the fact that the cost of presidential campaigns has surpassed the $1 billion mark, a candidate needs plenty of helpers, and some of them will have to be rewarded with an ambassadorship.

This system may not be as dysfunctional as it seems because of the preferred destinations of political appointees. Relations with the countries in Western Europe are typically as strong as they are complex. Communications with and travel to and from the United States are not difficult, and those nations have large embassies with capable staffs and a usually competent ambassador in Washington. It is easy enough to circumvent a political appointee, either in the foreign capital or Washington, if the ambassador turns out to be lazy or a disaster. Moreover, these countries are well accustomed to the peculiar American tradition and manner of sending amateur envoys. Some have even complained privately when their ambassador gave less in campaign contributions than the one sent to a neighboring country.

As for the Caribbean nations—those tropical paradises not far from the southeastern United States—relations are also usually very good and not that important from Washington's perspective. If the ambassador runs the embassy badly, damage is confined mainly to those who have the misfortune to work for him or her.

Not all political ambassadors are big campaign contributors or bundlers—those people who literally collect, neatly package, and deliver the contributions of many. The contributors and bundlers are the largest group but comprise a bit less than half of the political appointees. The rest are divided between people appointed for political reasons, such as retired senators or women and minorities who add diversity to the mix, or those who have been loyal staff aides or campaign

workers. The latter two types will not wind up in Europe, but they could find themselves in the Caribbean or the more attractive posts in Latin America.

Regardless of which of the three types of friends of the president—economic (big donors), political, and personal—a political-appointee ambassador is, there is very little chance that person will be sent to a country that is undesirable because it is difficult or dangerous. The best measure of a lack of desirability is salary differentials paid to the people who serve there. They receive incentives for working in the embassies of dangerous, unhealthy, or generally unpleasant countries in order to facilitate staffing the post at all levels. Political appointees of any description are very rarely found in such countries—and never major campaign contributors.

Danger pay is compensation for just what the name implies. It amounts to a bonus of at least 15 percent of the employee's base pay and can go as high as 35 percent for serving in places where a threat to embassy personnel exists because of civil unrest, terrorism, drug traffickers, or some other form of violence. In the first term of the Obama administration, only 2 of the 18 embassies with danger pay—Afghanistan and Saudi Arabia—hosted political-appointee ambassadors. Both were retired generals, neither of whom made any significant campaign contributions.

Hardship pay is awarded for service in nations where the local conditions differ substantially from the environment in the United States and warrant additional compensation as a recruitment and retention incentive. This allowance is compensation for spending a few years in a country known for crime, disease, poverty, poor health care, isolation, or other local features that make it a particularly difficult place to live. The hardship allowance, an addition to base pay, starts at 5 percent and can go as high as 35 percent.

Of the more than 165 US embassies, 127 have conditions sufficiently difficult to warrant some level of hardship pay. Of those 127, only 13 had political appointees as ambassadors during Obama's first term. Of those 13, only 4 made campaign contributions or bundled in the 6-figure range, and their posts carried a hardship allowance of only 5 percent in 2 cases and 10 percent in the other 2.[2]

Aside from the wealth and touristic value of countries, a number of other factors determine who goes where as an ambassador. In the United States' early days, the men in charge of the nation's diplomatic missions abroad were either the Founding Fathers themselves or looked just like them: white, male, Anglo-Saxon, and Protestant with the occasional Catholic. As the country's overseas interests, economy, and population grew and became more diverse, so did the ranks of its diplomats.

More recently in the nation's history, some commentators have asserted that diplomats who represent America should be a microcosm of the American people. In reality, the makeup of US ambassadors reflects the prejudices and social values of the moment and will never be an exact replica of the demographics of the population as a whole. Although less true than in the past, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and religion have an effect on who becomes an ambassador to what country. The following discusses each of these factors and its effect on ambassadorial assignments.

