The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training
Foreign Affairs Oral History Project

ROBERT LAGAMMA

Interviewed by: Charles Stuart Kennedy
Initial interview date: August 6, 2008

[Note: This interview was not edited by Mr. LaGamma.]

Q: This is tape one, side one with Robert R. LaGamma. This is being done on behalf of the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training and I am Charles Stuart Kennedy. Do you go by Bob?

LAGAMMA: I go by Bob.

Q: Bob. Ok we will start at this point. Let's start at the beginning. Where and when were you born?

LAGAMMA: 1939 in New York City. I grew up in the Bronx.

Q: OK, tell me a little something about the LaGamma side of your family? Where do they come from and your grandparents and all. What line of work were they in and education and so on.

LAGAMMA: My grandparents came to the United States at the turn of the century from Italy, Calabria, a little town called Castrovillari in the mountains. Very poor, to this day very poor. I visited it a couple of times, and can hardly imagine how they managed to get to the coast and to the nearest port which probably was Naples. Going through those mountains in the days before railroads and cars.

Q: By foot probably.

LAGAMMA: Only by foot and a great distance.

Q: Well did they go to New York I assume?

LAGAMMA: Yeah, the whole family went to New York.

Q: And what did you say your grandparents or so, what sort of activity was he involved in?

LAGAMMA: Well he was a land agent. My grandfather worked for a wealthy landholder in that part of the country. He didn't have much in the way of skills when he came to the United States.

Q: Do you know what they were doing or what he did?

LAGAMMA: Well he did a number of different things. He was never very successful at any of them. He did some carpentry and did some tailoring. He had some basic skills he put to work to scrape out a living. It was especially tough during the depression where he didn't have very much to do at all.

Q: What about your father?

LAGAMMA: My father was born in New York. He didn't speak very much Italian. They weaned him away from his language. He actually went to the same high school I went to, Stuyvesant High School in New York, as did my uncle. Then he went off to the navy during the war. He was a naval carpenter and participated in most of the island invasions and saw a lot of very bloody combat in the South Pacific.

Q: Then what happened when he came back?

LAGAMMA: He came back.

Q: Of course he was married.

LAGAMMA: I was born in 1939, and when he came back I was six years old, '45. He settled in as a carpenter and he did that for a number of years and then he eventually went to work for the New York Transit Authority.

Q: I take it he didn't have more than a high school education.

LAGAMMA: He started college but didn't go very far before the war broke out, and never picked up on it.

Q: What about on your mother's side? Where did her family come from?

LAGAMMA: They came from near Naples. They came over about the same time.

Q: So you grew up in an Italian neighborhood.

LAGAMMA: Well actually I grew up on the edge of an Italian neighborhood in a very cosmopolitan working class neighborhood, with Jews, Italians, Poles, Irish, even some African Americans. It was really quite a mixed neighborhood.

Q: What did they call the area?

LAGAMMA: Well right now it would be called the edge of the South Bronx.

Q: Did you live in an area where you had extended family?

LAGAMMA: Yes. My father had three sisters, my aunts, and two brothers, so that was the major part of my extended family. My aunts were never married, so I spent a great deal of time growing up with them including during the war. I spent a little lesser time with my aunts on my mother's side.

Q: Did you get much, in a way Italian is probably not the word for it, I imagine they spoke a dialect.

LAGAMMA: Sure. I didn't have any exposure to Italian whatsoever. It was a banned language. My grandparents spoke it only to each other.

Q: I used to get this from the German, not in front of the children.

LAGAMMA: That's right. And so it wasn't until I studied Italian in the foreign service and was assigned to Italy that I learned Italian.

Q: Well now in your area, in the first place I assume your family was Catholic, but were they very Catholic or not particularly? How did this go?

LAGAMMA: Not rigorous, no. I mean we went to mass; we had all the sacraments. We went to church once in awhile. Not necessarily on a regular basis. We grew up within the framework of the church, local parish, but I guess some of us became more religious than others and some drifted away.

Q: Was there a cohesive Italian community as a kid or were you pretty much in a mixed?

LAGAMMA: Pretty much, I grew up in the midst of other ethnic groups. It was a very strong Jewish population in my neighborhood. A lesser number of Irish and some Italians, not many, and other nationalities.

Q: I was interviewing quite recently a woman, Beverly Zweiben who said, I grew up in the Bronx and she didn't meet a protestant until she went away to get her masters. She went away to I think the University of Indiana. Until that time I mean she had Jewish friends, mostly Jewish friends. She was Jewish, but Italian or Irish. But they were all either that. There wasn't …

LAGAMMA: Yeah. Well I played on the Lutheran basketball team as well as a Catholic one.

Q: Were you much of a reader or did this sort of thing go on?

LAGAMMA: Oh yeah. Reading was my salvation. It was kind of the entryway to higher education and interest in the wider world, and the thing that filled up many hours while I was growing up which otherwise would have been very lonely hours.

Q: Where did you go to get your books?

LAGAMMA: The Arthur Avenue Library. About ten blocks from where we lived.

Q: How good was the librarian or the librarians? Would you call them to help you get the right book.

LAGAMMA: No, they pointed me in the direction of the shelves, and that is about it. Not too helpful.

Q: Do you recall some of your earlier books when you got into reading that influenced you or you enjoyed?

LAGAMMA: Oh yeah. When I was seven, eight, nine, I fell into reading about the American frontier, the west, the heroes of the American frontier, the Kit Carsons and the Daniel Boones and Davy Crocketts. I remember reading biographies of each of them. And about the discoverers in the age of discovery. Christopher Columbus and the great navigators at the beginning of the age of discovery. Those sort of filled my imagination with ideas of adventure.

Q: In school, let's take elementary school. How did you mesh with the school system?

LAGAMMA: I liked school. I liked learning, but I wasn't very disciplined. My father encouraged me to be a good student, but didn't keep after me very much or didn't have much in the way of influence on my studies. I went to an elementary school within easy walking distance, four or five blocks from my house. One of the elementary teachers I had was Samuel Richewski. I had him for the fifth grade, and he was a grand master in chess. I learned how to play chess there. So that was quite inspiring.

Q: Were you a good student?

LAGAMMA: Pretty good, yeah. I was usually in the most advanced class.

Q: Did you get involved with sports at all?

LAGAMMA: Yeah, I played everything, lots of street games. You know we played all the games like football and basketball and baseball, but most of the time we played stickball, street games. Stick ball, punch ball, up the river, down the river, hundreds of games that we would invent on the sidewalks.

Q: How were the streets in those days?

LAGAMMA: Not as crowded as they are now. There were actually parking spaces and room to move around.

Q: Were there gangs?

LAGAMMA: Oh yeah, there were gangs. There were gangs in my area. I was in a rather tough neighborhood. We had one gang that was known as the Fordham Baldies. If they decided they didn't like you and had something against you, they would cut all your hair off.

Q: Did you ever run afoul of them?

LAGAMMA: Not so that I couldn't run away fast enough. But it was a tough neighborhood. We talked about going to the library. At one point when I was about 10 or 12 years old, I acquired a pocket knife because I wanted to defend myself when I crossed some difficult terrain in the park on the way to the library.

Q: Did you get into a gang?

LAGAMMA: No, I never belonged to a gang. But there were a lot of gangs around us and some very tough kids, and you learned to navigate around them, to leave them alone and not to get in their way. There were shootings when I was at school. Kids manufactured their own guns.

Q: Zip guns.

LAGAMMA: Zip guns, and a couple of people I knew were killed. Well to give you an idea of the unsavoriness of the school, I went to a junior high school where Lee Harvey Oswald went a couple of years before, the guy who killed John F. Kennedy.

Q: Did you have any favorite as you started your route, let's take elementary school, any favorite subjects?

LAGAMMA: I was really taken by math. I could do it very well, and science. Every once in awhile you come across a great teacher, somebody that believes in you and invests some time in you . I had that in high school in English, a man that later went on to be a high school principal. But he was just so good to me and recommended me for Stuyvesant High School

Q: Stuyvesant High School, was that where, we call them magnet schools today. Was that a particular type of school?

LAGAMMA: It was a school where you could only get in by having good grades or very high exam scores or some combination thereof. I was very fortunate to get into it. It was a school known, along with the Bronx High School of Science, for its offerings in science,

so you could really get almost a college education at Stuyvesant. Since they had such a big population in New York City to draw upon, the kids were very able.

Q: One thinks about high school of science and then in particular Stuyvesant, you had this Jewish population and in the Jewish community they put an emphasis on education, so I would think it would be a rather strong. Was it heavily Jewish?

LAGAMMA: Yes it was.

Q: At Stuyvesant, how were the teachers?

LAGAMMA: No good or no better than at any other high school. It was the students that you learned from.

Q: Yeah.

