

The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training
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Ralph J. Bunch Legacy: Minority Officers

JOHN TWITTY

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INTERVIEW

Q: Mr. Twitty I would like to get started off with you telling me a little bit about yourself. Where you were born? When you were born? Something about your parents? Something about your early childhood and your schooling? So why don't we start off.

TWITTY: I was born January 17, 1919 just in time for World War II as I always said. I was the last of eleven children and the only survivor right now. My mother was born in Westchester in 1872 and there were not many black people around in those days and they seem to be freer, there was no slavery there. Her mother was married there in 1834 so they go back, way back a couple a hundred years almost. My father was from North Carolina and my mother said he wandered into town one day and went to church. They fell in love and got married. He always worked for himself. He used to work for a guy who had a horse and carriage hauling and when cars became the thing he bought a couple of trucks with a partner named Valentine and that is what he raised us on. I was the only one who did not work on the truck because I was too young. He took care of his eleven children. Eight survived actually. And, as I mentioned that I was born in Tarrytown, New York (which) was 20 odd miles north of New York City in the County of Westchester which was once said and seem to be the wealthiest county in the nation. The Rockefellers lived there. They came in from Ohio, I think. My mother said they were carpetbaggers. The Hills of the tobacco people, a lot of millionaires there. And I went to the public schools and there was no segregation in the public schools. So I went from kindergarten through high school finished in 1937 and my dad died in 1934 right in the heart of the depression. We had a little hard time. It was the only time I experienced being evicted from my own house, couldn't pay the mortgage. So we moved into an apartment for the first time in our lives. My mother struggled and got us all through school.

In 1937, I said, I graduated and I had a little job in a dry cleaner for a big \$15 a week. I inherited from my brother James who went to work for General Motors which was then hiring black people for janitorial help. I was making big money and in that for two years, then I went to school. There was the National Youth Administration which had a program for poor people, blacks and white. I went to Maine in a place called Quoddy, where it is

said that the biggest and highest tides in the world come in and out, there. The tide goes out so far that you can't see the water and when it comes in, it rushes in and the Roosevelt Administration once tried to put some (electric) turbines in there and manufacture electricity but it never got done. It was a poor village with a lot of poor Indians and several hundred young guys like me, 19 and 20 years old, from New York, Maine, all east coast people. I met a lot of people there. I met several of the white kids there and those that are still alive, we still talk on the phone or send postcards. That was fifty or 60 years ago.

Then came the draft. I was the first one to go in. My brother James followed me. My brother George and my brother Joe who was then 40 years old but he was living in New York City and instead of registering at our home, they took him. Nobody in Tarrytown that was 40 years old went into the Army. But he did it. Double time, he went to the evasion of North Africa and then he went to the evasion of Europe.

Q: Tell me, when you said that you were drafted, during that period, of course, everybody had to register, black and white. Did you notice that there were any disproportionate numbers of draftees based on race?

TWITTY: Not in my home town, no. There were not that many of us. In fact, I knew the draft man was our milkman. There was a story which I wrote that won a prize in my Newspaper later but I will never forget the morning that my mother and my sister took me to the train which had a reserved coach for draftees who were going to New York City to go to White Hall and then over to Governor's Island. This young white boy from somewhere upstate, I don't know his name and I don't remember where he came from but he was very friendly. He said, "I hope we can serve together." I didn't want to challenge him with two armies. Ha! Ha! One black and one white. I never told him until we got to Fort Dix about four days later and we jumped off the truck and the Sergeant would say you go here and you go there. Blacks go one way and whites another. I said goodbye. I often wondered whether he made it or not. It's sad when you grow up in a country and you don't know what is going on. So that was my Army experience.

Q: Before you get into the Army, here, you graduated from high school you said in 1937. What were your plans when you graduated from high school?

TWITTY: Well, I always wanted to be a journalist. And then it sort of fell away and I said I don't see how I am going to do it. But it was because of the Army and the GI Bill of Rights (that) I was able to do it much later than I anticipated. I thought I would get out of high school and get a job and go to college right away but it took four more years.

But most people did that, so I was twenty-two when I was in the Army and we went from Fort Dix to a place called Camp David in North Carolina. It no longer exists. It was the Anti-Aircraft Artillery School and they had three black battalions. We were the 99th, there was the 100th and there was another one, I don't remember but that was Coast Artillery. But we were anti-aircraft and my battalion went to Trinidad that was the Great War down there. Ha! Ha! But it had a lot of German prisoners in the December raids (that) were

being bombed out of the water down there. On Sunday, you took your girl down in the camp and strolled by and saw the white Nazi's in their prison camp.

Q: What were the prisoners doing?

TWITTY: Nothing much. They were never let out and a lot of them were officers so they lived very well, you know the code of the military. We never had any excitement there except one time when the French, we didn't know what the French were going to do and the Vichy took over. But one of the big battleships escaped and was headed toward Martinique and that was within our territory. We were alerted with the guns and the planned Air Force group there too. They all went searching for it and she came in and gave up to the Americans. They thought they were going to fight us but the "Origelu," (was) one of the biggest battleships built at the time, we would have had a little over a year and a half. We went back to Georgia.

Q: Before you left there tell me about you getting into this. What were your choices when you finished your basic training? How were you selected to be in an anti-aircraft battalion?

TWITTY: Well, they chose any people who had high school diplomas. Because we had a bunch of blacks from the Chicago area, New Jersey, New York and a few from Connecticut. Then we got some Mississippi people in from the southern states where they had very little education because they were ammunition carriers and, you know and what not. Seventeen of us got chosen to either go to officer school; I chose to become a warrant officer. So I became one. I was appointed in Trinidad, me and three other guys, one from Pennsylvania and two from Chicago. I was the administrative guy from the battalion and we had three battalions in those days.

Q: Three black battalions?

TWITTY: Yes. In fact, we were so welcomed by the Trinidadians they thought why are we getting all of these white troops and when we arrived they were very pleased. I knew a lot of West Indians in New York, you cannot avoid it. I broke the code by telling my mother in a letter that I was in Mrs. Whiteman's home and she knew what I was talking about and I didn't have to tell her it was in Trinidad. That was my doctor's wife. So she knew that I was safe and sound.

And then the war changed when we began to build all these airplanes. So they disbanded every anti-aircraft unit in the Army except for a few out in the sticks overseas because we had air superiority. So I was automatically transferred into the field artillery.

I went back into Georgia is what had happened and so I lost all of my close friends. One guy went with the Infantry Transportation Corps in some God forsaken island in the South Pacific. I was going to go to Europe and I was sent to join a black artillery school troops out in Fort Sill, Okalahoma which was the artillery school. Now it was very interesting to see how race comes up in these things. I knew this when I went there

because (of) all the soldiers, I was the only black officer they had except for the Chaplin and he was telling me how many alerts they went on to get out to go overseas but they never went. Because, number one, they were the best troops they ever had for training the officers and they just knew they were never going anywhere. Well I told them, well I am here and I'm here to tell you that the next time we have a dry-run; it isn't going to be a dry one. So when it came, they said, "Oh well, the change is, we are going to come back", and I said, "you wait we are coming back to New York City and get on that ship and go overseas." But we didn't go until about seven or eight months after the evasion. Number one, they didn't want us and number two, not many artillery pieces got ashore on D-Day because that was the infantry's hustle to get up those cliffs. So we came into Marseille and, I try to think, June the 6th was invasion, 1944. So we were like in January for six months sitting in England and Wales dancing with the Welsh girls. In fact, somebody sent the guns to France and we were in England. Good old Army 'snafus' you know. So finally, we got the guns, they married them up, and we got into France. I will never forget the first casualty report. One of my soldiers was drinking that Calvados apple juice and got drunk and fell in a river and drowned. I hadn't fired a shot, "dang it" and I had to write a letter to his parents and tell them how he died. Oh God, it was terrible! I would not have felt so bad if he had been shot to death but he was drunk and stupid. So we chased the Germans from that date, early January '44 all the way to the end of the war. Up in Germany, I never really saw too many people get killed because we had worn out 155mm guns and those things shoot a long way and we would shoot them as we passed through and they were already dead. Cleaned up by the time we got there.

Q: You had the latest in the state of the art. That 155mm that was a lot of field artillery.

TWITTY: Did you ever see the "T-O-T (Time on Target artillery shell)?" They were so secret. One time, I lost one. I had to cycle these things. I knew I had twenty, but we couldn't find the twentieth one. So I told the battalion commander, "We are not leaving here until we find it." So we went, over and over, and there it was in the truck bin, came down and it was caught between the hinges. Lord! They should be put in jail. It was a marvelous piece of artillery.

Q: Were all of the commissioned officers black?

TWITTY: None.

Q: None.

TWITTY: I never saw any (black) commissioned officers until I came back from Trinidad and they were just putting him in the artillery, the field artillery. We didn't get any. I think a black postal officer had two choppers and me. That was it. All through Europe, it was an all-white soldiers and officers army. Until the war ended, we were up in Germany sitting out the so called end of the war. With nobody telling us the war was over because the Germans had flown their first jets and were bombing us every night. But, they always did it about six o'clock so we always got out of the way. That was the first time I ever saw a jet. I tell you that when the war was over for us, I had to send some