Gender

For nearly a century, the State Department employed no women in full-time positions. It began to hire them in 1874 but only for clerical work. The view of the department reflected the era's condescending attitude toward women. For example, in 1905 Assistant Secretary Frederick Van Dyne is quoted as saying, "The greatest obstacle to the employment of women as diplomatic agents is their well known inability to keep a secret."[3]

The effort to win women the right to vote, which culminated with ratification of the 19th amendment in 1920, helped bring about a different attitude. Things began to change, but progress came slowly to such a tradition-bound institution like the State Department. The first woman to enter the Foreign Service, Lucile Atcherson, did not do so until 1922. Ruth Bryan Owen, a former member of Congress, was the first woman to be chief of a diplomatic mission. President Franklin Roosevelt named her envoy extraordinary and plenipotentiary to Denmark in 1933. Helen Eugenie Anderson was the first woman to hold the title of ambassador. Active in the Democratic Party, she was appointed by President Truman as ambassador to Denmark in 1949. In 1962 President Kennedy sent her to Bulgaria, making Anderson the first female ambassador to a Communist country. Frances Willis became the first career diplomat named ambassador when she was appointed to Switzerland in 1953.

Opportunities for women in the Foreign Service have greatly increased in recent years. In the 1960s, only 7 percent of new officers brought into the Foreign Service were women, and they held only 2.5 percent of the senior positions. By 1990 the Senior Foreign Service was still only 19 percent female. By 2005 that ratio had risen to 30 percent although it has not increased much since.[4] At the entry level, things are better. Today 40 percent of people who take the written exam for the Foreign Service and 40 percent of those hired are women.

Even though the number of women in the senior ranks seems to have plateaued at 30 percent, the Foreign Service is still far ahead of other sectors of

American society in terms of workforce composition. Only 4 percent of the chief executive officers of *Fortune* 500 companies are women, and less than 17 percent of those who sit on the boards of those corporations are female.[5] Only a quarter of university presidents, a supposedly enlightened group, are women.[6]

Progress has also been made with regard to the effect of gender on ambassadorial placements, but some patterns are still pronounced. The historical data show that women ambassadors typically have been underrepresented in Western Europe, North and Central America, East Asia, South America, and the Middle East. With the exception of the first region, the explanation could be that Washington was reluctant to send an ambassador to parts of the world where local attitudes toward women might make their job more difficult. In the case of Western Europe, the paucity of female ambassadors can probably be attributed to the fact that the region is popular with big donors and that, unlike men, women usually have not had the financial wherewithal to make the required large campaign contributions.

Race and Ethnicity

African-Americans have a longer history as diplomats than women but have enjoyed much slower progress. The only reason for the longer history lies in the thinking that deemed it appropriate to send African-American envoys to two predominantly black nations: Haiti, the second country to win its independence in the Western Hemisphere, and Liberia, founded by freed American slaves and dating its independence from 1847. The first African-American diplomat, Ebenezer Don Carlos Bassett, was sent to Haiti as minister resident and consul general in 1869. Lester Aglar Walton, the first African-American chief of mission, went to Liberia in 1935. Edward Dudley, the first African-American to hold the title of ambassador, was assigned there in 1949.[7]

Clifton R. Wharton Sr., the first African-American to have a professional position in the State Department, was also the first to become a Foreign Service officer and the first appointed as chief of a diplomatic mission to a European country. His road to Europe, however, passed through Liberia—his first overseas assignment. Wharton went on to become chief of mission in Romania in 1958 and then ambassador to Norway.

Wharton overcame a deeply ingrained State Department view regarding where African-Americans should properly be assigned. In 1949 Christian Ravndal wrote a memorandum to the deputy undersecretary for administration with the subject line "Countries to which an outstanding Negro might appropriately be sent as Ambassador." Ravndal was director general of the Foreign Service at the

time, the State Department's most senior personnel officer.[8] He suggested three sets of countries. Romania or Bulgaria came first because "the appointment of an outstanding Negro as Ambassador to one of the iron curtain countries should serve to counteract the communist propaganda that Americans are guilty of race discrimination."[9] The second choice was Afghanistan or Ethiopia, but he gave no justification for suggesting either country. The third group included Haiti, Paraguay, Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras even though Ravndal worried that the ambassador would have to "overcome the initial hostility with which he would be met."[10] As for other possibilities, Ravndal thought that Middle Eastern countries and Portugal would be offended by an ambassador of color and that Ecuador, Bolivia, and the Dominican Republic had not "evolved enough socially to overcome race prejudice."[11] He suggested that Switzerland, Norway, and Denmark were civilized and enlightened enough and "generally without the race prejudice found in other places."[12] Less than three months after Ravndal wrote the memo, Dudley was named ambassador to Liberia. Over the next decade, five more African-Americans would attain ambassadorial rank. Four of them would be sent to Africa—two to Liberia and one to Guinea and Niger—and one to Europe (Wharton to Norway).