LAGAMMA: I mean the quality of the school was in the student body, and to this day there is a strong New York City policy of not assigning the best teachers to the best schools, because that would detract from the other schools. It was a matter of school policy. So you got a kind of random selection of teachers. Every once in awhile you would get a particularly good one. I had a marvelous physics teacher for two years, Dr. Meyers. He was a pioneer. He had been at Los Alamos with the Manhattan project. He was a brilliant teacher. We would enter the classroom each day and the blackboard would be covered with sheets of paper. Then he would unfurl them. Underneath you would see in ten different color pastels formulae and drawings of experiments. Then he would carry those experiments out in the classroom, and things would explode exactly how they were supposed to explode, and everything would work the way it was supposed to. Unlike many other science classes that I know of. He was on the first experiment in education television, Sunrise Semester. He was the physics teacher for people that hadn't gone to college and wanted to take credits by correspondence. He was really an outstanding teacher of science.

Q: How about did you get involved in sports in high school?

LAGAMMA: Not as much as I would have wanted to. I was slightly not good enough. I would have played basketball had I been able to. I tried out for my high school basketball team and I didn't make it. The biggest disappointment of my youth.

Q: How about social life? Were guys dating girls.

LAGAMMA: Stuyvesant was an all boys school. So we occasionally had mixers and dances with other schools but not very often, So all the socializing was done in the neighborhood. Because it was a commuter school. We had to go about an hour by subway to get down there, so it wasn't in our area. But people came from all over the city, every borough.

Q: So your social life is basically back in your neighborhood. How did dates go? Did you date and how did dates go in those days?

LAGAMMA: Not very much. Not until I guess my first summer in camp which would have been about my sophomore year when I started meeting girls who were fellow counselors and from then on that was my kind of social universe. I got to know girls from different parts of the city and the Bronx especially.

Q: What about New York City? Was this a place you could go to?

LAGAMMA: Oh was it a place I could go to. New York City was my school. It was the best educational institution in the world if you knew how to use it. If you had a little sense of adventure. When I went to high school, I was from the Bronx, and therefore I had to go all the way down to 17th Street to get to school. So I had the whole city to stop off on should I want to. I remember even in my high school days stopping at the United Nations. It was a very exciting time in the 50's and in the late 50's things were beginning to percolate around the world. Independences. The United Nations was a very interesting place back then. There was no security. You could get into the General Assembly, you could get into the committee rooms, almost all of them, and put on a pair of headsets and listen to people from all over the world. Then of course theaters, museums, a lot of things in New York if you know how to do them can be free.

Q: Were you able to get into the theater at all?

LAGAMMA: Yeah, beginning probably in high school and then all through college I went to Broadway theater quite a lot, and then I gradually moved in the direction of off Broadway. I remember in my late teens and early 20's I saw virtually all of Ibsen, all of the Irish playwrights, all of Strindberg, Brecht. All of the world's great playwrights were off Broadway.

Q: Were your parents at all interested or was this pretty much self initiated?

LAGAMMA: Pretty much self initiated. I think I was mostly on my own in those days. My parents had drifted apart and my father was very much busy working. I rarely saw either my father or mother. A couple of times a week maybe.

Q: Well as a young lad, New York City itself was a safe place to go.

LAGAMMA: Very safe. My neighborhood wasn't so safe, but once you got onto the subway you were free and clear to do almost anything or go anywhere. Central Park and all those places were much safer than they are today. There wasn't the drug problem that you find today.

Q: What about sort of news of the world and all that. How did you get your news?

LAGAMMA: I don't remember exactly when, but my other main source of education was the New York Times. I started reading it at a relatively early age, in my teens, probably about 14 or 15. I tried to get it at every occasion. It became the way I learned about the world.

Q: Where did your family fit with people around you in political life spectrum?

LAGAMMA: Their whole political orientation was formed by the New Deal and they were great admirers of FDR and of what he had done to literally save their families during the depression, and they believed in him as a wartime leader as well.

Q: As you were growing up there, did the outside world intrude much? I mean in your interests, the cold war?

LAGAMMA: Very much. Well Israel yes, now that you mention it. It is interesting given the nature of my neighborhood with lots of Jewish families. Yeah, I was very much aware of the Holocaust growing up because it had affected the families of many of my neighbors, many of the people in my neighborhood. There was a consciousness in my community of what had happened in Europe to their families. So I was very sympathetic to the idea of Israel and to the plight of Jews around the world who were seeking a homeland. Despite the fact that my views may have changed over the years and have become more balanced, I still on regular occasions explain to my children where I came from and why my views were as sympathetic to Israel as they were.

Q: Well was it in your case and your family, was it sort of a given that you would go on to university or were you expected to get a job?

LAGAMMA: Nobody talked about it much. I think there was an expectation that I probably would go to college. I had virtually no counseling from anybody in my family about it, nor from my schools. We weren't encouraged in any particular direction. The fact that I went to a school that 99% of the students went to college made it kind of inevitable that I would go to college because all of my friends and everybody else was oriented in that direction. So there was never a question that I wouldn't go to college, but I didn't give a lot of time to which college it would be. When the time came I like to say today that I was free to go to any college in America that I could reach by New York City subway. So I wound up going to the CCNY, Brooklyn College of the CCNY.

Q: When did you graduate from high school?

LAGAMMA: 1957.

Q: So you were in CCNY. What was it like then?

LAGAMMA: It was very cosmopolitan, ethnically pretty diverse, with probably close to a majority of the students being Jewish, being New York City at that time. Very bright kids which again you could learn from . Almost the time of the beginning of the civil

rights movement. During my time in college the civil rights movement developed and I became conscious of it and of problems of racial inequality in America. I became sympathetic and identified myself with it and took some steps to join various organizations that were dealing with issues of civil rights.

Q: Well you were in college from when?

LAGAMMA: I was in college from ’57 through ’61.

Q: did you get involved at all in the 1960 presidential campaign, engaged?

LAGAMMA: We couldn’t vote at 18 in those days, so I wasn’t going to be able to vote, but I was very strongly supportive of Adlai Stevenson. I was a little bit disappointed when John F. Kennedy became the candidate. But then I was aroused politically by his speeches and by his very imaginative approach to politics I thought.

Q: How about New York politics? Did that engage you at all?

LAGAMMA: Tammany Hall, not too much. New York was a pretty tawdry messy thing to try and get a hold of. I finished college in ’61 ½ because I stayed on another semester because I had to change my major. I was a physics major when I went into college, and I stayed that way for over three years. Then the idea of international relations appealed to me so much that I sort of started over. So I stayed an extra semester. Then I went into City University graduate school and I was a member of what was called the Lower Harlem Tenants’ Council, which was a group of radical students which organized rent strikes in Harlem, aimed at the slumlords who were not providing services to the tenants. What we did was arrange for the tenants to put their rents in escrow and not pay it until such time as they had their leaks fixed and their plumbing fixed and their electricity working in their apartments.

Q: How long, did you get involved at all in, well I guess civil rights really weren’t much of an issue there.

LAGAMMA: In my last year in college we started picketing some of the supermarkets that discriminated or that allowed discrimination in the south. I remember doing that. I made a trip around the country when I was 20 and got arrested in New Orleans for sitting in the black section of a lunch counter. Did those kinds of things. It wasn’t really the time for the rides through Mississippi and Alabama. That came a little bit later, but I think I would have done that.

Q: Well then how did the arrest come about?

LAGAMMA: Oh I don’t know. My friends and I who were traveling together decided that this was an outrage that people should be made to sit in separate parts, that it made no sense at all. That we would show them that we would sit with the people that were

being discriminated against, and how could they do anything to us about that. They called the cops and had us arrested.

Q: What happened?

LAGAMMA: Well they let us go. They didn't want any trouble. They thought it would be more embarrassing for them.

Q: What about…

LAGAMMA: I want to tell you another thing I got involved in. Nelson Rockefeller was then the governor of New York. He had a major program of building shelters against nuclear attack. So we were all obliged to take cover on a regular basis and go into shelters which I and my friends thought was ridiculous. So I got suspended from college for a month because I refused, because I was protesting against that.

I don't know why they let me in the foreign service.

Q: Well we have a lot of things odd. I was on the oral examination board with when we had one guy who came before us and had been in the SDS. We took him. He was articulate.

LAGAMMA: I am sure he grew out of it.

Q: What about both in high school and in college were you working after school hours?

LAGAMMA: Yeah, I had many jobs during my high school and college career. Toward the end of high school I went to work for the New York City library, the central library on 42nd street.

Q: The one with the lions.

LAGAMMA: Yeah. I was a stack boy. I could find anything out of two million volumes. I had many different jobs. I worked in lunch counters, I worked in summer camps every summer. I loaded and unloaded trucks. I used to shape up in the mornings. Whenever it snowed in New York City I worked for the sanitation department to shovel the sidewalks and streets. I would take a day off from school because they paid well. They paid seven dollars an hour which was a fabulous wage in those days.

Q: Well what about at CCNY, you say you were a physics major.

LAGAMMA: Yeah, I started Brooklyn College and then I transferred later to CCNY. I was a physics major. I went to a science high school so I had advanced science courses, advanced physics courses. I decided I wanted to try my hand at science as a field of study and as a profession.

Q: What did it lead towards?

LAGAMMA: Not very much. I tell you what, I wasn't that good. I felt that I would probably be a mediocre physicist, and that probably wasn't worth doing. Because I would probably land a job teaching high school, and that is not what I wanted to do.