people to the Pacific and some stayed in the Army and some stayed in Europe. So I was going through the records and I found two guys who were in my outfit when I trained them in Oklahoma, Fort Sill, who were graduates of the University of Chicago. And this white captain had made them ammunition carriers. So I took this to the Colonel and said, "What is this?" What do you mean? I said, "Look at these men's education. They are more educated than most of your captains who were out of high school." He said, "Well, you do what you have to do." I am going to get rid of a couple of your captains and we are going to make some of these guys master sergeants and send them out to school one of these days. So it was an amazing thing to see it that blatant. Somebody must have seen those cards. I was there like a week before I found out. I went through the 201 (personnel files) cards, those big yellow things we use to have. It was ridiculous to see that kind of discrimination. But the first time I went on leave in Europe, the war was over in April or May, I forget. I kept complaining to the General in charge of the area that I had not had any leave since I have been here. That was a year and a half. He said, then, why not go to Paris. I said, fine. Ha! Ha! So I said I commanded a battalion with me and one other enlisted man. And all I do is send him one report every morning. Some courier came to pick it up every morning. You can do that in Paris you know. When I got there the commanding general in Paris told me I better come to the morning meeting of the commanding officers. I was a warrant officer and everyone else is a lieutenant colonel, they will all laugh at me. But, I said, but I am commanding. What happened was that my complaint was getting cold so the good old General, he liked me because I was the only fool there that didn't have a silver leaf (lieutenant colonel insignia of rank) on him or eagle (colonel insignia). He said, how about the Rivera? Oh! We are going to carp. He said, "Yes". You can do the same thing there. I never saw this man and it was in a unit somewhere in Paris, and me. The courier came by and one day he came by and said, mister, they called me, the rations are due today do you want to get some. What rations? You get scotch from the British, whiskey, rye and bourbon from the Americans and French, even the Hawaiians. So I made friends with two Mormons who didn't drink or smoke and had all their cigarettes and all their whiskies after about six rations. One day I was sitting out and having my dinner on the Rivera outdoors of this fashionable hotel on the street level and ran into an old buddy of mine that was in training with me in the 40's, 42' in North Carolina. He had been with the 92nd Infantry and he came down to have a little recreation so we sat there and drinking wine and ordering dinner. We saw these five or six black Air Force Officers coming down. I knew about them but I had never seen them. I said, hey buddy come on, come on. They said "you're Air Force," and I said no, we're infantry. They came over and joined us and had drinks and about a half an hour later here comes some drunken white Air Force Officers and they stopped. I said we are going to have to fight. I am sure they want to start a fight. We were ready for them. The oldest one said and the guy with the wig said, what kind of planes you fly? P-51s. "Damn it", so do I come on and drink. It was a lovely evening. Ha! Ha!

Q: Was that the 99th (Tuskegee fighter squadron)?

TWITTY: I think it was called 332nd group by that time.

Q: The Tuskegee Airmen?

TWITTY: Yes. I had a couple of friends who were in that. One flopped out and became a navigator, but two or three guys from Jersey, that I knew; in fact they were at General Davis's (Benjamin O. Davis, Jr., the squadron commander) funeral. We are all in our eighties now. We use to belong to the same social clubs in Westchester and Jersey because we lived nearby each other.

Before I got home, I use to write my mother every week and she said, people came home from the war and got married and divorced and you are still over there. What is going on? Well! I am serving my country, lying on the beach every day. So finally, they decided I couldn't go home because, number one, I was an officer and number two, I had to do my duty and send these poor clowns to other places. So back to Paris I went for a couple of months. Finally, my number came up and I went to Belgium and sailed for home.

We went to Jersey somewhere to get deloused.

Q: Before you left as a Field Artillery Unit, do you remember which infantry units you were providing support to? Were they black units or were they white units?

TWITTY: They were Patton's Army. He had so many armies. Midway between and after we left the French Marseille and came north to Rhone (river) and shooting up to the German border we were summoned in the field, one day, all 484 people in that little battalion. There was Patton with his three stars, pistol on each hip and hat. He insisted that we put our hats on our heads. I refused. I said, "They would shoot you right in the damned head, they know who the officers are. So we didn't do it. It was a good thing he was killed he was a natural Fascist. He loved war, he loved it. He told us once in that famous speech on the battlefield, "I don't give a damn what your color is, just kill those bastards in the green suits (the Germans)." Then, running around slapping soldiers faces because they panicked. He had no trouble out of us. We were the good fighters. The German prisoner that I interviewed one time said, "You black Americans have automatic artillery, they did not know about the "T-O-T's" coming from 155's, 240s and the 105's they were all arriving about the same time as killing them, you know. It was a part of the ingenuity. So, I saw the other day on television, somebody was putting one of those in the nose cone of some bombs, they used them in the Air Force evidently.

Q: OK, Mr. Twitty, I would like for you to tell me a little bit more about your impressions of General Patton? You mentioned about him talking to the troops and saying that his only interest was to kill as many Germans as possible. How did he treat the black soldiers?

TWITTY: Well, we had virtually no contact with him after that field meeting which he was introduced to us as joining his Army. I never even saw him again. Everyone had the same complaint about him he kept moving so fast, that we kept running out of fuel. Though we were way ahead of the infantry with those tanks and tank destroyers we just stopped for a day until the gasoline caught up with us. But he was pushing, pushing, pushing. He did a good job. We never really had any problem with him, really. In fact, I

never even saw him, not even once after that. That was way in the beginning of our adventures in Germany. So no big problem.

Q: And as far as the units that you were supporting were concerned, how did they react knowing that they were being supported by a black field artillery unit?

TWITTY: Well, they never knew it until one day we met in some little town just over the German border and they saw us and they said you are the 686th Field Artillery? I said, yes! All black! Ha! Ha! Oh! We are quite delighted. Because we were in the middle of the 240's in the back, three in the middle and 105's up front. We had no problems, no problems at all.

Q: That is very interesting, because I asked the question because I know the record of the Tuskegee Airman who were flying the fighter support and they never lost a bomber. It is interesting to get the other perspective of support on the ground, how they reacted.

TWITTY: We had very little trouble. In fact, we were sort of, by ourselves. Everybody running in the same direction but everybody kept their distance because the 240's had to be way in the back. Shooting over our heads and we are shooting over the heads of the 105's and we are all Army at the same time. The German's called it the automatic artillery. Must have been a tremendous situation. I remember having my only experience with déjà vu in that situation. We were blasting our way into Germany and we had a couple days break and I knew that night we were going to be in a town. And as we turn the corner, there was going to be a bar and (in) the back of the bar there was a little apartment. I had never been there in my life before or since and that is exactly how it turned out to be. I knew where we were going and I knew before we opened the door what was going to be there. That is strange you know. I never believed in that before but I believe it now. It can happen.

Q: How did the citizenry react towards your presence there?

TWITTY: The Germans, oh there was lots of integration once we started fighting. I use to lean out the window and scream at the white officers trying to get those German girls who were more attracted to the black guys. I said, leave them alone. You have no right over them. I had a wonderful white friend who was a doctor, Italian from Rhode Island and he joined us in Texas when we went down to get these troops from Oklahoma to get ready to go overseas. We had a colonel from Mississippi who was always complaining about his bad knee when he played football for Ole' Miss. So I said to Neria, Waldo Neria, Captain Neria, you know you have the power to put him out of the Army don't you. Yes! Well let's do that. Because, he does not like black people and he is afraid. Because he knows we will shoot him in the butt when we get overseas and he'll never know what hit him. So, one morning he comes up and says, I will have to leave you chaps, with this bad knee I can't go overseas. Signed the papers, and got him out of there. We got a nice guy from somewhere Upstate New York who was a high school superintendent. Had no problems. In fact, when the war was raging and it was over, I took a trip to Nuremberg one day and surprised to see my high school principal's name.

He was the commanding officer. So I went to his office and knocked on the door and this 2nd Lieutenant said you can't see him. I said, you tell him that John Twitty is here. He will know who I am. I was a high school student. He came rushing out and grabbed me and "come on in John, it is nothing but C rations, but you are welcomed to it. No, I have already had something to eat." The 2nd Lieutenant was quite amazed you know. These things happen sometimes.

When I was in England, I ran into some friends of my mothers. Old time vaudevillians, who had been in England before the war and made their money and stayed there and became citizens. I went to see one of the old ladies one day and she said, oh, I remember Mary Thornton, that was my mother's maiden name. Yes, she is still alive. Being very British you know and her kid had married a British guy. They are everywhere.

Q: So, you basically enjoyed your military service?

TWITTY: Yes, it was quite exciting. I was 22 and didn't know what was going on in the world, but learned very quickly. I was angry because I knew what the segregation situation was in the service. In the Air Force, I had a friend who looked like he was white and he was going with a sister of a girlfriend of mine in Tarrytown and since there was no black Air Force he joined the white Air Force. But he was stupid enough to write letters to some girlfriend that was going to a black college in the south and the Air Force found out about it. They bumped him out and by that time Tuskegee had started. They put him in Tuskegee he went through the whole thing again and got killed on the first flight in Italy. Doubly trained. Frankie something, I forget his name. But we use to have a great time deceiving the white girls in our high school and they did not know that he was black.

Q: What do you think you got out of the military as far as preparing you for your future careers? You were a warrant officer; you were in charge of the administration of the battalion. So did any of that, you think, have a major influence as to your later development?

TWITTY: Yes, I was fascinated. I never knew what they were telling black people. And they got to a lot of them good and bad. Traveled in the south after the war and saw some of them again. I was amazed at how the variations you find in the race. I use to go to St. Louis to see some old buddies, they had friends come in with New York accents and I thought it was strange but I guess it was different from there's. Mississippi, there is a girl here, a nurses aid, the worst speaking Africans say, from Liberians that was founded by American blacks, I don't know what they are talking about. They have some kind of lisp in their Amish. There is a Liberian girl here who has been here sixteen years from a different tribe and she says she does not know what they are saying either. I tried and Barney Coleman will tell you he was in Liberia for years. He cannot understand them. But the racial situation in America was an eye opener. I never knew there were that many talented blacks outside of the bible circle. I think four or five buddies, three or four of us went to college and we never saw each other very much again. They are all dead now. It was an eye opener. I enjoyed Europe when I was in the Foreign Service. I use to get to Paris, London or Rome every time I had some leave. Because I never wanted to serve in

those countries because it was too expensive. You live in Africa or the West Indies or Asia; you get a nice house rent free.

Q: Tell me when you got ready to leave the service did you go directly into school or did you become a journalist?

TWITTY: When I came home they tried to get me to join the reserves and I was smart enough not to do it. Because, I would have been in Korea by the end of the year. So what I did, I went down to the Veterans Administration one day to pay my own insurance and the guy said, you were an officer in the Army and I said yes. Don't you want a job? Not really, I just got out six months ago. Come on, we need you. So I joined the Veterans Administration for a year and a half and learned about the GI Bill. One day I had no intention of quitting I went to 17th Street, I think that is 23rd Street in New York. I put my hand on the doorknob and I said, today is the day. I am going upstairs and sign all the papers and got out of there and went to register and was in school the next week. I wanted to join the summer session and turn my four years into three.

Q: What year was that?

TWITTY: 1948. Because I worked for almost two years and then one year I didn't work at all and then I joined the Veterans Administration. Made a big \$5,000 a year. That was a lot of money in those days. I had a few bucks put away from the Army and my mother graciously let me live in her house for nothing and fed me. All we got was, I think was \$75 if you are single and \$90 if you were married. So I survived. Wore Army clothes until they wore out. I never wore another brown suit again in my life. They looked like kaki. I finished in 1951. I had two offers, Ebony and Amsterdam News in New York.