The regional distribution of ambassadorial appointments for African-Americans is much less balanced than for women. Historically, over 72 percent of those individuals who have become ambassadors have gone to Africa. In the last decade, the percentage has fallen but remains at 60 percent.

In earlier times, prejudices within the State Department had a profound effect on where African-American diplomats were sent. Ravndal's memo demonstrates another kind of bias: trying to anticipate the prejudices of the country to which a diplomat might be appointed and letting those attitudes drive the assignment process.

A third, more benign explanation exists for this geographic pattern of assignments today. Because of their heritage, African-American diplomats might choose to serve in Africa because they have greater ties to, or interest in, the continent or because they think their ethnicity might be an advantage in dealing with African officials. Or perhaps they anticipate that they will be less welcome in other parts of the world and therefore less effective.

Most Foreign Service officers tend to specialize in a particular region of the world that reflects their personal preferences. For a career officer, having established one's identity and gained experience and language proficiency in a region makes it highly likely that when the possibility of an ambassadorship arises, it will be in that same part of the world.

If self-selection is now an important determinant of where an African-American might go as ambassador, then the same might be true for other minorities. Of the 23 Hispanic-Americans named ambassadors between 2001 and 2013, 14 of them (61 percent) went to Latin America and the Caribbean. Whatever the reason, the same sort of geographic concentration that results in African-American ambassadors to Africa seems to work for Hispanic-Americans and Latin America.

Sexual Orientation

One might not think that sexual preferences would have an effect on the selection and assignment of an ambassador, but that issue has always been in play. Despite the remarkable progress made in gay rights in recent years, it will continue to have an influence in the future.

Since Thomas Bayard became the first American diplomat to receive the title "ambassador" when he was sent to London in 1893, more than 4,500 people have had that honor. Until 2013 only three of them have been openly gay. The first was James Hormel, a prominent philanthropist and grandson of the founder of the meat company that created Spam. When President Clinton put him forward for Luxembourg in 1997, his selection created a firestorm of congressional opposition.

The Senate Foreign Relations Committee approved Hormel's appointment, but a number of Republican senators, responding to pressure from conservative Christian groups and Catholic organizations, blocked the nomination.[13] In arguing against Hormel, Senator Trent Lott of Mississippi labeled homosexuality a sin and compared it to alcoholism and kleptomania. Among those senators opposing Hormel was Chuck Hagel of Nebraska, who said being openly, "aggressively gay" would limit Hormel's effectiveness as ambassador. Fifteen years later, facing his own confirmation struggle to become secretary of defense, Hagel apologized for the remark.[14]

When the full Senate failed to act on Hormel's nomination, Clinton bypassed that body and gave him a recess appointment in 1999 that allowed him to serve only until the beginning of 2001. At that time, a new session of Congress began, and his nomination as ambassador was not resubmitted for consideration because of the opposition to his appointment.

Over the next 12 years, only two more openly gay ambassadors served their country. The first one to be confirmed by the Senate was Michael Guest, a career diplomat whom George W. Bush named as ambassador to Romania. In his first term, President Obama named one openly gay ambassador, David Huebner, to

New Zealand without any significant Senate opposition. Then in June 2013, following his reelection, Obama nominated five more gay men who were confirmed without controversy within two months. All were political appointees, and all were named to wealthy nations, except one who went to the Caribbean.

The congressional treatment that openly gay nominees receive today stands in stark contrast to the reaction to Hormel's appointment in 1997 but is even more remarkable when compared to attitudes in the 1950s. Back then, when State Department officials made their annual appearance before Congress to discuss the budget, the chair of the committee that handled the department would ask, "How many homosexuals has the Department fired this year?"[15] In that era, homosexuality was grounds for dismissal, and security officials in the department devoted considerable time and effort to investigating anyone accused of being a homosexual. One security officer, in fact, was employed full time to follow up on such allegations.[16]

Even in the 1980s, homosexuality was reason enough to revoke one's security clearance because the employee was considered vulnerable to blackmail by foreign agents. Loss of one's clearance made any meaningful work in the department or career advancement impossible. Secretary of State George Shultz stopped that practice during the Reagan administration.