Q: Well then what did you switch to?

LAGAMMA: I switched to International Relations. We had some wonderful professors in Brooklyn College and CCNY in that field. Kenneth Organski, who has gone on to a major academic career at Michigan State. I had a professor who was a stringer with the Agence France-Presse, a French woman. Some really good people who opened my eyes to what was really going on in the world, developing nations, independence, Africa.

Q: Did you have on the campus both, you were at Brooklyn?

LAGAMMA: I was at Brooklyn first and then I went to City.

Q: Were there the equivalent of the campus Marxists and all.

LAGAMMA: Oh sure.

Q: I would imagine that particularly in New York City you would find…

LAGAMMA: There was attractive.

Q: Did you get involved in any of that?

LAGAMMA: Not really. I would attend lectures and things, gatherings occasionally. But I didn't like to belong to anything. I think I was a bit too individualistic for some of those groups, because they all had ideological approaches and they all kind of thought in lockstep. So that wasn't as interesting to me as being on my own. But one of the organizations that was interesting to me was YPSL, Young People's Socialist League. Which was Trotskyite. At the time it was mostly because you meet an individual or two who seem to have interesting ideas.

Q: Did the Cold War intrude?

LAGAMMA: When I was in college, very much so. The Cuban Missile Crisis, we thought that was going to be the end of the world. Very much intruded, the beginning of the Vietnam War, the first rumblings of Vietnam. Earlier, obviously, '52-'54, the Korean War, when I was young, made an impact. I guess the fact that one of my friend's brothers, his older brother went off to the Korean War and died at Inchon. He lived right above me. It is funny that these days we don't know anybody in our neighborhood or in our family that is in Iraq. But in those days we knew people who were in Korea. It was the nature of my neighborhood. It was a working class neighborhood.

Q: Did you have any thought of joining the military or government service at all?

LAGAMMA: The military was the furthest thing from my mind. Government service, not really. I don't know. I think that I was very unfocused all through my college years, and didn't have any concrete ambitions. It wasn't until my junior year that a friend of mine told me he was taking the foreign service exam and suggested that I might want to do it too. He had a driving ambition to join the foreign service. So we went off together and did it. Then I took it a second time when I was a senior and passed it the second time.

Q: This would have been when?

LAGAMMA: This would have been in 1960. 1960 the first time and then I took it again in 1961.

Q: Did the arrival of John Kennedy and "Ask not what your country can do for you but what you can do for your country" strike a chord?

LAGAMMA: Very much so. Of course. As I told you I originally was infatuated with Adlai Stevenson. So when Kennedy ran I was lukewarm about him, but I certainly thought him better than Richard Nixon. So I supported him and I remember going to one of his rallies on the grand concourse in New York, and being impressed. Once he got into the White House, the kinds of things that he said and did moved me greatly. I was vice president of my college's Peace Corps Club. I would have gone into the Peace Corps had I not gotten into the foreign service. So it moved me to the extent that I really wanted to join up, join this new organization. I guess I would have been in the first class in the Peace Corps going to Tanzania had I continued. Actually I did apply as did most of the people who were in this peace club.

Q: Well you took the exam in '61 the second one. You were a senior then?

LAGAMMA: I think I was in my first year of graduate school when I took it.

Q: Where did you go to graduate school?

LAGAMMA: CCNY. I just stayed put.

Q: Did you have any idea the Peace Corps what this would lead to?

LAGAMMA: No. I was interested in the world and so I studied international relations as I had as an undergraduate. I wanted to specialize in Africa. So I took one or two courses in African politics.

Q: Why Africa?

LAGAMMA: Because Africa was being born at that moment and all these new countries were coming into being. I had the habit of stopping at the United Nations, and all these guys dressed up in these costumes and magnificent robes. They were like princes from another planet. So they greatly impressed me. The fact that Africa was a subject, the topic of conversation, and that the fate of all these new nations was being decided, and that we might have something to do with the success or failure of those countries, as they came into being, all this was an enormously stimulating.

Q: Had you had any chance or were you being challenged to travel abroad?

LAGAMMA: Not really. I took two very long trips when I was in college. I earned money at the beginning of one summer in 1959 to be able to travel with three friends across the United States. The one adventure we had abroad was in Mexico. We drove all the way down to Acapulco and back, spent several weeks in Mexico, and then came back to New York. We put on 16,000 miles in that summer. Mostly just camping out or sleeping in the car or sleeping on the beach.

Q: Well did you get to Canada at all?

LAGAMMA: Yeah, a couple of times. Banff, Jasper in the west. We drove through all of Canada.

Q: Were you able to attack into some of the Jewish Catskill circuit and all that or was that the great comics came down from there?

LAGAMMA: No, not really. I spent a couple of summers at summer camps, one in upstate New York. One in New Hampshire, but not the Catskills.

Q: Were you still a fan of the New York Times?

LAGAMMA: Yeah, I have never quit. I got my job through the New York Times.

Q: Well it was very useful when you took the oral or the written exam.

LAGAMMA: I still tell aspiring foreign service officers before they come into the foreign service, that they should read the New York Times, that it is the best way to learn about the world and about issues. If they don't have a curiosity for it, they shouldn't join.

Q: Do you recall the oral exam?

LAGAMMA: Oh yeah vividly.

Q: Can you tell me some of the questions and how it went?

LAGAMMA: I will tell you the context in which I took it. It is a miracle that they ever put up with me because frankly I didn't take it seriously. I didn't think that the foreign

service would ever be possible for me, and that it was going to be such a long shot that it wasn't even worth sending then my autobiography which is one of the requirements.

Q: Did you think that the foreign service is for fancy people?

LAGAMMA: I think so. I guess I thought of it as something of an Ivy League thing. It wasn't something that anyone in my neighborhood ever talked about doing. They wouldn't have. They wouldn't have imagined it. No, it wasn't for us. So when it came right down to it I hadn't done my biographical essay which was required at that time. When they called me in, they were kind enough to say that they hadn't received my biography yet, and that maybe they could put off the interview until they had received it. This made me go right home and write it, and send it to them immediately. All of a sudden I started to realize that maybe this is possible. They were very nice and they received me well and they went the extra mile to make it possible for me to take the oral exam, so why shouldn't I take it seriously. So I did. I went back, and I was the last person to be interviewed that year in New York City. There were only two examiners left. The others had gone. They had their suitcases packed which were sitting in the room outside, ready to go to Grand Central Station and come back to Washington. They told me I was the last one and it was wonderful. We were very relaxed, and they were very kind. They put me totally at ease. I guess maybe they were deficient. I didn't think they were supposed to be so friendly, and they were very friendly. They asked me questions about what I would do of I were, they knew I was interested in Africa. If I were in a bar in Nairobi and there were some hostile critics of the United States and they didn't like what we had done during the Cuban Missile Crisis and how could we possibly defend it, and why shouldn't Cuba have missiles when the United States had missiles, and so on. We got into a very interesting discussion about how I would react. They asked me about my interests. I think that was my great strength because I was interested in museums, and I was interested in literature and in music and the theater. I was interested in travel. I think I hit the right chord with them because they were at the end of the interviews. We liked each other. We felt that we liked each other and I walked them to the station on my way home. We had a nice little conversation going off to the station. Despite the very friendly reception I was still astonished when I got word that I had made it. I had one big barrier: my draft board. When I was accepted into the foreign service, there was a little footnote that said by the way you have to demonstrate to us that you are not about to be drafted before we will accept you, that you can get a deferment . So I thought, well, my God everybody was being drafted. It was still early days. For Vietnam and the draft calls were not so great.

I went around the corner to my draft board on Arthur avenue, and went to see the lady in charge. I explained the situation. I said I had this grand opportunity to be in the foreign service of the United States of America, but that I couldn't be accepted unless I were deferred. I was 1-A and there was no physical reason for my not being taken, but they weren't taking very many in those days. She looked at my application and said, "oh yeah, we'll do that. There is no problem." And again it was the luck of the draw. It just so happened that in that neighborhood they had plenty of kids that had no aspirations of that kind and were going to be drafted and that they would not have any problem giving me a

deferment. Had it been in another part of New York, or in another city, that might not have happened. But they said, sure, and they signed a paper saying so.

Q: Well so you came in when?

LAGAMMA: 1962.

Q: 1962, I assume you went to the A-100. The so-called A-100 training course.

LAGAMMA: Yeah, and we had a USIA training program after that which we went to A-100 rank.

Q: Well how did you come to view the USIA A-100.

LAGAMMA: Oh it was easy, Ed Murrow.

Q: Oh yeah.

LAGAMMA: He was our director. He was a god. You know Dean Rusk wasn't a god. Why would anyone want to work for Dean Rusk? But Ed Murrow, yeah. And that was where the action was. It seemed like we cared about what people in other countries thought of the United States. We wanted to engage in a dialogue with them. That became very important, that we had credibility in the world. We seemed to be on the right side of a lot of issues. Issues that I cared about. We were deeply engaged in Africa, and we seemed to be helping many places. It was kind of a natural thing for me to want to be able to spend my career talking to people about my country and the ideas that it had that might be relevant to them or things that we should be doing together or trying to understand them so we would be able to deal with them better. So those were all things that greatly appealed to me.