Q: Where was this back to your university days? Which university did you go?

TWITTY: New York University.

Q: And you majored in?

TWITTY: Majored in journalism and minored in advertising.

Q: And your experience while you, you didn't live on the campus per se?

TWITTY: No. We commuted. It was about 25 miles.

Q: Tell me a little bit about your experiences at the university?

TWITTY: It was quite amazing. NYU was not as big as it is now. You had mostly New Yorkers and Bronx and Manhattan a few from Harlem and Brooklyn. And a few people from places like Ohio which was like a foreign country to us. You meet Ohio boys and girls at NYU and they didn't know which end was up half the time. But there was two of us in journalism class together. A guy named Richard Gines and what happened to him I

don't know. He was stupid enough to join the reserves and he was in the Air Force and when Korea came up he disappeared and I never heard from him again. I don't know if he got killed or didn't go or what. I graduated and I was the only one in my race in my class. A lot of the guys.

Q: You were the only black in your class?

TWITTY: Yes in journalism. There were eight thousand people graduating that year, you know that was huge. It was the last three or four years of the GI Bill and everybody was rushing in. You never met anybody under twenty years old or under eighteen. But some of the girls, there were a lot of young girls in the last year, I guess in 1950. They didn't like it very much because most of the guys were married or getting divorced and killed people in real combat. We had some really good journalism students. We had something to say. You talk about your uncle's apple orchard or something if you had nothing else to say. Richard Nixon said one day on television to an English man, "Did you fornicate over the weekend?" Can you imagine him saying something like that? What is his name? He became a knight recently, a British guy. He said that in the paper the other day.

My professor for short story writing use to tell us some raucous stories and the girls didn't think it was nice. He used to write four-letter words on the blackboard. When somebody would mention them he would say, what is the difference between sex and words. When he wrote about a truck driver whose kidneys are killing him, he said, God damn my kidneys. He didn't say, "Darn". They didn't like that but they had to bear it because we liked it. It was a good experience. I belonged to the alumni association up until 1979 or so, the year I finished and got out of the Foreign Service and then I began to stop going. Something happened. NYU became so large we never had a journalism department, a big department. It was tucked into the commerce department somehow. Somebody founded it. So when we graduated we had a degree that said the School of Commerce, Bachelor of Science and Journalism. I went to the reunion and they were all bookkeepers. Ha! Ha! I don't know what happen to the journalists. I wrote to complain once you should go to the records and put us in the arts and sciences where we belong but there wasn't any arts and sciences in those days. They were not together. It was amazing foolishness you know. I still get the newsletter once in awhile. I was sitting in Africa one day and I was wearing my NYU ring and some guy from the State Department came over and he said are you an NYU graduate. I said, yes. About a month later I was getting letters from the alumni association. He put my name in. I didn't want to be bothered. You don't have anything to say when you haven't been around in a long time.

Q: Did you find that your academic experiences as far as your preparation was concerned had it suffered at all by this interval between graduating from high school and then the war that was in between? Did you find that you were probably better prepared?

TWITTY: I think I was better prepared. My mother use to complain that every last one of us were readers and she would be cooking breakfast on Sunday morning and I would be in the New York Times and my sister would be in the Daily News, my father would be

reading the Journal. She would say get your hands out of those papers they are not going to be reading the Post everyday. And the New York Times whenever I could get a hold of one. You have got to know what is going on in the world. It is said that people don't understand this business of the Middle East and all of these little Arab countries. I was very upset the other day to see that the University of North Carolina bowed to some idiot on TV because they wanted him to read the Koran. Sure he should read the Koran, not going to make Islam Moslems. I bought one on my own from USIA when I was going to Africa because I knew a lot of the Africans were Moslems. I saw nothing in it; in fact, the radical Moslems have never read it. Women are very respected in the Koran. So is Jesus Christ. He was a disciple and he was not the true redeemer but he was one of the good ones. Joseph, the Jews and the Arabs and the Christians all believe in the same basic thing.

Q: So you attribute that whole interval, the experiences that you had, had made you, you were a more mature person also, so you were very prepared for excelling in your studies? When you graduated what was the job market look like?

TWITTY: I had two job offers before I finished my senior year. Evidently, the late Dr. Powell, no relation to Adam Clayton (Powell), and a West Indian guy from Guyana and he use to scrunch to see if there were any black graduates at NYU. They thought I was one and Ebony was doing the same thing. And so I chose Ebony first and I didn't like it because they had a white senior editor, whose only job was to screw black girls who had their pictures in Jet. You know Jet use to have those centerfolds. You don't see them as much anymore. He thought he was blacker than me. I didn't appreciate white guys doing that kind of talk. So I told Johnson (Johnson Publishing Company), I said, I am not going to sit here and take this foolishness. "Oh! He is alright". I said he is not alright with me. You own the joint, I am going. So, Ebony called me up.

Q: Johnson himself?

TWITTY: Yes. It was about six months. Powell called me up; they must have heard I was leaving. Would you move? Not for the same money. It is no point in me leaving Chicago for same money I am getting here. So he raised me a few bucks and I came home. I was glad to because my mother was dying at the time and I didn't want to leave her at the mercy of a couple of my brothers who didn't pay much attention to her. So, I stayed. I went back to Ebony a second time. I almost forgot that when things got bad out there for him and Johnson called me on the phone and said go downstairs call me on a pay phone. He though they were tapping him. So we talked and talked and talked. I said, well I will come back when the other, I am not going to go for. He said, I got rid of that guy, you were right. Then I got a little tired after a year and a half of that. That was in 1961 I guess. You get tired of writing, I was not brought up in a segregated society and every time you wrote, Jim Dandridge was the first black so and so that became the first, I wanted to get rid of that. One time I wrote a short story, news item about Maggie. You went to Howard didn't you? My cousin taught there for forty years. My mothers first cousin my second, Burr. Anyway Maggie, what's her name, she was a crazy lady. She was a professor at Howard and so was her husband. She tried to commit suicide. And I

wrote the story that she jumped out the window trying to commit suicide. Johnson changed the story, saying she fell because that was a friend of his. I said you can't make the news to fit. He didn't like that. I am not here to write what you think. I am writing what I know. I am from the east you are not. There was some kind of carryings on there sometimes. A lot of those guys stayed, there was a guy in New York in the Washington office, he must be eighty years old. He is still working for Johnson.

Q: So your experience with Ebony - what did you gain from that experience?

TWITTY: A little later I had determined that I am never going to work for a magazine or newspaper that is all black. And that is all they think about you know. That was weird; you know to say that in front of so called militants, although I did go back to the Ebony news for a little while because I did have to have a job. But as soon as Jim Pope put my name in on this thing I jumped at the chance.

Q: Before we talk about your transition you had experience with the Amsterdam News. You were a reporter with the Amsterdam News and later an editor; tell me a little about your experience there? How did you compare that experience with your experience as a writer, editor with Ebony?

TWITTY: Much better. I wasn't there a year before the lady who was the city editor, which was the top editor, decided that she was going to quit and she recommended that I take the job. I told her no, I was not senior here. "But you are the one with a degree in journalism like me." So I agreed, and I enjoyed it because I could shape the newspaper. I could do what I wanted to do. And I got some good guys I met that I knew who were journalism graduates from other schools that had written for newspapers. So, I use to sit up there and would pass out the assignments or I had a guy named Jimmy somebody, I forget his last name, who I never had to give an assignment to because he knew all the politicians. He always came up with a good story.

I had been at parties with Governor Harriman when he was Governor of the State of New York and the only black guy who was on Life Magazine who was a big politician, his name was Brown. I forgot his first name. We use to meet at the bar at Harlem called "Red Rooster". You ever go to the Red Rooster? That was where everybody met. You could find me there with Adam Clayton Powell every Thursday night. And in the winter they would have chitterlings and champagne. Those were great times. That was a good time in my life, in general, because I didn't have to take assignments from some idiot who didn't know what they were talking about. I remember I got a hold of Mrs. Roosevelt or she got a hold of me somehow, and she wrote a weekly column called "My Day".

Q: This is Eleanor Roosevelt, President Roosevelt's wife?

TWITTY: Eleanor, yes. She was living in Greenwich Village and I met her a few times when she came to the university parties. She had lived on the other end of the square. Sometimes when you get busy I told the people in the print shop not to print it, put it in type and hold it. And put in red, HFR (Hold for Release), don't use it! Well they know

my reason, because some advertiser dropped out. They ran it.

I got a call from Mrs. Roosevelt, she said, "Mr. Twitty." I said, yes, Mrs. Roosevelt. She said, "You ran my speech and I haven't even made it yet but I am going to tell you I will not change it." She was very gracious, very gracious. I said, thank you. I felt like an idiot. I told the publisher that one day. You see, they think I am stupid but I know what I am doing. I said I didn't really have a lot of space. When your people lose ads, go find another one, don't use my space. That was a fight in the newspaper business against the advertising people and the editorial people. People don't buy the paper to read ads they read papers to read the stories and if they like it, they will put an ad in it. Fighting, all the time. And more drunks than I have ever seen in my entire life at the newspaper.

Especially advertising people. That is all they do is drink. Especially the guys who had the advertising for whiskey. They had a little party every night in some bar and gave prizes out. A friend of mine said. I said, if Jesus got back tomorrow morning my mother wouldn't get in there, I mean that. That is more important than we do the news, that's no news that is puffery. You are making money at it. You can make money elsewhere, not with me. He wanted space for his whiskey clients.

Q: It is interesting that you had this relationship with Mrs. Roosevelt. You had just met her casually there?

TWITTY: Yes, casually at the school. And then one time she invited me over to her apartment for tea when she found out I was really in a place not far from her and everybody. It was after the news. She said, "Why don't you come by for tea?" In that funny voice. She was a great lady. Did you see that film? No you didn't, the Red Coats, the Black Flask. You see, she went down there and insisted on arriving at the place. She wanted to see how good they are. I am surprised that they had that in the movie because I knew that story.

Q: Well tell me - we will change the tape here and then what we will do is go to your meeting with Jim Polk.