Just as the country's attitudes have changed, so did the approach of the State Department toward issues of race, gender, and sexual orientation evolve. After announcement of the 2013 Supreme Court decision striking down the Defense of Marriage Act, the State Department and other federal government agencies moved quickly to expand benefits to same-sex married couples. A majority of Americans now support gay marriage and don't believe that homosexual relationships between consenting adults are morally wrong. Additionally, gay men and lesbians are now welcome in the military, even by former secretary of defense Hagel.

Governments in some other parts of the world, however, are not so enlightened: 76 countries criminalize homosexuality, and 5 of them allow the death penalty for such an offense. Nearly all of Africa and the Middle East impose harsh legal restrictions, and the trend recently is not necessarily in the right direction. In December 2013, India's highest court reinstated a colonial-era law criminalizing same-sex acts, and in February 2014, Ugandan president Yoweri Museveni signed a bill into law that toughened sanctions against homosexuality, including the possibility of life sentences for gay sex and same-sex marriages.[17]

Sending openly gay ambassadors to countries where homosexuality is condemned and criminalized will therefore be an issue that the State Department must continue to deal with. It is a new variation of an old problem, however. The

State Department reflects the country it represents, but it cannot completely ignore the attitudes in a country to which an ambassador is sent. Because of racism abroad as well as at home, assignment of an African-American ambassador outside Africa or Western Europe was a rarity for many years. Moreover, prolonged debates undoubtedly occurred about sending women ambassadors to the Middle East.

Although Americans like to ignore their own prejudices and insist that the rest of the world be as enlightened as they, that simply is not going to happen. A country that imposes harsh penalties on its own citizens for homosexuality will not accept an openly gay ambassador with enthusiasm and would not be receptive to a request for a diplomatic visa for an ambassador's same-sex spouse or life partner.

The predominance of gay ambassadors nominated by Democratic presidents reflects the impact of election politics and the tendency of political strategists to slice and dice the electorate in order to make direct and indirect appeals for the support of certain groups. The president and Governor Romney evenly split heterosexual voters in 2012, but Obama won the gay vote by 76 percent to 22 percent—an even greater gap than the one among Latino voters.[18]

Clinton appointed Hormel because he was a major donor to the Democratic Party.[19] Indeed, in his autobiography, Hormel describes how Bob Farmer, the national treasurer of the party, urged him to seek a presidential appointment. Farmer suggested that he look over a copy of the "Plum Book," a government publication listing some 7,000 federal jobs for political appointees. Hormel took this advice and described what he found:

> I skimmed through the Cabinet jobs, the senior level department appointments, and the presidential commissions. There was assistant secretary of this and undersecretary of that and memberships on commissions relating to every aspect of public policy. In most cases, my qualifications weren't suitable for a given position, or else I knew of someone higher in the pecking order than me. The best fit, it seemed, was an ambassadorial post.[20]

The clear implication, at least in Hormel's assessment, is that the qualifications to be an ambassador are not as great as those for other government jobs. Having made the decision, Hormel showed he was going to work hard to get the position. He goes on to detail how much time, effort, and networking he had to do to overcome the opposition to his being named. Although the Senate never acted on his nomination, it took considerable work on his part to push the president into giving him a recess appointment. Nearly two years passed from the time

his name was sent to the Senate in October 1997 until he presented his credentials in Luxembourg, but he persisted and made history in the process.

Religion

One of the concerns of the Founding Fathers during the drafting of the Constitution was the separation of church and state, and it was reflected in Article VI, which states, "No religious Test shall ever be required as a Qualification to any Office or public Trust under the United States." Nonetheless, there have been religious tests in a few cases. Belonging to a certain religion precluded some diplomatic assignments and was a requirement for others.

Before the 1970s, Jews were not assigned to the embassy in Tel Aviv. Martin Indyk was the 13th ambassador to Israel and the first Jewish one when he got the job in 1995. Since Indyk, five men have served as ambassador to Israel, two of whom have been Jewish. Today it is unlikely that many nations would openly reject an American ambassador because he or she was Jewish. That was not the case in the past, but in some countries it was never a problem. In Turkey, for instance, a relatively high percentage of ambassadors have been Jewish because the Ottoman Empire was one part of the world that had no problem accepting Jews.