Q: Well then with that what was your USIA entry class? How was composed, and how do you describe the people?

LAGAMMA: I think we had three classes that year. I think there were 20 of us, roughly 20, and there were people from all over the country. It was an interesting bunch of people. Some of them were right out of college as I was. Some had been going to graduate school, one of them to law school when they got the call, and decided they wanted to do this. Some of them had been in teaching or in various other professions. I was the youngest. I was 23 when I finally came in. Others were up and around 30. I guess the oldest was about 30. They had had about seven or eight years work experience. It was an interesting bunch. About five of them stayed in about 25-30 years. All of the women left within the first four or five years. It was tough then for women. Ethnically, there wasn't very much diversity. The majority were WASP, Protestant. There wasn't much diversity in that sense. There were no Asians or no African Americans there.

Q: What sort of things were you learning on the USIA side training?

LAGAMMA: We had some pretty good people in the training division. I remember the highlight of my time that year and six months was a visit to the Supreme Court, and an hour and a half we spent with Justice William O. Douglas. I recall that vividly. He was wonderful. And the idea of being in that great temple of the Supreme Court was really inspiring. So we got around town and we did some things of that kind with different organizations. Mostly it was learning the craft, learning about the tools, different parts of the agency that dealt with exchanges, with the press, with Voice of America, with films. We were cycled around, and we got to learn a little bit about each part of the agency.

Q: When you had your joint sessions with the State Department foreign service officers, did you feel a difference between you all?

LAGAMMA: Absolutely. It was a different cast. We felt that they were more uniform than we were. We felt that they were less imaginative. We thought that they were socially formidable, that probably they had greater social skills than we did. That they were more disciplined probably and less imaginative.

Q: Did the two groups mesh at all?

LAGAMMA: I guess I had some friends among the FSOs. We were FSRs. There was a tendency on their part to look down on us I think. We thought we had intellectual superiority. But I guess there were a few that we liked that were more open, and a few that were more into their own sense of being state officers, and that was superior. So I mean there was that to overcome. I don't know if we ever succeeded. I mean there was a kind of snobbishness I remember. And a sense I thought it was that they had learned much too well, much too quickly, that they were State officers representing the U.S. Department of State and U.S. foreign policy, and therefore they were members of this society that was designed to protect American foreign policy from the American people. We had an example of that when a staffer from the Senate addressed our class and talked about the role of the Senate in American foreign policy. When it came time for questions he was attacked by the State officers who felt that this was an outrage. That there was no place for the U.S. Senate in American foreign policy, that it should be left to the President and to the Secretary of State who were the professionals after all. I and some of my colleagues felt that this was an outrage. What kind of mentality was this that felt that the elected representatives of the American people are not supposed to play some kind of role. So that was one impression that I had that I will never forget.

Q: Well these are some very important things, and when one moves into a profession taking a look at attitudes. There is no better place in a way than you know while the training thing or later on when you have these, what are they called, off site. At different stages. You learn the thought processes of your fellow officers which are quite illuminating.

How did the assassination of Kennedy hit you all?

LAGAMMA: Very hard. It just coincided with my own marriage which had taken place the week before. I married on November 16, and the assassination occurred on the 22nd. The 22nd, Friday. I was at FSI studying French at that time. Just before leaving; we left in December. So it was traumatic. It was the most terrible thing to think I was going to have to go overseas now after this had happened.

Q: Well back to this, where did you meet your wife, and what was her background?

LAGAMMA: My wife was from New York, from the Bronx, also Italian-American. A family that was known to my family and had interacted with it on holidays. So we didn't grow up together but we interacted on holidays once in awhile. I had been very attracted to her. Abut 1960 we were at a baptism together. I found out she was going to see West Side Story that weekend with her school. She was a teacher. I said, "What a coincidence. I am going too," which wasn't true. I only then went out and got a ticket for that night, and met her there and took her home. We started going out for a couple years and then we got married in '63.

Q: How did she feel about the foreign service?

LAGAMMA: I think she was interested in the idea of traveling around the world, escaping, just as I was, escaping from the Bronx and escaping from our world of pedestrian things, things that were not so interesting to us. this was a great adventure to both of us.

Q: Well during the time, we are talking about '59 to '63, did you see much change in the Bronx or was it later than that?

LAGAMMA: Oh it started changing. It started deteriorating economically. You could see some shops closing. It wasn't anywhere as prosperous as it once had been. A lot of the more successful people moved out. Moved to Queens, moved to Long Island, moved upstate to Yonkers. Bronx was a stepping stone, and the successful people got out as soon as they could. So there was that migration and then the replacement of some of those people by African Americans, Hispanics, what was considered then as a lower social class. That process continued all over the Bronx. The biggest single change occurred when Robert Moses decreed that there should be a cross Bronx expressway which wiped out a whole neighborhood near where I lived. He decided to do some urban renewal at the expense of the neighborhoods which were really quite vital communities, and knocked a huge number of buildings down, separated them by highways. That was quite close to where I lived. It happened about 1959 or '58 or something like that.

Q: I just read a book on Robert Moses. I can't think of___

LAGAMMA: Yeah, something like that. American Colossus.

Q: Something like that, talking about how he used urban renewal for social engineering. It was pernicious.

LAGAMMA: It really was. I didn't really understand what we have come to understand now about how easy it is to destroy communities.

Q: Then where did you want to go and where did you go?

LAGAMMA: I wanted to go to Africa. There was no question in my mind. I said, "Africa anywhere." And so I was assigned to the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland. Which existed only for a brief period of time. The three parts of that British colony were put together and they didn't survive very long. In fact when we got to what was then Rhodesia, the federation was collapsing. Malawi had become independent, and Zambia was on the way to independence. Rhodesia was locked in a struggle between the British and the white settlers who wanted to maintain a system that was very close to apartheid. We had expected the British might intervene and stop that from happening, but eventually, right after I left, they made a unilateral declaration of independence. I remember they had sent an inquiry to our library wanting a copy of our Declaration of Independence. It was from the Ministry of the Interior, the man who would provide the rationale for declaring independence against Britain. They wanted to use our line which they did.

Q: Well then you had this federation broken into three states.

LAGAMMA: Yeah, Zimbabwe, Zambia, and Malawi.

Q: Well where did you go, I mean…

LAGAMMA: Where did I go. I went to Salisbury which is now Harare. That was our first assignment. As we said it was just after the Kennedy assassination. My wife and I were married in New York. We moved to our apartment in Washington for about a month and then in December we took off and I went to Europe for my first time on my way there. We spent a coupe of weeks in Paris and then we visited some of my classmates in Rome and in Athens. From Athens we flew to Rhodesia. A direct flight from Athens to Salisbury.

Q: So you were in Rhodesia, Salisbury from when to when?

LAGAMMA: I was there one year. I got there in December of 1963 and we were there to the end of 1964, at which point they moved me to Zambia because they were establishing a branch post on the copper belt of Zambia. That was just up the road a piece. Actually you could reach it by road. I think the U.S. government's philosophy of assigning me was to move me up the road a piece, because those were my first three assignments, Rhodesia, Zambia, and the Congo. Each one I moved to by road.

Q: Well let's talk about Salisbury. What was Salisbury like when you were there? This would be '63 to '64, what was it like then?

LAGAMMA: It was a paradise, some say it was a malignant paradise. Most of the country is on the highlands of Central and Southern Africa. Altitude approximately one mile. Therefore climate is mild, moderate, almost perfect most of the year. There is a hot season, but most of the year is very beautiful. I remember we woke up the first morning and looked out the window of our hotel and saw the public gardens which are as nice as anything you can find in London. In fact they are nicer because they have more exotic flowers, more of a range. A very beautiful place, and we had a very beautiful house which we didn't think we could afford. I had my New York mentality and my very small housing allowance and was inclined to rent an apartment downtown. My wife said, "What are you crazy?" In those words. Why would you want to live in an apartment in a place like this." I said, "But I don't think we can afford anything else." She said, "How do you know, you haven't looked." She was right. We picked up the paper one morning. In those days not everybody was assigned housing. Hardly anybody was assigned housing. Nobody had furniture, none of the lower ranking officers had furnished housing. So my boss gave me a copy of the local newspaper and told me where to rent a car. Which I did, and we found something in the newspaper that sounded intriguing. And drove off to this place called Borrodale north of the city beyond the race track. There was this cottage on three acres of garden that was being rented for less than our housing allowance. We fell in love with it. It was being rented by one of the Rhodesian employees of my office whose husband was a doctor and they had moved to a grander place. They wanted to rent their house for one year which is exactly how long we were going to be there. So it couldn't have been more perfect.

Q: What job did you have?