This is tape 2, side A. The date is August 28 and my name is James Dandridge. What we would like to do now is talk about your first interest in the Foreign Service and how you came to make that transition.

TWITTY: Now let me see. Now that brings up my good old buddy Jim Pope. It seems to me that in the fall, I don't remember what year this was, let me see, 60 or 61. The United Nations had a big to-do in New York, no in Washington, rather. I think that it was welcoming all of the new African countries that had become independent. And Jim Pope and Jackie Robinson and myself and a few other blacks were there. And a few weeks after that I got a call from Jim Pope who reminded me who he was and I had just met him. He said that Kennedy looks around in the Foreign Service and said that "you don't see many black faces. And I said that he didn't look very hard but I think that somebody got a hold of his press secretary, you remember, what was his name?"

Q: He was a black guy?

TWITTY: Yea, he shipped him to this and so Jim was scrounging around and getting everybody that wanted...and I said "sure I'll come," so he said that you'll get a letter in a few weeks and a ticket to come to Washington for an interview. So I guess it was around November or December, it was quite cold and I went down, and I remember that they sent me a ticket and I up-ed it to a more luxurious seat because I didn't want to ride a sitting up train. I didn't want to ride one of those long times...because you know it was a five-hour trip in those days from New York to Washington. And I met with the USIA committee and we talked, told them that what I was doing. And I went back home, and Christmas came and went...

Q: Now when you say that you met with the USIA committee, what kind of committee was that?

TWITTY: Interview, about joining the Foreign Service. I had never heard about USIA before.

Q: This was not the Foreign Service exam.

TWITTY: That's right; this was to see if I was interested. And then around January, it seems to me, I was called in to take the Foreign Service exam. And I found it very interesting. You know it was tough but I made out through it all right. And I got a note saying that I passed but I would have to go to the nearest military installation for the physical. And I was right in Governors Island in New York and if I passed that I would come down and be sworn in. I passed it and I went to Washington about a month and a half later. And I met quite a few white guys and couple of black guys, who said we've been waiting six months for this call and you're doing it in two. And I said that I don't know why but I didn't waste any time and Easter week, I remember I couldn't find a hotel room. Well I had a cousin was a sister of a guy at Howard University and she had a room because her daughter had just gotten married. She said that you can come and sleep on a couch if you want and I said, yea, I've got to get some place to sleep until I can find a room. I was in.

Q: That's a most unusual experience. Where did you take the exam, was it the State Department that administered the exam or did USIA administer it?

TWITTY: That's funny, I can't remember. You know, I think that I took it in New York.

Q: You took it in New York.

TWITTY: Yea, because they weren't sending for you to take the exam. They just wanted to see if you were the type that they wanted, I guess. Yea, I took it in New York. I remember it was way downtown in a God forsaken area, the Customs House or something.

Q: But it was a written exam?

TWITTY: Written exam, and then I did the oral in Washington. I remember when I was approved by the oral exam; there was a guy about six-foot-four named Bill Miller. He's dead now. Bill said "Are you a journalist?" And I said yea, and he said, "I thought so, you put sentences together better than most people." And in fact I saw him again in Vietnam. He was over there with me.

Q: Now, where did you do the orals, do you remember?

TWITTY: I did the orals in the USIA building on 17th, at 1776 Pennsylvania Avenue.

Q: So you went back and you took the orals and...

TWITTY: And they told me to come on in and I came down and, as I said, it was an Easter weekend. I'll never forget it. And then it occurred to me that people came to Washington for sight-seeing Easter but, God it was jammed, jammed. And I was lucky enough to find a guy named Bill Wilson, I forgot his last name, he's dead now, too. And a guy who was light-skinned and was in the same class I was in, in Washington. I didn't know that he was black and I told him about the room problem and he said "you're not speaking with the brother?" And I said that I didn't know that you were black. He had a French wife and he went to Howard and also to the University in Paris. He spoke beautiful French but drank a lot and smoked pot and all that foolishness. They put him out of the Foreign Service very gently. He had a French wife that he used to beat up in the streets in the Congo, but he was up in ... you ever read that black ambassador, I think that he's at Colombia University, he speaks so, a weird little language of West Coast Africa, I think Gabon, no not Gabon, I forgot the name of the place. I met him when he was at Liberia and he came down and he talked with me. And he said, this guy, this light-skinned guy was very nice, beautiful artist, he was a cultural officer, but he's like some people you meet, they come to town and in two weeks time they know everybody. And the deputy ambassador's white wife, who was white, told him one day, "You're having people at your house who are not at your level. And he told her, if you were doing your thing, they would be at your house. Ha, Ha, Ha. So I think that he went to the Congo after that and they let him go. So I understand that he went to Martha's Vineyard somewhere and he had a little boutique and died overdosing. A wonderful guy, just a waste of human intelligence.

Q: Well now, when you came in, you passed the orals and came in, how many other black Foreign Service officers were there?

TWITTY: About nine and I was probably the third highest paid at my level of a five.

Q: You came in as a Class-Five?

TWITTY: Yes.

Q: Because of your professional experience.

TWITTY: Yes. People don't understand that that's the low-ranking, our numbers are inversed, if you are a one, you're at the top. I think that there was a guy named Wilson and this guy that I told you who had just died, ah, there were only three in my class at the time, I think, I can't think what this guy's name was. John, what's his name, was in Japan at the time.

Q: John Reinhardt.

TWITTY: Yes, John Reinhardt.

Q: So John was one of the nine, can you recall any of the others who went on to make it...well, Todman, of course he was State, but Todman was in and, can you recall any of the others of that nine?

TWITTY: Well, let's see, when I got to Nigeria, which was my first post, I had a wonderful opportunity when they asked me where I wanted to go. So I said I wanted to go to Africa. Well they said that you can have it all, all English speaking Africa. I did a program in cooperation with NASA on this space business. We hadn't even gotten a rocket off the ground but I did everything from the Gambia all of the way down to South Africa where they wouldn't let me in, over to places like Malaya, Zambia and all the way back up to Ethiopia. It took two years to do that, 62 to 64. And that's when I began to run into black officers like Bill Jones, who was in Nairobi when I first met him. And then I met him again in Ethiopia and a guy named John Thompson. In Nigeria when I came back to be the chief Information Officer, we had Elsie Alston, you ever meet her? She's 97 years old, marvelous lady. She looks like Mrs. Nehru, a beautiful woman with white hair. Still got her buttons too. What's her name would know where to find her, Mary Dougherty. They made her the Cultural Affairs Women's officer for all of Africa. She really ran that job very well. Anyway, there was Elsie, Barney Coleman, myself, John Thompson...there were four black officers in a six-officer post and Nigeria was number-one in Africa at that time. We never had a black PAO until John Reinhardt and then he became ambassador to Nigeria. I wasn't there when that happened. But it was pretty well under staffed but Barney Coleman is a pretty good officer because he knows everybody which a lot of people in the Foreign Service didn't appreciate, because he knew who these people were. And I used to tell them in Washington that I didn't appreciate the way they wanted to handle things. They wanted you to sneak around and find out what they did for a living and what their politics was. You were supposed to write it on a card and you're supposed to ask the locals...and I said, no, no, no, that sounds like CIA foolishness to me and it didn't work out and they dropped it after a while. I said that I think we get to know people when you get to know them socially. You'll find out what they like and what they dislike and what their politics are. If we had done that in Nigeria we probably would not have had the terrible upsetting experience of the civil war. Terrible.

Q: So, you lectured throughout Africa.

TWITTY: Yes, every college and secondary high school that I could find. I never knew that Sierra Leone had one of the oldest universities in Africa. It was over a hundred years old when I went there. For a Bay, it's called, sitting way up on the mountainside. And the University of Nigeria which the US helped build up. We had two universities, when I left we had five, one in each of the regions, except two in the coastal regions. The University of Uganda was part of the tripartite thing in Uganda, Tanzania, and Kenya. It's called East African Universities. Went to pieces during the foolishness of the wars and crookedness, the university in Uganda was working on some of the most interesting scientific problems of women and abortions and what not, long before it became popular. They had a lot of good scholars, they had an Indians and black Americans and white Americans and some good local people who had gone there. I was in Nigeria when the revolution started but I was leaving for Vietnam, a worst situation when they murdered the prime minister who was a Muslim, the General of the Army, who was a nice guy. His name was Ironsi, we called him Ironsides and the head of the parliament, they all got shot to death. Just a shame. The Nigerians are marvelous people and when the war was over and the country was shattered, they made up and went on back to work. But now the thieves are in there and the politicians own all that oil. I know a woman here who is American, I met her just yesterday. I said you're a Nigerian and she said my husband was but we're no longer together, Ha, Ha, she had one of those long names that I recognized as a Nigerian. People all over the place are starving to death and oil is up to their necks. But they are not getting any of it. And we're going to buy more oil from them because of the situation in the Middle East.

Q: So, how long did you spend in Africa all together?

TWITTY: Almost nine years, eight plus something. Because I was two years on the trail doing a lecture and came back and they made me the chief Information Officer in Nigeria and I stayed another year and I was supposed to do three as ...and I agreed to do it if they gave me some time off, I hadn't been home in three years. But, by the time that I got ready to go home they needed me very badly in Vietnam and I refused to go until I got leave. I said I'm going home and you can find me at home and when you got the ticket, I'll go. Its Christmas again and I said I haven't seen my family in three years and I'm going home. So they didn't say nothing and I went home.

Q: Do you remember who the ambassador was when you were there?

TWITTY: Oh yea, a guy, and Irish guy, Barney knew him well Theloney or Maloney or something like that, very nice guy.

Q: Barney had been there before?

TWITTY: No, Barney had been there before me, I met him there. Barney was at a teaching school in Liberia for years before that. Too bad you didn't meet his wife, she died of cancer on my birthday, we were both 70 years old when she died. I was down

visiting my sister in the Virgin Islands when she passed away. I didn't realize that she had cancer, she never told anybody. She was a very attractive chic woman. Yes, almost nine, eight and a half years in Africa and then I went to Vietnam for a year and a half.

Q: Now, how did that come about, now, did they offer that as a career enhancing assignment?