In the past, Jews have been excluded from some ambassadorships, but at least one position at present has a religious requirement. Not only is there a "religious test" for this particular ambassadorship but also it automatically draws the person under consideration into the debate about one of the most divisive social issues in America today. That ambassadorship is to the Holy See—a unique appointment in that it is to a city-state as well as a religious group.

Some level of diplomatic relations with the Catholic church date back to 1797, but they lapsed in 1870 after Congress passed a ban against spending federal funds on a diplomatic mission to the Vatican. The congressional action was prompted by a rumor that the Pope was going to forbid American Protestants from holding services in their homes within Rome's city walls.[21]

Congress repealed the prohibition in 1984, making relations at the ambassadorial level possible, and President Reagan quickly elevated his special envoy to the Vatican, William A. Wilson, to ambassadorial rank. Wilson was a very close friend of Reagan and a member of his "kitchen cabinet," a collection of wealthy supporters and advisers. Wilson used the opportunity of being in Rome to secretly fly to Libya to talk to Mu'ammar Gadhafi. The purpose of the trip was never made clear, but it happened at a time when the Reagan administration was trying to rally international efforts to sanction Gadhafi because of his support for terrorism.[22]

Since Wilson, 10 US ambassadors have served at the Vatican, all of them political appointees and Catholics. Additionally, each one either opposed abortion or did his or her best to avoid discussing the issue.[23] During Obama's first term, stories in the conservative media claimed that the Vatican rejected three of the administration's candidates for the position because they were insufficiently pro-life. An article by the Catholic News Service denied this claim, quoting a Vatican official who maintained that the Holy See did not vet the personal beliefs of individuals put forward as ambassadors. The article went on to state, however, that marital status did matter and that the Vatican had rejected two ambassadorial candidates in recent years—one a divorced man from Argentina with a live-in partner and the second an openly gay man from France in a union with another man. Both were Catholic but apparently not Catholic enough.[24]

The Vatican is not the only embassy where being Catholic matters. Ambassadors to Ireland have been overwhelmingly Irish and Catholic and, for the last half century, all have been political appointees.[25] During Obama's first term, the ambassador in Dublin was Dan Rooney. He gave the exceedingly modest amount of $30,000 to the campaign, but having the support of the owner of the Pittsburgh Steelers football team was apparently contribution enough. Following Rooney's departure in December 2012, two years passed without a replacement.

Several candidates were supposedly considered during that time, but they apparently failed to survive the background investigation.[26] A senior White House official was quoted as saying that reports that candidates had failed the background check were "not right." The official offered no excuse for the long gap between ambassadors, however. In this case, as with most questions surrounding personnel decisions, the truth is elusive and facts hard to come by.[27] Reputations are at stake, and the reasons for why and when such decisions are made are always opaque.

Finally, in June 2013, the White House announced that it would nominate Kevin O'Malley, a Missouri lawyer, for the post. According to media reports, he was a devout Catholic and Irish-American but neither a significant campaign contributor nor bundler.

One news story interpreted the lack of major contributions as a sign that the embarrassment caused by other big-donor nominees might lead to the avoidance of bundlers for a time.

That theory proved short lived. The next day, the White House announced that Jane Hartley, an economic and political consultant married to an investment banker, was being nominated as ambassador to France. She was among the top 50 bundlers for the 2012 campaign, gathering up more than half a million dollars for the election effort. According to press reports, she speaks "conversational" French.

Although that statement gives no real indication of how well she can speak the language, it is clear that, despite any earlier bundler embarrassments, money still talks when it comes to ambassadorial appointments.[28]

At O'Malley's confirmation hearing, he was introduced by both senators from his state. One of them, Claire McCaskill, had high praise for O'Malley and noted with enthusiasm that he had until very recently been a citizen of both the United States and Ireland but had given up the latter when nominated. The prospect of such an obvious conflict of interest and the potential for divided loyalties apparently made no impression on the senator.

Personal Preference

The desires of the aspiring ambassador can also play an important role in the decision about whom to appoint to a particular country. On the one hand, career officers are usually happy, or at least willing, to take any embassy they are offered. Political appointees, on the other hand, often have very specific ideas about where they want to go.

Those ideas can sometimes be driven by where they were born or grew up, but it is generally not a good idea for ambassadors to attempt to go home. Any ambassador is always subjected to all kinds of pressures and expectations that will only be made much worse if they have roots in the country in question. It will not be long before a distant relative asks for help getting a visa or for some other favor.