LAGAMMA: Well as a junior officer you did a little of everything. I did cultural work, press work. I rotated around the different parts of USIS. It was a large USIS office actually. It had been the USIS office for the entire federation, and we still had a staff approximately the same size. We had three American officers and myself, and we had a very large Rhodesian staff. Some of them very skilled. It was a consul general post so our consulate was not too far away. It was about five or six blocks walking distance if we had to go over for country team meetings. The consul general was named Gerrin who had been a missionary. A very nice man. We had some very interesting staffers. Somebody who came from the Bronx I think, Hank Cohen, who is still a friend of mine and was later Assistant Secretary for Africa, and with whom I served in a couple of posts. Hank was there as a relatively junior officer. I remember the CIA station chief was a very interesting guy who was involved in politics. I spent a lot of time talking to him. Toward the end of my time there he sent me out on a very interesting mission. He asked that I represent the consulate in making contact with the political detainees, the African Nationalists who were being detained at a detention camp far from any habitable place. They were in a godforsaken national park with lots of animals, but no facilities whatsoever. So I was sent off in a four wheel drive vehicle with an FSN about 150 miles from any town on a service road for a railroad which was pot holed and wash boarded. We got to spend several nights with the leaders, the future leaders of the country. We brought them books and a case of alcohol and some food and some films and a generator,

and traveled around with them. They actually had a car and were able to travel around to the villages in that area. It was a very interesting opportunity.

Q: It was white rule obviously. From your observation how heavily did his hand weigh on the people?

LAGAMMA: I found it very hard to take, and I am sure the black African citizens of that country found it infinitely harder to take. It was a daily humiliation, this white rule. People had to live in their own part of the city, their own ghettoized neighborhoods, townships they were called, and were obliged to pay obeisance to the settlers, who in many cases were really quite unimpressive. They lorded it over these people because of skin color. They were hardly more qualified than them to rule this country I felt.

Q: I was told there was an expression saying Kenya is for officers and Rhodesia is for other ranks. In other words, the better class of Brit settled in Kenya and the lower class or working class settled in Rhodesia.

LAGAMMA: That is interesting because, as I said, Rhodesia was a kind of paradise, and the comparison that I would make is not between Kenya and Rhodesia but between Rhodesia and South Africa. The fact was that while you would find working class South Africans who were miners and even homeless people in the parks and streets, everyone in Rhodesia was privileged. Everyone had a very decent house with servants, and almost everyone had a swimming pool. So there was an enormous amount of privilege. We had a neighbor who lived next to us in our very nice neighborhood whose son was being married. We went to the wedding. We found that he had not gone for any higher education. He had barely been able to finish high school, and yet he was starting a career as an executive with a big company, only because he was white. So yeah, I would say you had a more highly educated class of Brits in Kenya, much more elitist, even some nobility, which you didn't have in Rhodesia. The Rhodesians came as a result of the migration up from South Africa and the companies, and so it was a phenomenon of an extension of South Africa even though many of them were Brits.

Q: What were we doing USIA-wise there when you got there?

LAGAMMA: Well we were talking about the Kennedy-Johnson administration and progress the United States was making in civil rights. I had participated in the March on Washington, so I was able to talk about Dr. King and stuff of that kind, while I was in the foreign service, while I was in training. So the question of racial equality was on everybody's mind and how that might apply to an African situation. And whether that was at all relevant, that was the debate. We were constantly running into very defensive Rhodesian settlers who, when you went into a pharmacy to buy an aspirin, would tell you, "We are not leaving. This is our country. We built it." It sounded very much like what southern whites were saying and other whites in America during the civil rights movement. There were a lot of parallels. It seemed like the united States was making progress and Rhodesia and South Africa were going in the wrong direction. Then there was the question of Africa. Could Africa be successful if it were under majority rule.

What was happening in Ghana; there was a dictatorship. What was happening in the Congo: chaos, anarchy. Do we really want that to happen here. We would get involved in those kinds of discussions. We'd say it doesn't have to happen here if you do it right. If you participate in creating a system of majority rule where you have your place. Those were the kinds of arguments that we would get involved in.

Q: Well was there the feeling on your part, people in the rest of the consulate general that it was only a matter of time before the Africans took over, or was it a feeling you know that it was going to be like South Africa.

LAGAMMA: Well we weren't sure that South Africa was going to be like South Africa at that time. You know, we thought that there might be some hope there, although things were going more quickly in the wrong direction. We felt that if some accommodation wasn't made, if compromise wasn't arrived at, if there wasn't a process for assimilating blacks into the modern world and into governance, that there would be terrible violence. We felt that some of the problems that were occurring in the rest of Africa were a result of the lack of proper preparation, so educate people, treat them better, bring them into the process of decision making. If you do it properly, maybe over a decade or even more, you will have a country that is very viable because you have resources and you can have a partnership between people.

Q: Well did you get much of a feel for USIA operations let's say with press and all that. What sort of press was there and how did we operate within home delivery?

LAGAMMA: Fairly limited, a kind of British model. There was a right wing newspaper called the Citizen which was the mouthpiece of the settlers. There was a Rhodesian Herald which was a daily newspaper which would provide news of the world, but was fairly provincial. It wasn't much of a media. There was television and there was radio, but a single station. We mostly dealt with the dissemination of news from the wireless file, press releases that we thought were relevant. We wouldn't place too many of them. It would be rare. We would send out press releases on events that would be happening at the cultural center, at the consul general. It wasn't a very dynamic press operation. We had a very conservative Rhodesian woman who was our press assistant. We were more active on the cultural side. We had a very good exchange program, international visitors program, Fulbright program where we were trying to expose as much as possible some of the brightest people to American education, American ideas through trips or through scholarships. That was more important. We had a very fine library, which was important to us. We had an exhibition program. We had some very interesting programs NSAS had a trained a couple of our people to do lectures on the space program. They came out and traveled around the country. In the case of Rhodesia and other countries these very wonderful lecturers did these wonderful experiments and shot off rockets and stuff like that, and really wowed high school crowds and others. We had a good lecturer program, and there were a lot of people in those days interested in a country like Rhodesia and its fate. I remember taking a representative of the Americans for Democratic Action to see some African nationalist leaders at the university and to talk about what they could do in the U.S. to try to put some pressure on to help with majority rule.

Q: How well or not so well did the Africans in Rhodesia either mix or get educated? Could they go to the same restaurants or the same accommodations?

LAGAMMA: When we arrived we stayed at the only hotel that would allow people of other races to stay at it. The consulate as a matter of policy used that hotel. It was the only hotel in Salisbury that would allow people of other races to stay. All the other hotels were segregated. There were a few restaurants and bars that would allow Africans to patronize them. The city was very divided. There was a very dramatic example of integration with the director of the national museum who was a brilliant fellow. He wanted to encourage the development of the stone sculpture that has become world famous, Zimbabwe stone carvers. He couldn't do it within the context of his museum, so he hired the most talented of them as museum guards, and that entitled them to sleep on the grounds. Otherwise they would have had to sleep in their township ten or fifteen miles away. They wouldn't have been able to be at the museum all the time and work at the museum on their sculpture as well as on their work as guards. So he gave them a salary to do that.

Q: Well were they were Africans…

LAGAMMA: I'll mention his name. Frank Vicuun.

Q: Were Africans coming out of British universities were they able to…

LAGAMMA: There were some who were trained. I know that because there were some that were university lecturers who had British educations., but not too many. Fewer than there were coming out of those schools from West Africa.

Q: Did you have receptions and mixed receptions?

LAGAMMA: Yes, we could on our territory. We did it at our cultural center; we did it at our homes.

Q: Well did you find efforts to improve the lot of the African nationals sort of drove a wedge between our operation and the white settlers?

LAGAMMA: Oh sure. At the end of my tour in Rhodesia, as a result of my having gone to the detention camp, the minister of the interior asked that I be expelled from the country. The consulate rather than get into a fight said well he is leaving anyway, why make a fuss. It was my end of my time there, so they just allowed me to move on. Yeah there was a lot of friction between ourselves and the government. We tended to side with people who were either in the middle or on the African side of the equation. The white settlers were led by very reactionary group of people who were arguing in favor of a break with Britain and a violent break, and the most repressive measures against the African population.

Q: Was Ian Smith….

LAGAMMA: Ian Smith. There was a very interesting election for the position of prime minister of the federation when I first arrived, and the federation broke up. Sir Roy Welensky, who was quite a character, was favored. Then he was beaten by Winston Field who was representative of the White Settlers. Then in the next election Ian Smith won a surprise victory overwhelmingly. All the white settlers came out and supported him en masse. That was the turning point. After that there was no turning back, and there was no compromise with either the Africans or with the British. It was our hope and expectation that the British if necessary would intervene, and that if there had been a unilateral declaration of independence they would intercede, militarily if possible to keep that from happening. They had a responsibility we thought to the African population for not allowing them to be total captives because they were the protecting power. They didn't. the politics were too difficult for the British to impose.

Q: The UDI, Unilateral Declaration of Independence, lasted for a considerable amount of time.

LAGAMMA: Well the UDI lasted for one minute, but the results of it, the independence of Rhodesia as a kind of rogue state, lasted for 20 years.

Q: What about was there much cooperation between the British high commissioners on this British council, were you …

LAGAMMA: We talked to them a lot. My impression was they sort of gave us the run around. They said all the right things to our people, but they didn't take very strong action. I think they were constrained. Even if they had meant well, there were problems of British politics that kept them from taking any strong measures that militarily might cost British lives. They found it unpalatable to risk British troops in action against people with British heritage in Africa.