TWITTY: This was President Johnson's foolishness, you know he had flown out to Hawaii because he knew he was losing the war, but he wasn't telling nobody. And he was having this big conference and promising to send a half million soldiers. So he did, emptied out Africa practically and for the USIA part of it which was then called CORDS, PODS, and JUSPAO and everything else. I lived in a village; I was the last man out, way down in the last part of the Delta. And I forget the name of the town because it had two names. And I had two posts; I was the only black man in the field that had two posts. I said they must think that I'm powerful. And we used to have these black bags that you could pass out money to our friends, you try to train them, you know. Somebody said that you should have a white bag, you know. I thought that wasn't very funny but, Ha, Ha, but I survived it. Some wonderful people lived down in there, some of those Vietnamese didn't deserve that/

Q: Barry Zorthian was in Vietnam then.

TWITTY: Oh yes, I used to see him there quite often at the press club when I went there. And you had television then when Barry started to defend the military, you know, we called it the five o'clock follies. Ha, Ha, Ha. I used to say, Barry you're lying in your teeth. I used to send reports, CIA reports, and they killed 15 people and, by the time my reports got Saigon, it was 30. Body counts were just ridiculous! I never saw 30 dead people in my whole life in a year and a half in Vietnam. I'm sure there was more than that but, I didn't do it. There was nobody that knew what we were doing. We had JUSPAO and something else in between and, CORDS and CORDS-POD. You know, you had three kinds of files in my folder, files and I didn't know what I was doing from one day to the next.

Q: So, you spent how long in the Delta?

TWITTY: About a year and a half, I refused to move. The Viet Cong knew me and I knew them. They tried to send me notes. Why is the black man fighting the white man's war for? We used to (inaudible). I went to the regional headquarters, a town that I can't remember, and a guy named Bob, a white fellow that was head of the post and so I had to go up there to a meeting one time. And we were sitting in the park when we had to have a smoke and he said, "You see that old man over there, an old Chinese-looking man with the big straw hat?" He says, "He knows me, he reports every time I move and I hear it from Radio Hanoi. I understand Vietnamese too," he said, and "as soon as you got here," he said "Now a black man has joined in with the white Americans." Oh yea, they knew I was there. And I also knew, we saw a rumor, you probably knew in Vietnam, it was always a rumor that some black soldier was captured and they had him in a cage walking

around the (inaudible) (off camera – *no, I was in Can Tho*) Bac Lieu was the name of the place, which had another name before I came.

Q: So, in your experiences in Vietnam, after that where did you go?

TWITTY: They said, now that you have been to some terrible places, Nigeria's revolutions and Vietnam, we're going to send you to a nice quiet country, Uganda. Ha. It was alright the first tour and too (inaudible) the second tour, that's when it happened. That's when they started killing each other. Idi Amin and the secretary of state, I've forgot his name, told me when he came up, he says, "Twitty, he is the most ignorant man I ever met to be head of a country." He had a third-grade education. He made himself a colonel and then he made himself a field marshal. I used to swim with him in the hotel pool. (He would say) "I tell you, you Americans are no good." And I said "You're no good either colonel." Ha, Ha, Wonder, he didn't kill me. There was a rumor that he kept a human head in his refrigerator, freezer. I wouldn't doubt it.

Q: What kind of a man did you find him to be, did you find him to be a serious person or was he demented?

TWITTY: He was ignorant. He didn't know nothing. The Muslim population in Uganda was less than five percent. It was about 45 percent Anglican and there would be 30 percent Catholic and the rest, a few Methodists, Baptists. He had no right to be anything, but he... he bulldozed them. In fact, the man that kept him from being colonel, he got him murdered in his bathtub one night one afternoon, when the guy was taking a bath. He had him murdered and the wife. He just took over. Idi Amin. Yea, so I was given that post as a reward for my services in two bad posts.

Q: The day is September 6 and the interview is with Mr. John Twitty. My name is James Dandridge and we will continue from Uganda. While you were in Uganda were there any unique incidents, any events that took place that you had an opportunity to observe or have had an indelible experience with?

TWITTY: Well, I think one of the most sort of amusing incidents, I don't know if it deliberately happened, but we found ourselves with an all black American embassy except for the DCM. It was when Ferguson was our new ambassador. The other ambassador disappeared in mid-ocean on his way to England with his wife. He apparently jumped off the ship in mid-ocean. His wife said that when they booked the trip they didn't have room for two in the state rooms so they had separate state rooms. So when they set sail and she went to wake him up and he wasn't there. They rang the bell all night. Then the PAO, who was there earlier with me, I was on home leave when he got himself killed in an accident coming from Nairobi back to Uganda (where) he went to the Peace Corps wedding. So there was no PAO and no CAO. So they flew somebody in from the States. Actually, someone from the embassy. The budget wasn't done, nothing wasn't done.

After everything quieted down I had a lot of friends from East Africa and South Africa.

Makerere University was well known for its medical faculty and the other, (a) Zulu from South Africa and not too many friends. He knew some Americans that I knew and he had some special studies. And, he told me something is going to happen here and I said what are you talking about? At the university, Idi Amin who was a hurtle, could have caused the death of the man he was to succeed. And it was true that he had him murdered. And then he became the Head of State had made himself a Field Marshall. He had an Army and for several months he refused to accept the new American Ambassador. He stayed there and stayed there. One Sunday morning I was roused out of my bed by the head of AID who was black. He said that “I need you to come down and be a witness to his credential presentation, to Idi Amin. The distance is about 20 miles from Entebbe to Kampala, the old British capital that was the site of the Yacht Club. It was the second time in my life I was in a Rolls Royce. Ha! Ha! As opposed to having drinks and all that, the chef, who was a Muslim, was not supposed to drink, but he was enjoying life. He gave us a lecture of what was wrong with America. That didn’t go down too well. But, everybody kept their mouths shut, you know. We finally got him to stop talking and they kept the credentials and we got our bags and were gone.

Right after that there was a complication at the university at the very end, the very end they got to President Kenyatta, at what would be his last appearance before he died. Nobody invited him in but he showed up in the middle of it with his armored cars and Amin for protection. I was home, I had sprained my ankle but I saw it on television and my friend was there and said, I told you, see! We knew something was going to happen. About a week or two later the tanks rolled as I recalled the Secretary of State for Africa was visiting us. We had dinner with him Sunday night and after dinner we all went home about 10 o’clock. Somewhere in the night the tanks started to roll and I heard them and I looked out my window and they were going somewhere behind my house. Someone shouted out the police faction who were was responsible for the shoot-out. The next morning they were announcing the shooting downtown. I knew something was wrong because I dealt with them and the Army took over the studio and didn’t know how to use the tapes. So they played, “yes, we have no bananas”, about fifteen times. It was so funny. There was very little shooting that we saw and I understand that they were all taken to the famous prison and slaughtered.

The blood was running and into the second largest lake in the world, Lake Victoria. It was kind of sad because of all the people that we knew. A guy I knew in the embassy who was a good friend of mine, one night he came knocking on my door, saying could I hide him. Sure go upstairs we have a bedroom we don’t use. So we got on our little telephones and called. The next day the ambassador got him out in the trunk of his car. Ha! Ha!

Q: Who was that?

TWITTY: That was (a) James Bond story. Ferguson was a very good diplomat and I was shocked when I got home, I got a call saying he had died, he had had a heart attack. He was at Harvard by that time. He was a brilliant man. Things settled down after that. I picked up that Muslim business, less than ten percent of the people you get are Muslims.

Everybody was frightened and nothing happened. The University went to pieces from lack of money and everybody had a Mercedes. You could tell the rank by the size of the Mercedes. The Field Marshal had a Mercedes 600, the Union rep who had business with Uganda, and Tanzania and Kenya had the cars. The railway, the postal reps had money. You could say go to Chile, it was a rip; it was marvelous to travel like that, you travel light without passports or nothing. Well, that all went to pieces.

It was marvelous to travel to Uganda and (see) Kenyatta, a very sick man. He died shortly after that. Things got a little exciting after that, but I left which was about August of '65. When I came back I was assigned to Nigeria. Not Nigeria, I meant Jamaica. The only place in the world where I could not pay my bills on time. Because the mail never got to the States in time. There was Uganda and everyday paid my bills in London. They could not get a simple letter. They got it messed up and all the paychecks with it. It went to the bank and wrote out my own name, at the British Bank and I asked how much will you charge me for a simple mailing letter fifty thousand shillings to pay the staff. They said, "Charge you?" Yes, I said what was the interest. He said, why should I charge you? I said how will you make any money. So they got the money and paid them and the checks came to me and assigned them over to me and I paid them back. It was just ridiculous. But that is the way they do business, I guess. It wasn't my money but I was borrowing it to pay another obligation. I didn't have to. I know I lived from pay check to pay check sometime and they were even worst than me. It was sad to see that happen.

But, I was leaving there when the AIDS thing came up. Very suddenly, I noticed that two of my staff was getting thinner and thinner. They used to call it the "Slim Disease."

Q: So AIDS had already started to spread. What year are we talking about?

TWITTY: This was late 65, I guess it was. Because I went to work in Vietnam before I got there 66 and 67 and I saw some people who had what they called that my man had died and the librarian man had died. So sad and they had no idea what was causing it. The government wasn't doing anything about it. USAID tried too but I don't know. Now they are the most successful country in Africa that is eradicating AIDS. They have a lot of kids. I had a kid at my house for six months. He got married and had four children. He had two before he got married. At least he admitted it to me. I was given a nice haven Washington had sent me. The nice spot was Jamaica.

Q: Before we go to Jamaica, who was the Assistant Secretary for African Affairs when you were still in Uganda?

TWITTY: I knew him.

Q: It wasn't Cohen was it?

TWITTY: No he was out, but I knew him. But a tall, slim fellow.

Q: No, I asked because, I know that Barney Coleman had been Special Assistant to

Cohen and

TWITTY: Cohen was there in Africa, the African man after I left. But the guy who was there said he never saw a man so critical of anything. I used to refer to our meetings as a NAACP league. White (head of the NAACP) was the DCM. There was AID, Peace Corps, the ambassador and the deputy ambassador.

Q: The Ambassador was black, Ferguson?

TWITTY: Ferguson.

Q: Oh! Ferguson, yes. Yes.

TWITTY: He was recently widowed. He had two daughters, who give you heart attacks, when they get to be teenagers. Ha! Ha! But his sister came over and kept them.

Q: How did the Ugandan's react to him being a senior US official there in the Embassy in being one of the very few whites there? How did the Ugandan's react?