Or perhaps the ambassador's spouse wants to go home again, as was the case of Vera and Donald Blinken. She had left Hungary as a child, and he, years later, went there as ambassador. He helped raise $5 million at a single dinner in New York for Bill Clinton's election in 1992. In their coauthored memoir, she describes why his getting the job was not such a great idea:

> For the first time in our marriage, in his capacity as ambassador to Hungary, Donald was obliged to keep secrets from me. A red folder on his desk contained intelligence reports, and it was allowed to be there only when he was alone in his office. What disturbed me more than the curiosity about the contents of the red folder was not being able to share this part of Donald's life.
>
> Being a wonderful husband, Donald applied for and obtained a security clearance for me from the State Department. Now, when I was with him escorting officials on diplomatic missions, I could accompany them into "The Bubble," the secure enclosure in the Embassy where sensitive information was discussed.[29]

Access to classified material is always based on a person's having the appropriate security clearance and on a need to know the information in question. Security clearances take time and money to obtain, so there is the question of the use of

government resources in this case. Clearly, the ambassador's wife had no need to know what was in the red folder or what was said inside "The Bubble."

Another case of an ambassador returning to his roots is that of John Estrada, nominated to be ambassador to Trinidad and Tobago, the country of his birth, in July 2013. He gave only about $1,000 to political causes, but he did endorse Obama for president in 2008.[30] He did so after retiring as sergeant major of the Marine Corps, the highest-ranking enlisted man in the Corps. It took until February 2016 for him to be confirmed although the reason for the inaction was never explained.[31] The Senate never rejects an ambassadorial appointment outright. It just refuses to act—and doing nothing is something that Congress does very well.

Congress is not the only entity that gets a vote in the process. Even before an ambassadorial appointment is made public and forwarded to the Senate, the country receiving the ambassador must grant *agrément*, the formal term for its concurrence with the nomination. Although this action is usually just a formality, some countries have strong opinions about the kinds of ambassadors they are willing to accept. Saudi Arabia wants individuals who don't speak Arabic and have a close personal relationship to the president. Japan, which likes high-profile personalities, was thrilled when Caroline Kennedy was sent there in 2013 as ambassador—thrilled, that is, until she took to Twitter to criticize the country for the way it treats dolphins.[32]

Clearly, many factors affect the way an ambassador winds up in a specific country. Many of them have little to do with either the ability or experience of the individual, and no theory will ever be able to explain how or why it came to be. And as long as campaign contributions continue to play such an important role in American politics, some of the appointments will continue to be for sale.

Notes

1. Walter Pincus, "The Case of Peter Flanigan," *New Republic*, 18 October 1974, https://newrepublic.com/article/91252/the-case-peter-flanigan.

2. The posts and their hardship differentials include Afghanistan (35 percent), Belize (20 percent), Botswana (10 percent), China (15 percent), El Salvador (15 percent), India (20 percent), Malta (5 percent), Mexico (15 percent), Romania (5 percent), Saudi Arabia (20 percent), Slovak Republic (10 percent), South Africa (10 percent), and Trinidad and Tobago (5 percent).

3. "A Short History of the Department of State," US Department of State, Office of the Historian, accessed 18 February 2016, https://history.state.gov/departmenthistory/short-history/inequality.

4. Margot Carrington, "How Are FS Women at State Faring?," *Foreign Service Journal* 90, issue 5 (May 2013): 39.

5. Alanna Vagianos, "There Are Still Few Women at the Top of Fortune 500 Companies, Says Report," *Huffington Post*, 25 January 2014, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/12/11/women-in-leadership-roles_n_4418725.html.

6. Jack Stripling, "Survey Finds a Drop in Minority Presidents Leading Colleges," *Chronicle of Higher Education*, 12 March 2012, http://chronicle.com/article/Who-Are-College-Presidents-/131138/.

7. Much of this information came from the US Department of State, Office of the Historian, http://history.state.gov/about/faq/african-americans-in-the-foreign-service.

8. Michael L. Krenn, "'Outstanding Negroes' and 'Appropriate Countries': Some Facts, Figures, and Thoughts on Black U.S. Ambassadors, 1949–1988," *Diplomatic History* 14, issue 1 (January 1990): 132.

9. Ibid.

10. Ibid.

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