Q: Well you left there then in '64?

LAGAMMA: I left there at the end of '64.

Q: So at the end of '64 off you go to…

LAGAMMA: Zambia.

Q: Zambia. Was it called Zambia at that time?

LAGAMMA: It was Northern Rhodesia until the moment of its independence. I was actually sent up to Lusaka to attend the independence ceremonies when the British flag came down; the Zambian flag went up. As a result of my being up there, the PAO in Lusaka said, "Why don't you come up here on assignment, and we will send you to the copper belt to open our office."

Q: All right, we will pick it up then.

This is tape 2, side 1 with Robert LaGamma. Bob, we left off when Zambia became independent, and you were asked by the PAO there to come to do what, and we will pick it up there. And when was this?

LAGAMMA: This was at the end of 1964 when I was winding up my assignment in Salisbury in Southern Rhodesia. That was the time that Zambia earned its independence from Britain. I was asked to go up to Lusaka on TDY to take with me a film crew. They would film the independence ceremonies for the USIA film section, so that they could produce a documentary on the U.S. participation in the Zambian independence celebrations. We had sent a major cultural presentation out there, a Jazz band to help with the celebrations, and we had delegations obviously of officials from Washington to participate in the independence ceremonies. So we headed up to Zambia and spent a week there. I had known the PAO previously from Washington.

Q: Who was that?

LAGAMMA: Phillip Dorman. He had been desk officer before going out to take over as branch PAO in what was then Northern Rhodesia before the independence of Zambia. He was soon to be the country PAO. They had established a branch on the copper belt of Zambia which was where a lot of the political activity had taken place in the course of the previous decade. Zambian copper belt was the site of most of the country's trade union movement. A lot of the politics evolved out of the trade union movement. A lot of the youth activities of political party, the party of Kenneth Kaunda and it was the economic powerhouse of the country producing its most important export, copper, along with other minerals. It was also the site of some of the major press institutions of the country, newspapers. So I concluded my TDY in Lusaka, went back to Rhodesia, and packed out and learned that I was then assigned to Zambia and to the Zambian copper belt.

Q: You say copper belt, was there a town?

LAGAMMA: Yeah, the town of Kitwe which was one of half a dozen major towns in the northern part of Zambia that I was to cover. It was a very interesting arrangement because there was no USIS as such or any other American presence in the northern part of the country. My job was to work out of my house. I had the residence of a doctor who had moved out. Attached to the residence itself was a doctor's office which consisted of three small rooms. That was to be my office. I was given a vehicle, some films, some books and just told to talk to people in the area and serve as the point of reference for any programs that we were going to do in the northern part of Zambia. So I spent a number of months traveling the copper belt of Zambia and visiting trade unionists, newspapers in Angola and in Kitwe. Making contact with the youth movement in the party, arranging for the showing of the USIA film on John F. Kennedy, right after his assassination. Generally trying to make myself useful in reporting what the situation was like in the north for the USIS but also for the embassy.

Q: Well this was the period where we were paying particular attention to unions and youth weren't we.

LAGAMMA: That is right.

Q: What was the sort of how did you see the union situation in that area?

LAGAMMA: Well the unions were very interesting. They were a cause of concern to the ruling party and to President Kaunda because they were a major power base, political power base, and they had great organizational strength, and they could very easily shut down the country, its economy. Something very interesting happened right after the independence of the country. President Kaunda decided to name many of the trade union leaders as Zambia's first ambassadors to Europe and other parts of the world.

Q: Get them out of the country.

LAGAMMA: Get them out of the country.

Q: So what was the result of that from your perspective?

LAGAMMA: Well it wasn't a very coherent leadership at that moment, and I was only there for a few months. Fairly soon after I got there I learned that our office would likely be shut down. The reason for that was that the Russians, the Soviets at the time, had asked permission to establish an office on the copper belt. Rather than allow what they considered to be cold war competition to take place, the Zambians had decided that nobody could establish diplomatic offices of any kind outside of the capital. So the handwriting was on the wall, and I was counting down to the time when we would have to shut down and move on to somewhere else.

Q: What was the mining situation? Who was running it and what was there?

LAGAMMA: Well the Anglo-American company, the long arm of South Africa, reached into Zambia and of course into Rhodesia. There were basically Brits up there who were running the copper companies.

Q: What was your impression of how they got along with the new government?

LAGAMMA: Well, they were indispensable to the new government, but they were also somewhat insensitive to it. Because pretty much they operated as they always had. And the copper towns were rather islands, self sufficient unto themselves, and didn't really run social services and health care and education for their workers without much reliance on the government.

Q: How about the youth movement? Was there much there to work with?

LAGAMMA: The problem with the Zambian youth was that in the build up to independence the Communist party unit had relied heavily on youth as what we would call rock throwers to make life very difficult for the colonial government to put pressure on to make it appear in the big cities at least that Northern Rhodesia, the colony, was becoming increasingly ungovernable. So they set up boot camps. They didn't want rock throwers to be sources of disruption. Once you set those kinds of things in motion it is very difficult to stop them. So they said we have got to do something to stop them. We have got to get them out of the way and get them out of the streets in the big urban areas, and we have also got to try to do something for them, to educate them, to prepare them for some kind of career. So they set up youth camps in remote places outside of the big cities. They shipped the kids that were active in the youth wing of the party at one time to these youth camps. They promised them vocational training and education, which they were not really very capable of delivering, so there was dissatisfaction. We used to go out to the youth camps a lot and show some documentary films and try to keep the kids entertained a bit and try to get them to understand what the United States was all about.

Q: Did you feel that both with the youth movement and with the trade movement that what you were doing really advanced the cause of the United States?

LAGAMMA: Well I was very fortunate in this regard. What I discovered when I went up to Zambia was that there was, first of all, no great understanding. There was a naïveté about the outside world and a lack of knowledge abut the United States. There was a reverence for John F. Kennedy and the civil rights movement in America and a deep sorrow over the assassination of Kennedy and later on, it wasn't yet the time of Martin Luther King's death, great identification with the American civil rights movement and the progress that was being made. There was an innocence in these kinds of first contacts, and there was a wonderful receptivity of us as outsiders to this place where there were no other diplomats. We weren't competing for the attention of people. They were somewhat in awe of what had happened to them and were trying to relate it to the wider world and then the United States. Because of what was happening in the U.S., because of John F. Kennedy and after his death the Great Society and the civil rights movement, there was a very positive feeling about the United States. In fact some of the Zambians that we knew had named their children Kennedy, as a given or first name.

Q: Were you picking up what particularly these two groups are talking about, the feeling towards the British?

LAGAMMA: Well, compared to their experience with the British we were a breath of fresh air. Because we didn't have colonial possessions in Africa. We had no track record to speak of, and we were identified with a very positive role of the independence movement in Africa to that point. So as America's reputation stood, it was regarded vaguely, not with any precision or great understanding or depth, but positively.

Q: Well then you left there when?

LAGAMMA: I left there about six months later. That was in 1965. There was a vacancy in Lubumbashi which was then Elizabethville, in the Congo, right across the border. So I made easy transfer steps by car, by road from Salisbury, Rhodesia to Lusaka, and then Kitwe, Zambia, where we lived for six months. Then when the word came there was a vacancy in the IO position in Lubumbashi, we just traveled across the Congolese border, about a three hour drive form Kitwe to Lubumbashi.

Q: Well you were in Lubumbashi from 1965 until when?

LAGAMMA: Until '67. It was a two year assignment.

Q: What was the situation there when you arrived?

LAGAMMA: Rather chaotic. The worst had passed. The secession of Katanga was over. Moise Tshombe, who had been the secessionist leader, had moved on. He ultimately had become prime minister of the entire country which is rather remarkable. Somebody that we thought had good political sense and was capable of bringing the country together by negotiating deals with other leaders around the country. I arrived to see the aftermath of the secession. Where there had been mercenaries, now there were UN troops. There is an important book by Conor Cruise O'Brien who had been the UN administrator up until the time I got there. It was called "Mercenaries and Missionaries." He more or less put them on the same footing. These were outsiders who meddled in the affairs of African society and disrupted things. The Congo was a place that was very different than Zambia. In Zambia what we found I described as innocence. A lot of people hadn't been touched too much by the outside world in Zambia. The impact of the outside world was in the big cities. But the people in the rural areas had a kind of innocence in terms of their contacts with the wider world beyond their borders. In Congo it was very different. The Congolese had been brutalized throughout their history. From the time of King Leopold, they had been terribly exploited as virtually slave labor for the rubber plantations up north and for the mines, and had been badly treated. And not well educated. So we found people that were very hard to relate to, that were very suspicious of outsiders, that had mental and emotional scars from their dealings in the past with the Belgians who were probably among the worst people to ever colonize another society.

Q: Your take on the Belgians, what was the problem with them?