TWITTY: They were very warm to him. He had everyone to his house in two minutes, you know. It was one of the most interesting times we had in Uganda was when USIA sent over the...well known college choir? They started in Ghana and worked their way across Ghana and on to Ethiopia. And the Ghanaian ambassador in Uganda heard about this and since they had been in Ghana, he insisted that they come to his house for dinner and that was 45 guys. They came and sang for him and, our ambassador had a nice house and gave them a buffet lunch. They had a good time and enjoyed themselves. I had to remind them that they don't mention dictators because you don't know who is who here. We always had something to do. I couldn't think of the choir, but I think that it was Howard, no from Georgia, Morehouse (University)?

Q: Morehouse, yes!

TWITTY: That was an interesting time. I have a great nephew who is going there now. He's a junior. That was a great and interesting time.

Q: You were the Cultural Affairs Officer there, right? Did you have any problems making contacts in the community?

TWITTY: None whatsoever. I was aware that the country was partially Muslim and 30% African and the rest were 10% Muslim and whatever. This school kept asking me if I would come and present some African-American spirituals. I said yes. But it was a Muslim school, I didn't know and they didn't care. They invited me anyway. They invited me three more times. We had a couple of exchange programs that went on. There used to be meetings. There were not any problems as long as you stayed off the streets at night and never go where the troops hang out. We used to go out to the night club out on the countryside but we stopped going there after the coup because it was dangerous. It

depended on who you were talking to at the time. I knew all the old regime so I could really see them too much. They would tell you to keep away.

Q: Did you have any other experiences or contacts with Idi Amin himself while he was in?

TWITTY: I am sorry?

Q: Did you have any other contacts with Idi Amin yourself? Professional contacts or social contacts?

TWITTY: I use to go swimming at the hotel pool. It was called the Apollo. We used to use the swimming pool together. Two big whales swimming around, ha, ha!. The former royal ruler, the Kaba was dressed in a field marshal's uniform, it was the peasantry to come to see him. But my cook wanted to go. I said sure you can go. Sure go and pay your respects. She was at the kitchen door crying. They will not let me see my king, he could be dead. He was a peculiar guy he was up and down, up and down. But he lasted a long time, until they finally got him in Saudi Arabia.

Q: In Saudi Arabia playing basketball. Ha! Ha!

TWITTY: He escaped once. But they brought him back. He was cut off with all those wives.

Q: I find it interesting that 10% of the population was Muslim. How did that cross the tribal lines? Were there any conflicts between tribal lines and religious beliefs?

TWITTY: Oh, yes! The President of Uganda, I can't think of his name (Apollo Obote). But from a same area as Idi was. And Idi was really a Sudanese, right on that borderline. And most of the in-fighting with Idi was still going on and once in a while you will see a clash of people who believe in Idi Amin and those who were against him.

I went up there once to investigate a mess, even trying to help the embassy. The heir to the Coors Beer, son came to see me one day and I asked what are you doing here? I am a free lance reporter I didn't know that the "Post" had turned him down. He had no experience. He was just rich. I said if you don't get your butt out of here because you are going to get yourself killed. The day I was going to do was a two-day trip up the country, to lecture at a girl's school. He turned up missing and my driver and I stopped at a rather nice hotel/restaurant for lunch and the waiters told me that this white man was hustled out of there two hours earlier. It turned out that he went into the barracks. And I said that was ridiculous. The company's name doesn't matter but it wasn't until months and months later that they really were contacted by the family and lawyers. The Boy Scouts were doing a camping trip and they looked into a ravine and there was the car. It was definitely turned over, and the man was dead but he was not in the car. They found the body. The only reason why they knew it was the car (is) somebody forgot to take the serial number off, that it was a rented car. So that together with that, I told him when he came to see me

that this guy was going to be in trouble. He just doesn't try to walk in to a country and try to get what he wants. Nobody did that. The Washington Post people were not there and the people from Nairobi certainly were not there. He used to come to see me and I would tell him what was happening and you get it. Ha! Ha! I said that I am an old journalist too, you certainly don't do that. It's not the movies. The most confusing place and yet the most beautiful country against Nigerian but you have to admire is after they killed each other for years. They made up and went on about their business. I knew this guy who became the President or whatever they called him in Nigeria. You know what he said in a deposition when it was over. He said (he) spied on the nations that rule and took care of them. The winner of it all is beautiful and fantastic – he was a millionaire! A truck business in the Gulf. "I do actually begin with trucks," Ha, Ha. He went to Oxford too. He and I had a lot of talks together although he was only a major. He never became a general He just kept his title. He was a beneficent man - it was almost like the movies but they had that on the television, he was quoting Abraham Lincoln. He'd appreciate that.

Q: Now as far as your next assignment was concerned, at what point did you know that you were going to Jamaica? Had you requested that or was that offered to you?

TWITTY: I had so much leave coming, that I went home and had my leave. And it was almost a year later; it was the year that Nixon was getting into trouble that I left for Jamaica. And, it was '72. I guess it was. Yes it was a couple of years between Uganda and ... Vietnam, Uganda, and then Jamaica. And that was falling apart We woke up one morning to find that the supermarket were auctioned in Kingston by the one-percent Chinese Jamaican population in Jamaica. You couldn't buy a chicken, nothing. We were buying our food from Cuba at the US Naval Base there. Once a month we would go there to purchase chickens, canned goods, cooking oil. I used to bring a five-pound can of cooking oil for my landlady because there were nice Jamaicans who lived all their lives in New York and came home to retire and they couldn't find a thing. They couldn't buy a thing because there was nothing to buy. It was going down, down, down.

I was there three years.

Q: What year was this that you went to Jamaica?

TWITTY: It was '72. I was there for three years. It '75 when I came home and Richard Nixon he was on his way out, I know I remember that.

Q: Who was the Premiere then in Jamaica? Was it Michael Manley?

TWITTY: Yes.

Q: Did you know him?

TWITTY: Oh, yes.

Q: What did you think about him? What kind of person was he?

TWITTY: Oh no. He was a womanizer. He was a very charming guy. He could speak impeccable British English and then get right down to the local Patois. He was married three times. Once to an Afro-Jamaican, once to a Chinese-Jamaican and once to a white English lady. His mother was half white and his father was half white. He was three quarters white himself. He was a charming man but he was a shark. He could quote Jehovah and biblical quotations and didn't know how to run the country. Everybody...every street that you lived on in my neighborhood had one of those Sea land containers. One woman said to me do you want some space in my? I said that I am an American. But they were taking in their china and things for all to go to Canada. Yes, it went downhill. When I left there – USIA couldn't get up to the north for the tourist people who were sucking up Ocho Rios to the North, about an hour and a half away from the capital there.

Q: Kingston.

TWITTY: Kingston, yes. We had quite a time.

Q: Well now, what was your position when you went there? Were you going there again as a CAO?

TWITTY: Yes. I was the CAO. The other guy was kicked out of there. He didn't stay very long. He didn't like it there. I was ready to get out of there. It was time to go. Three years is enough. I didn't want anymore of this. You get tired. Then when I got home, I got the bad news. That everybody that was 60 and over had to go. You got the message.

Q: My name is James Dandridge. This is an oral history interview with Mr. John Twitty. Now that we are in Jamaica and I was going to ask you about your position there. We talked about your contact, incidentally before we do that, how did you get to know Michael Manley. Was he Prime Minister when you arrived?

TWITTY: I knew his father when I worked for the Amsterdam News and years before I interviewed his old man, Manley, Sr., who was quite a character. They always stayed at a big-time hotel in Manhattan when they came. I interviewed him successfully I asked if he had any children and he said no, but outside ones.

Q: Did you have an opportunity to have social contacts with the Prime Minister?

TWITTY: I was invited when the Queen came. I never bowed or nodded. Ha! Ha! They spent a lot of money on this. Oh God! Jamaica, they are known for it. They were very British in a way and in a way they were not. Most everyone in Jamaica has a cousin or a brother or sister in New York. So it is like a Little America. Everyone has been there before. You couldn't tell them nothing about America.

Q: How were the Jamaicans as far as the US policy was concerned? What were the

major issues that we were dealing with in Jamaica?

TWITTY: Our major issue with Jamaica was economics. The Jamaicans depended a great deal on sugar cane, cheapest thing in the world, everybody got some. When the price when up or went down, and what not, nobody would buy the stuff. They gave some of it up but nobody was buying it. They kept hanging on to the sugar. I knew this Chinese guy who invested in onions and made a million dollars. He snapped it up. It was good but it was being ruined by sugar cane. You could not buy a decent pair of shoes, you couldn't buy any food. Luckily they are all used to the market goods that they were used to and the market goods that they were used to exporting. They blamed us for not giving all the money they wanted.

The World Bank refused to help them out a couple of times. After awhile they let them have it but they changed. It was a small country with five or six million people. Everybody had a hard time and we didn't do any good down there. We had an ambassador who arrived on a yacht. He was the owner of real estate. He was a real slob, they got rid of him.

Q: What was his name?

TWITTY: I forget. When I got there he was leaving. He had everyone out of step. You would be piggy wiggly and I would be boogie woogie. This was a code name to you and me. And it was like that with no socks. When his dog got lost, he spent \$500 to find his dog.

Q: And he offered \$500 for?

TWITTY: When his dog got lost, yes. In a country where people would kill you for \$200.

Q: How did he do that? Did he advertise it?

TWITTY: He wanted to get on his boat and go home. The State Department would find it really embarrassing. That was one of Nixon's terrible mistakes. He contributed to the party, I guess.

Q: Was that when Harold Morton was PAO there?

TWITTY: Harold was there just before me, yes. I knew Harold Morton, but I keep forgetting from where I knew him from. But I kept following him. He was in the States. You say he is traveling now?

Q: Yes, yes. Who was the PAO when you were there?

TWITTY: I can't think of it, I am sorry.

Q: Well then, you and the ambassador that came in after this one, was he career while

you were there?

TWITTY: No!

Q: He was not career. He was also political.

TWITTY: He was a big Roman Catholic. He didn't know nothing about nothing. He once told me he was going to go home for July 4th. I said if you go, you won't have a job. Any ambassador got to be at his post; otherwise he doesn't have a job. You can't go home. Suddenly, he changed his plans. I told him to his face. Man, you are going to have to be more involved here. Didn't they tell you that in your orientations? We (Norman Manley) weren't speaking to each other. Jamaicans were very sensitive about invitations and he was invited to an important home where the father was born on July 4th. He did show up even though we were not speaking to one another, but then he did show up. He had his duty. He was very touchy.