LAGAMMA: Well there wasn't a sense of any kind of obligation toward the people that they had colonized. There was a sense of exploitation from the time of King Leopold and his handing over the administration of the Belgian Congo, the Belgian companies, the European companies for the exploitation of natural resources. For the rubber, for the ivory, for the copper in the south, and so at best it was highly paternalistic. The Belgians never really assumed that the Africans were capable of running their own lives.

Q: I heard there were only three college graduates or something like that and all were Belgian.

LAGAMMA: In 1960, that is right. Three college graduates in the Congo at the time of independence, three, four or five, something like that. A handful. The educational system was not designed to produce graduates. Mobutu was I think a corporal or a sergeant at the time of independence and then became general very quickly. There was a famous Belgian commander of the force, which was the local military at the time of independence, who stepped up to a blackboard in front of the Congolese soldiers, and he wrote the famous phrase, "Avant independence egalle après independence." Before independence equals after independence. No change, which set off a mutiny in the army that reverberated for some time. There wasn't a political class that related to each other. There were political leaders in various parts of the country, each of whom saw himself as a potential leader of the whole country, or of one of the provinces of that country, which some of them said should be independent of the whole. So they became kind of warlords.

Q: Well let's go to Lubumbashi. That had been Elizabeth...

LAGAMMA: Elizabethville. And it was parallel in some ways it was much like the Zambian copper belt where the Zambians would accuse the Belgians of digging their ore underneath the border. Mineshafts were ambiguous. It was a very mineral rich region of the Congo, the same basic mineral structures as Northern Zambia, only more so. We got our uranium for the first atomic bomb from there, from that region, from Shinkolobwe in Katanga during the war. And the copper mines were so rich that the slag heaps outside of Elizabethville were said to be richer than what Anaconda mined in the United States. So they wasted enormous amounts of copper because the richness of the ore was so great that they could just extract it very easily and leave behind what was mined.

Q: Was there a consulate or a consul general there?

LAGAMMA: There was a consul general there.

Q: Who was that?

LAGAMMA: Arthur Tienken was the consul general. He later became ambassador to a couple of African countries. Later on Bill Harrop was also consul general. It was a post that was considered to be very important. We were roughly 1000 miles from the capital with no good links between ourselves and the capital except by telegram.

Q: Well no before you got there, had the Simba movement and all had hit, where did it hit?

LAGAMMA: That was up near Stanleyville. There had been hostages and Americans killed. There was a Belgian rescue mission aided by the United States. We knew some of the people that had been held hostage who had moved on to Lubumbashi from Stanleyville. There was still an active rebellion going on along the lakes in Albertville. I went up there once at the request of the embassy to look the situation over. I took a film projector and generator and showed films in the evenings at some of the villages. After I came back I found out that I had been in Rebel territory, rebel areas without knowing it.

Oblivious to what was going on. I remember a CBS news team that came in. They wanted to film what was going on in that area, a fellow named Ted Yates and a colleague, one of whom was killed. They actually went up to that area and were embedded I guess we would say today with mercenaries, and came under attack from rebels. Actually they had both been former military, they picked up weapons and they helped the mercenaries.

Q: What was your work and what was sort of your audience that you were working with?

LAGAMMA: Well you mentioned earlier the importance that we gave to youth. That was one of my main priorities, to try to get to know the university students. I taught a course at the university in English, economic English. I got to know the university faculty from the vice chancellor on down. There was always a lot of trouble on the campus. The government would occasionally send troops and fire on students, that kind of thing. We arranged for a professor to teach there. We I organized a lot of gatherings for students at my home. I also worked with the press. There were daily newspapers, a radio station, to try to get news that was important to us on the air. As in Zambia, we also organized the local showing of the Kennedy film that USIS was showing downtown at the main theater in Elizabethville. We got the governor to attend, Munongo. We had a reception after. Munongo had been the minister of the interior in Katanga. The United States position was to work hard to end the secession of Katanga. That was Kennedy's policy. In that we succeeded. So I was very anxious to know what the governor, who was kind of a Machiavellian figure, thought of John F. Kennedy. So I asked him at the reception. He said to me, "He was a man who knew power." An interesting quote.

Q: Well you mention again and again these films. How did you feel, did they have any real impact or was this just a different world of entertainment or what?

LAGAMMA: Well it was a way of making contact, of entering in. It was an entertainment for people especially outside of the cities who knew nothing of the outside world. We had at that time two kinds of things that were very interesting for people in the interior. One was a series of Disney films on health that had been produced by Walt Disney for use in the third world. It talked about digging wells and making sure that you had clean water. It told people that there were bacteria that caused disease and how to prevent that disease. So those were very interesting. People would go up to the screen and look behind it to see where these images were coming from. They had never seen movies before. Some of them may have learned something from it; others may not have. But the main effort as far as films were concerned had to do with our own production unit in Kinshasa. This was rather remarkable. We had a documentary series being produced in Kinshasa, or that was Leopoldville when I first arrived, which was called The Congo Avants, The Congo to its way. We had a very talented film producer, documentary film guy, who was one of four people around the world who had won a competition to work for USIA and produce documentary films. One was in Asia; one was in Latin America; one was in Congo. I don't know where the other was. But probably the Middle East or something. We produced on about a month to month basis. We had quite a stock of them. They talked about things that were important to us. What you have to realize is the

United States had a big stake in a peaceful Congo, a Congo that removed itself from any possible Soviet or Chinese influence. And a Congo that was free from anarchy and united. This was very important to us. The Congo had been so fragmented since its independence. It had never been really united except by the colonial power. It was very important to us to get the message across, the theme of one of the films, in unity there is strength. This film for example, showed a Congolese chief who was having a council with his elders in a village around a fire. The chief passed around a bundle of sticks and asked each of his elders to try to break them, and they couldn't. And then he unbundled the bundle and broke each one individually, and said, basically, the lesson was: in unity there was strength. Well we made a film about that. We made a film about women paratroopers who were being trained in Kinshasa and who were jumping out of planes. It was crazy. We made films about the prime minister. When it was Tshombe we made them about Tshombe, when it was Mobutu, we made them about Mobutu. These films were sent all over the country. We had a stake in the unity of the Congo. We had a stake in the political process. We had a very big role in shaping the politics of the country. It was said that you could never buy a Congolese parliamentarian, you could only rent them. They were very corrupt, but we were engaged in trying to pull this country together in some way and in a way that was congenial to American interests in that part of the world because the Congo was kind of the keystone of Africa. It sits there surrounded by I think it is 11 countries, and it has an impact on the political situation in every one of those countries. If the Congo is unstable it sends out refugees in all directions. If the Congo is unstable, it unstablizes 11 other countries very often, or up to 11 other countries very often. So we had a feeling that we had a very strong policy of trying to unify the country under somebody who was compatible with U.S. interests in that part of the world.

Q: Were the Soviets, what were they up to?

LAGAMMA: The Soviets had largely been thwarted when the rebellion petered out. I mean they were not totally absent. The Chinese were more involved, I think, in gaining some kind of a foothold by supporting the Gazangas and the other rebel leaders. But it was always a great concern of ours that there could be Soviet influence in the Congo. And we were afraid, well for that reason, I mean Lumumba had been eliminated before my time, but there was still a legacy of Lumumba having been flown to Elizabethville by his enemies who then had him executed. Lumumba was the potential link with the Eastern Bloc. He sounded like his rhetoric was rather Marxist, and he was readily disposed and at one point had asked for Soviet aid.

Q: Well did you find yourself dealing with the press or Radio at all? How did you find that?

LAGAMMA: Well the media was very immature and not very professional. Of course I wasn't very professional either. I didn't have any journalist training. It wasn't very well written, and the people who were writing it weren't very well trained and did not have university education, and didn't have very much perspective. I guess I thought it was my job more than anything else to give them a sense of the world and international relations

and try to influence a bit the foreign affairs content and some of the editorial policies by just providing American perspective.

Q: Were we reporting very much on what was happening in the United States? Was that getting out. I mean this was the time of lots of civil rights.

LAGAMMA: Exactly. Much less so than had been my experience in Zambia, because we had the language barrier. As with any Francophone country, a to of what was happening in America was filtered through European media. So you have got the Belgian press and the French press that were being read, and the French radio, Radio France. That was the primary source of news.

Q: Well how did we feel about the European picture of America.

LAGAMMA: Well that was really my first encounter with it. In my previous two very short assignments in Rhodesia and Zambia, we didn't have a language barrier. We didn't really have the kind of French bias that you experience in this other world, very different world. It tended to be jaundiced; it tended to be more cynical about what was going on in America, less generous about the progress of the civil rights movement than we would have liked. Rather resentful of U.S. policy in Vietnam because Vietnam was beginning to loom on the horizon of American foreign policy as being important. So critical of U.S. foreign policy in the world. And critical of the U.S. role in Africa because after all we had seized an initiative in the Congo that we had never before taken in Africa. We were new to Africa. We were not experienced. We didn't have back in Washington a group of experts that knew the continent very well. We had Soapy Williams who was the assistant secretary for Africa at the time, who was very enthusiastic about his role as secretary for Africa but hadn't had very much background in it. He had been governor of Michigan.

Q: He seemed to see the rosy side of everything.