Q: Were you a two-officer post, just a CAO and PAO? The PAO took over the IO functions also as a Press Officer. How were your relations with the rest of the Country Team?

TWITTY: Oh fine! I remember, I served in USIA but we had some great guys who came in '78. At the time it wasn't considered fit to deal with ordinary person. This is where it started. You started with the higher ups in the government. They did good jobs.

Q: Now as far as the Jamaicans were concerned, did you find it easy to make contacts as you did when you were in Uganda?

TWITTY: Oh yes. I am a New Yorker and we had great (interpersonal) sense. Do you know such and such? Yes, Yes. I made friends with the publisher - a conservative Jamaican newspaper. We used to have a cocktail party every Wednesday night. We had cheese and crackers and lots of whiskey. Ha! Ha! I was stoned sometimes driving my new car up and around the mountain. What time I got home, I don't know how I got there. I stopped that foolishness. Ha! Ha! I had not driven a car in years until I got to Jamaica. Why I decided to resume my career as a driver when you drive on the wrong side of the road. In fact, I had no driver's license, they thought I was weird. But this is an American and you don't drive a car? Everyone who lives in New York City is an idiot who owns a car. You can't do anything with it but drive out of town. It was good because I could get out each and every weekend and drive up the mountain side to Ocho Rios. Those were lovely resorts. Things got so bad during the downside of the economy there, that none of the resorts outside of Ocho Rios were very smart. (They) charged \$300 or \$400 a day. But (they) sent a letter to all the embassies in town saying, please come out and spend the weekend with us. We will try to keep the place open and keep the staff down to \$25 a day. So I latched on to that. I stayed at the Half Moon and stayed at some places you wouldn't even see advertised except in the high class magazines. I remember sitting out on my veranda and waiting for breakfast. I would call up on my phone and two very dark-skinned Jamaicans in white jackets, gold buttons and white gloves in an orange

and green wagon bringing me mangos and melons, hot rolls and coffee and then they would ask, "What do you want for breakfast?" Do you have any eggs? I wasn't thinking but literally, I was asked, how to you get to all those places. I'm clueless; I do not know who you are. This was the guy from Abe's Director somewhere. You got to know he was rich, you got to know.

Q: As the CAO you must have done a lot of program activities around the island, did the ambassador participate in any kinds of programs?

TWITTY: He didn't, except when his wife was interested in art. I used to do a lot of shows for aspiring artists. They couldn't sell them in my hall but they could make contacts and do it outside. He wasn't very interested in that. He was interested in the government. Ultimately, his focus was on the more dramatic. For instance there were incidences where people died in aircraft crashes coming in when they would run out of gas. And we blew this thing one night when the police radioed that a guy was coming in from somewhere in the Caribbean saying I am running out of gas can I land here. They wouldn't let him land in Kingston and he tried to make it to the north and he crashed. It did not kill him. When they found the plane they ripped it apart, all of his little packages of cocaine. He misjudged the distance. We knew he was in Jamaica and he knew he was right over Kingston but he knew you can't come into their airport late at night. They close the airports. They had about a half a dozen wrecks. That was the intelligence services and the Jamaicans had their hands full over that. Number one, somebody was bringing drugs in but no one knew who was getting it. But in the end it is amazing to look at the Chinese who always had money. You would go to a party and see three Rolls Royce parked outside. It was amazing, every one of them, because when I was in Jamaica I wanted to mention it earlier, I was a consular officer. Everything from the Bahamas all the way to Guyana in South America. My advice would be washing money would put you in prison over there. Once a month I would go off somewhere. Somewhere from Bahamas to Aruba way down all the way down to the Atlantic and Caribbean and Trinidad where I served in WW II. So I knew that place very well. In fact, I ran into a girlfriend from World War II, she wasn't married and neither was I at the time. I used to go to Guyana. All we could do was travel the exhibits because you couldn't put the load on the PAO. During my year tour that ended up terrible and that suicide, Jim somebody?

Q: Jim Jones.

TWITTY: Yes. Yes. A friend of mine who is retired in Albuquerque, New Mexico was a PAO down there and he was 200 miles from Jonestown. People who believed in drinking Kool-Aid. Kool-Aid stock must have fallen quite a bit during those days. Kids take money out of your pockets, sure. Children robbed and they never got beat. The ambassador always advised that we not travel on our own. He said when you have to go somewhere, you call me up and he sent me a guard. Otherwise the advice was to get a hotel and stay here. Terrible time!

Q: So most of your programs in the Islands had to do with exhibits and films? How about in Jamaica, did you do many; did you have many exchange programs?

TWITTY: Yes, before I got there we had an awful problem with students wanting to go to the States. Everybody wanted to go to the States. So it got to be so confusing that I said to my ambassador “The British have British Council“. Let’s meet once a month with them. Some of these people never finished the eighth grade and wanted to go to the university. There was anybody to tell them.

Q: How was that?

TWITTY: But it turned out no one wanted to go to Britain or Canada with all that in the States. I had a guy who wanted to go to an agricultural college somewhere and the only agriculture here was a “pick and shovel” that was the smartest move to move two acres. He could hardly speak English. There were some good people out there but there wasn’t much you could do about cultural exchange because a lot of people came there under the wrong assumption. It was a two-man post, the PAO and one Deputy. We always had a lot of people coming back and forth. Musicians, particularly. School of Music which the US gave money as needed for full time school for musicians. It was right across the street from my office. One of Dizzy Gillespie’s trombone players came down and taught music. Reggae was the rage in those days.

Q: Was Bob Marley playing?

TWITTY: Bob Marley, while he was making his millions, he played poor-mouth in Jamaica and a Rolls Royce and the biggest place in England at the same time. His father was Scottish and his mother was Jamaican. He was half-white. He was full of pot all the time. Had a big old fashioned house in Jamaica. He was(at) it around Christmas time. That is when his song came out, I shot the sheriff, but I did not shoot the deputy. They had very, very excellent ballet company and a good acting troop and a beautiful theater. They were very, very good at that and they all tried to make it to New York once a year if someone funded them. There was a whiskey company called Ray and Nephew. Oh! It’s a big whiskey company.

Q: Why don’t you go back, because I will have to edit that part. Go back to the beginning of that, please. When you were talking about Ray and Nephew.

TWITTY: There was always something going on. Ray and Nephew I thought was a name of a company but it wasn’t it was Ray and his nephew who owned this big whiskey suppliers to every embassy in town. Prices were ridiculous. When I lived in Saint Croix you could buy a fifth of Rum for 95 cents it was seven dollars in Washington. And they kept all the money in St Croix. In Jamaica, it was always a bottle of Scotch.

Q: What do you consider to be your most significant contribution while you were in Jamaica?

TWITTY: I guess when I helped to fund the School of Music where I had the Agency (USIA) lend me hundreds and hundreds of jazz tapes of all the big bands. And then we

recommended we support some of the imitators and come down on their own. If they needed it and wanted to stay a little longer you know doing some filming. I enjoyed that. And some of them were very, very good. I have a picture of him stooping over in a rose garden and until you looked carefully you could see only two women not five women because the tops of their heads looked like roses. I paid 200 Jamaican dollars for that thing, it was beautiful. It was worth every penny. That and the Christmas time, very British thing you go to the pantomime. That was always something. There was a big fat Jamaican lady, whose name I can't remember. She was the local dialect comedian. And she was welcomed in New York. She came to make a little money every year on that sort of thing. Every body has a cousin or sister and brother in New York. I had three doctor friends of mine, one was a dentist two went to school with a friend of mine in the university in Colombia. They all had good credentials. They all went separately because they had a lot of money and couldn't get it out. One would only accept American checks paid on the bank of New York. So, I really enjoyed that. The best cultural program on this side of Uganda was Jamaica because it was easy to have access to Americans from New York area where most West Indians might be, or Jamaicans.

Q: So how long were you in Jamaica before you?

TWITTY: I did it for three years. That was my last hurrah and I was vaguely aware that something was happening to Nixon when I got home. He left shortly after that I think, '72 or '75. I think Nixon was on his way out around that time. I looked at my old ID card and I see that I retired in 1979. So they didn't catch up with me until I reached sixty. I came to work one morning and my secretary said, goodbye Mr. Twitty. What are you trying to say Linda? You are fired!

Thurgood Marshall was the only one who didn't want us to leave after it went to the Supreme Court. He was the only one on our side, he said he was almost sixty-five and I still have all my marbles. They wiped out half of the agency. I said, "Do you know what you are doing to the collective memory of this agency?"

In 1966 I went into Uganda into... and half the guys I knew from Africa. Africa was not important to anyone here. The people who were assigned to Africa originally, really liked the place and they liked to be there and they helped. It was no big deal.

Q: Well that ruling wasn't that also for State?

TWITTY: State took it to court. I was a member through the unions in those days. They wanted to clean out the corps. They manipulated Grade-3. You were half way up the totem pole. Two (class-2) in the morning and you would be at ambassador level. They manipulated it so Grade-3, was nothing anymore. Explain that!

Q: Today is September 6th. My name is James Dandridge interviewing Mr. John Twitty for oral history project. So you were involved in the lawsuit to try to prevent them enforcing the grade discrimination that is, 60 years and out. Tell me about it, what happened?

TWITTY: I wasn't aware until I got home that the union had taken it to the Supreme Court. In April, told me that the Supreme Court had ruled against us. They had no intention of accepting the age until sixty-five. I had planned on sticking around until I was sixty-five. Things worked out pretty nicely when Carter was president. We got a nine percent raise one year. Right now, I am taking home more money now than when I was working without the expenses and what not.

Q: Now are you retired, you are a Class-3 Officer which is a Class-1 now. How long had you been a Class-3?

TWITTY: I believe in 1964 or '65, I had just gotten there. 1966 or 1967. I am sorry that was in the reverse. All my papers are scattered to the winds. I probably have thrown something away that I shouldn't have.

Q: When you were back there retiring you were also instrumental in... you were one of the founders of the Thursday Luncheon Group.

TWITTY: That came about after I had retired only a few months. I realized that I didn't hardly know any black officers who hadn't served in Africa and served in Europe. They said, "We have got to get to know each other." So, I had a big apartment and a low budget. Harry Hewitt, ambassador to Afghan, Bill Jones, Mary Dougherty under DA and three or four others names I can't recall right now.

Q: Bill Davis?

TWITTY: Yes, Bill Davis. One of the first things we did, somebody pointed out that State people had an idea that if you were black you wanted to go to Africa. We could serve anywhere in the world that we wanted. I don't know when it stopped, but it stopped after awhile. People like Harriet Elam Who spoke Turkish and French and Greek and people had a black ambassador at USIA.

Q: Kenton Keith?

TWITTY: Oh no! Much later! I don't know about Kenton Keith, he wasn't in the Africa assignment thing then. We lived in the same building.

Q: Was it Horace Dawson?

TWITTY: No. He was half American and half African and he lived around the corner from me in southwest. Anyway, he had been assigned as one of the first black officers to France and became a PAO there and then became an ambassador and somewhere he served in Croatia.

Dawson came in with me in Nigeria. He was the cultural officer there and I was the IO there. That was a big post that we had. I had three assistance information officers with

me. We had an awful lot of alcoholism in those days. There were some Nigerians that tried to drink themselves to death. The revolution came in my second year because I never finished. I came to Nigeria in 1962, took two years to cover all of the east and west coast and then I came back and I wanted to go home. Because, I hadn't been home. Why don't you stay in Nigeria and become the Information Officer stay for a year and then you go home and come back and do this for three years. Well at the end of the first year, the Congo busted wide open. We need you to go there. I said, Oh God! Did you know Stepherson? He was a bright, young black guy from St. Louis and married a French girl. Evidently, he got stomach cancer and then died. That is what he was doing speaking... French-speaking Africa. They let him go back to Paris for awhile and then he was PAO in Guinea that is nothing. They had a beautiful house and a swimming pool with no water. It is sad.

Q: Tell me about this; get back to the Thursday Luncheon Group? What was the basic reason that you formed the Thursday Luncheon Group... was out of concern for funneling all the black officer assignments to Africa, was that the basic reason?

TWITTY: I assume that was true because as I said, I knew all the black officers out there and didn't know a single black officer that did not serve elsewhere. So we should form a club. It was a low level thing. A guy who went somewhere in Southern Africa and he didn't like it very much. I think he resented it because he had a French wife, too. He was from Howard University, a Washingtonian. He was in the picture with me and I had a name before I came out here. McDowell was his name. He had been in Nigeria for three years. I was assigned there finally and two years brought me around. Bill Gordon lived in Silver Spring, had been there for years. And he was a Morehouse man (Morehouse University) and a friend of Martin Luther King and they used that. I said, you shouldn't let them use that all the time. It is like "Uncle Tom-ing," you know. He was a good man.

Q: When you formed the organization, first of all, why did you call it the Thursday Luncheon Group?

TWITTY: We didn't know what to call it because we met on Thursdays and then nobody wanted to make it black you know. We had one white member, you know. We had several after that but, he was with us from the beginning. He retired from working with State one time and I forgot his name too. That was a very funny thing. Nobody wanted to call it the African American or Afro this. Everyone knew who we were. One of our State Department brothers, was from Virginia. Also, one of our first black female officers, when she came to the State Department, blacks were never allowed to eat in the dining room, you know. You had to take your food out. She was so hungry that first day she fainted in the hall and they had to carry her out. There was studied embarrassed silence. She told it like it was. I did not know that myself. Mrs. Woodrow Wilson, his second wife, imposed segregation in the State Department. Although she had no power to do that, her husband was the president. So, that's how it started. We had a large group at first. It began to die off so we took domestic types after that. There were some bright young people there and we encouraged them to take exams and study up on the Foreign Service. She is not well now. Lady Ambassador?

Q: Ruth Davis, she has been ill but I think she is recovering. She is going to be the guest speaker at the next meeting of the Thursday Luncheon Group on September 26th. I will get the information back here to you. The registration is in the evening. It is a special dinner at Fort Myer, Virginia. I will tell you about it afterwards. Were you in the meeting with Kissinger when you went in as a group to Kissinger to tell him that blacks should not be limited to assignments in Africa?

TWITTY: No, I wasn't even president (Thursday Luncheon Group) then, but I can remember it was a small group out of State and there was nothing I could do about it and it was obvious that USIA couldn't either. I can't think of who was president in those days. I used to try to put out a newsletter and I was still working then and nobody wanted to take on. So, it came out sporadically. Do you still have the newsletter?

Q: Yes, and it comes out sporadically now. Well, what assignment did you have in those last days before your retirement, here in Washington?

TWITTY: It was the Operations Center. I was there for a year and a half. I liked the job, but the crazy hours from 7:30 until 3:00 or 3:30 to 11:30. My wife and I had theater seats that we couldn't always use. State did it differently; it was giving those jobs to newcomers. It was a very good idea but you had to know what is going on in the world. We been everywhere and we knew all these geo-locales and events – And you sit there in that room...in fact, then last spy ring was caught in that room. In fact there was a picture above my head with a hidden camera and it watched him being interviewed by his mistress and she encouraged him to give her some papers, to try him out - they kept all that on tape you know. It would keep you in the hot seat, you know. I guess they assumed that blacks could be spies. I was overseas for about five years. And, the boys upstairs asked to talk to me. They asked me "I have to talk to you." What do you do if the Russians had a camera with you and a woman? Number one, I am married at the moment and, number two; I would tell them I am free of my debts. You think that I would betray my own country for some stupid thing like sex? So influenced by sex. In my own house, was swept every month. Ha! Ha!

Q: So you were retired in 1979?

TWITTY: Yes!

Q: What did you do at retirement?

TWITTY: My only sister was now dead and had moved. When I went to Jamaica she had moved to another island. They bought a house in St. Croix and from that time on, every year I went down there, say from before Christmas until the middle of January. I didn't work. I did a couple of volunteer things like president of my apartment unit or secretary-treasurer. So, nobody wanted to do it. Because you can take their money and we don't see any results, underground parking lots - one night somebody will bring a truck and they stole the tires...the audio equipment out of Cadillac's and Chevrolets. They were not

hiring any guards. If, the guys are in overnight duty sleeping, mostly students, I caught a few of them. I said, you know the whole idea is when I am sleeping you are supposed to be awake. I didn't know what had happened, the next morning my neighbor would say to me "Is your car alright?"...I said no that's not alright. See that Cadillac, all of the wheels are gone. So they must have worked all night long, since they were not hiring any guards. That section of Washington is very nice until you get to 4th Street. Good security and telephone used... all you have to do is press a button. And the phone would ring and I would ask who is it? And I would press the number with the telephone number on it and unlock the door downstairs. And when you entered the hall, there was a locked up elevator downstairs and you would discover that they didn't belong there and go back to bed; got to be a nuisance.

I enjoyed myself; I traveled every winter and to New York, quite a bit. Then I started to lose some of my family. I'm the only one left. I had three brothers and two sisters and my wife. I can't tell you how lonely it has been. She's been dead since 95 or 96.

Q: So you spent a total of Federal time including your World War II time. How many years did you have in total?

TWITTY: Twenty-three (years) in the Agency, and four in the Army, two years in the Civil Service and I took a job with the Veterans Administration and just by accident I hadn't got over my GI insurance. I got all my papers signed for (the) next week I had to go. This is the day I getting out of here and going back to school. Went upstairs and got all my papers signed. I knew we had to go to summer sessions at NYU.

Q: Were you studying journalism then?

TWITTY: Yes, at NYU. Arts, Ancient Writing, had all that, there were no televisions in those days. We had radio. You couldn't find a job. Carrie and I started writing letters to the New York Times and New York Post and a few others. Here comes USIA hired me come on down and...everybody wanted to hire you back. We will give you a house, we will give you. . We can't do anything by correspondence for 4 thousand or 5 thousand dollars. Johnson started the African-Ebony because, I knew, was unfair because of advertising...

Q: Did you know Johnson personally?

TWITTY: Oh yes, we were the same age. We were born the same year.

Q: And as far as knowing him what was your assessment? How did you get along?

TWITTY: He was an honest guy. He impressed me by telling me that he did not believe in owing anyone any money. You or anybody else on staff would get garnished, is out. You can't handle your money, you certainly can't handle mine. One of my co-workers, when he first came there, Johnson would move your furniture, your wife and kids free. He moved this guy from Detroit and he didn't have much money. He had a wife and no

kids. Don't worry about this month and he let him slide for about three months. I don't owe any black people any money. I never liked Chicago because it was too cold in the winter. It's a very clannish place. I didn't know anybody way out on the south side. I was on the South Side but that was way, way out. It was the biggest thing in the world when it starts to get cold. Four thousand blocks that way that would be the south side. It turned from black to Indian Americans, Polish, and Irish. This is when airplanes were cheap. Leave my home Friday night and return Monday morning at 7:00 and arrive at 8:00 and go right turn and go right to work.

Q: You must have been with the Amsterdam News when Ralph Bunche when he was at the UN when he got the Nobel Prize in 1950. Were you writing then?

TWITTY: No. I was writing then but I wasn't assigned that news. News was very, very poor for the neighborhood for a paper that didn't try to reach out but it wasn't a wide readership. There are blacks in Harlem you should try to reach out. I was in Westchester County and I had some people who said to me that I wrote some stuff to people. I had been around and State didn't want him and he didn't want them particularly. And when he won the Nobel Peace Prize... rarely and I told my grandson he don't know anything about that. The peace between the Arabs and the Jews long before this foolishness came up. He had a daughter and a son. I believe his daughter became an actress.

Q: August of 2003 - How did the press as you recall?

Q: We are doing an interview with Mr. John Twitty, my name is James Dandridge. I would like to ask you, during the time of Ralph Bunche's achievements, tell me your experience, about how that was covered (press) at that time?

TWITTY: It was not covered very well by the black press although; they couldn't avoid covering the Nobel Peace Prize. The Amsterdam News, The Pittsburgh Courier and the other paper, the New York Age, was the oldest black publishing paper in the United States at the time. I went down there to the UN just as a correspondent and reporter. I use to go to the committees on slavery and committees on?? And we had stuff like that. I wrote a couple of short pieces but I was not the man that they assigned to the thing. He was our first black foreign correspondent newspaper guy that served in World War II. .

Q: So the black press didn't cover it very well?

TWITTY: Exactly.

Q: OK. Thank you.

End of interview