LAGAMMA: That's right. So as I said, the U.S. was new to Africa. The French especially resented us and our using our power to gain influence especially in a place like the Congo. And the Belgians too were resentful, because the Belgians regarded us as attempting to displace them.

Q: Well then how about the missionaries? From your perspective what role were they playing and how did we view them?

LAGAMMA: Missionaries were of several kinds. In Katanga and on up for a fair amount of country there were American missionaries, protestant missionaries, and there were Belgian Catholic missionaries, and those were very different kinds of missions. They were at odds with one another very often, very different attitudes. We had good relations with both of them but of a very different sort. For example, the Americans ran hospitals and schools, and they provided real services. The Belgians were there more for religious reasons.

Q: Ok, you were talking about the American missionaries ran hospitals and schools, and the Belgians seemed to be sticking more to the religious. How did this work? I mean from your perspective.

LAGAMMA: We were involved with the Americans because this was my first experience with scholarship programs. The Americans were running a high school just beyond the borders of Katanga, so Fantar province. They had candidates for an AID undergraduate program called ASPAL, the four year undergraduate program that AID ran. Since there was no AID presence in the southern part of the country, we were asked to take on the administration of the AID scholarship program. Since the American missionaries ran one of the best high schools in the country, we got a whole bunch of candidates. I think there were six that had won a scholarship to go to the United States. They actually came down to Lubumbashi for orientation in order to arrange to get passports and medical clearance and all that kind of stuff. These kids were right out of the bush. They had never been to a big city before. Lubumbashi had changed to Lubumbashi from Elizabethville in the middle of our tour, and all of a sudden was a metropolis for them. We found them housing with various missionary families in town, and proceeded down the path of trying to prepare them to go to the United States to study. We had a very interesting incident. One of the kids that we had come to know very well, because I used to see them every day and try to orient them to what this experience was going to be like for them, came to me shouting, his name was John Latemba. He is currently an official at the United Nations in Kenya. He said, "Mefi has been arrested." Mefi Engoy was the name of this young man. I said, "What happened?" He said, "We were in the market and all of a sudden there was an uproar. A Belgian lady had her purse stolen. In the confusion she pointed at my friend Mefi and said 'He did it.' They arrested him." So this kid who was about to have a life transforming experience earning this scholarship to the United States was under arrest and was in prison. Congolese prisons were not pleasant. So I spent the better part of three weeks trying to extricate him, and to let the police know that there had been a horrible mistake. At a certain point the consul general called me in and said, "Bob, you are to cease all such activity. The local government here is very angry that you are meddling in the judicial process. You are not to have anything more to do with this." Not being a very disciplined foreign service officer I said to hell with that. I went home and I got a local missionary to play the role that I had been playing and told him what to do and to stand up to this guy in court and testify to his good character. Well it came to the trial, and I went to see the magistrate and told him there has been a terrible mistake here. The trial began with the witness walking into the court room and pointing to the judge and the Belgian Lady shouting out, "He is the one. He did it," pointing at the judge. At which point the case was dismissed because all Africans looked alike to her obviously, and how could she possibly identify one. So our guy was set free, and we proceeded to help them prepare to go to the United States. We had to get a police release saying they had never committed any crime and had no record. Of course while he was in prison we couldn't very well get that. Now the reason that I mentioned that is some years later I traced the fate of several of the young boys that we had sent to the United States. Unfortunately we hadn't accomplished the purposes of the program which were to train people who would come back and help become leaders in their own country. Mefi turned out to be a professor of Chemistry in a college in Chicago.

He had earned a Ph.D. in the United States. John had become an American Citizen and also had earned his Ph.D. in economics in the United States and had gone on to be a UN official on Africa. I learned this from a third student who when I was assigned to South Africa 30 years later turned up in Pretoria as the U.S. Agricultural attaché to our embassy there. He had gone on to earn a Ph.D. at a Midwestern university in agronomy and had become a U.S. citizen, and was now an American diplomat. I think several of the others stayed in they United States. The problem was they were all from Kasai, and for many years to come there was great violence in that region. It probably saved their lived to come and study in America. My assessment is that it was good for us to have trained these people to become valuable citizens of the United States, that we really benefited from their presence and probably saved their lives from a place that would have destroyed them.

Q: How was the atmosphere in Lubumbashi? Was the government oppressive?

LAGAMMA: Well the government was very authoritarian. It was rather chaotic at times because there wasn't really very efficient administration of justice. The military police were very often out of control. Being American helped. If you were Belgian you might be in for more trouble because they really had something against the Belgians, and when you gave a weapon to a Congolese, you gave him an opportunity to exact a certain revenge. But we were rather exempt from that because they respected the United States for its role and its power, and also they regarded us with a certain amount of awe. Also they thought of us as having played a positive role, at least in that part of the country. So life wasn't bad for Americans in Lubumbashi at that time. When Mobutu became president, he became an authoritarian military leader. But that didn't mean they exercised very much control over the territory. There was a military governor in Lubumbashi at the time we were there, but not a very effective one.

I remember there was a fire in the central square of Lubumbashi that burnt down a lot of Lebanese shops. What happened thereafter was that these burnt down shops were knocked down, and there was going to be a renovation of the central square. The next thing we knew there was a great big hole in the center of the square. It went down maybe 50 feet. There was a sign. It said "Ici bientot en batiment de hiut etage." Here will soon be built a building of eight stories. That sign stayed there for some months. The rain season came and filled up the hole, so we had a lake instead of a building foundation. Then they finally took the sign down. I guess we thought perhaps it was a sign that they couldn't come up with the funding for the eight story building that they were going to put up there. Several weeks later there was a new sign in its place. "Ici bientot en batiment de seize etage." Here soon will be a building of sixteen stories. It was never built during my time. Before Mobutu came to power I remember there was another military ruler. He had been the hero of a battle, one of the only battles that the Congolese soldiers had ever been known up to that time to stand and fight against the rebels. I have forgotten his name. But when the rebels charged, there was nowhere to run, so the soldiers stood and fought and won the battle. He became famous as a military leader, and he became president, interim president after Tshombe and before Mobutu. I remember he came down on a formal visit. The whole town turned out to see him in the central square. Then Mobutu came, and all

of the women were given cloth for dresses with his image on it. Mostly the image was put on the woman's derriere for some reason. This is the way it worked out. You know great shouting and pageantry and marching through the streets of all the different organizations holding banners and things. Then I remember that Mobutu decided to bring a visitor to show that he was plugged in and presidents of other countries came to see him. So he brought into Lubumbashi the President of the Central African Republic, Bokassa, who later went on to be a butcher and a horrible …

Q: And later the emperor of the Central African Empire.

LAGAMMA: Exactly. So this little guy, pint sized dictator shows up. Actually he doesn't show up. People are waiting in the sun for him. A holiday is declared, and everybody is to line up downtown. We lived in an apartment in the downtown area, so we were out there taking pictures of all of the goings on. He was supposed to show up. The plane was delayed. He didn't come. People were standing there for hours in the noonday sun of the southern Congo. Finally he does show up, and he makes a prance and he waves at everybody and then he leaves. No speeches, nothing.

Q: Then you left there in '67.

LAGAMMA: I left in '67.

Q: Where did you go?

LAGAMMA: I came back to Washington to USIA. There was a surplus of officers around, and they didn't really know what to do with us. So they constituted a training program in USIA which was called phase 2, which was supposed to supplement the training we got as junior officers. It wasn't very well conceived. It was really kind of a timewaster, something to fill up time until we could be assigned. It was a two year program with a one year additional component. We were to make the rounds of USIA and learn about how films were produced, how VOA was done, how every part of our agency worked. This was useful in a sense that we got to talk with a lot of very interesting people to the extent that they had time for us and weren't doing their work. We were involved in some training over at State and FSI. Then after the first year or nine months we were put into various jobs for a month or two at a time. I remember I worked for the film unit at the old post office which was something out of a film itself, the old post office, our facilities over there. The film unit made documentaries including for Africa, which was interesting to me. I was made into a kind of assistant producer, and worked on a couple of films. One of them involved the career of Hugh Masekela, the trumpet player from South Africa who later married Marian Makeba, the famous South African singer. I went off to Malibu where he had his magnificent house. We followed him for several days and into a performance in a night club in downtown LA and made a very nice documentary. That was great fun. Then for the last part of my assignment I was assigned to VOA. I learned how to edit tape and how to produce news shows. That was a very interesting learning experience. Then I asked to be assigned to VOA and to the newsroom. For a year I wrote news for Africa. That was a great experience because it

was really formative for me. Any one of us in the foreign service believes that we are educated people who know how to write. I learned very quickly that college and graduate school had not prepared me to write very well. And that communication by radio was a great learning experience, to learn that what you wrote in the newsroom would be broadcast 15 minutes later to several million people was a daunting kind of experience. You had to be clear, and you had to write in a radio style which is very different than writing for publication. You had to be very concise in your use of words. It was the best thing I ever learned in the foreign service.

Q: Well did you find that your writing was for the Africans?

LAGAMMA: I was writing for the Africa desk.

Q: Did you find, one has heard stories of particularly both the middle east and the satellite, The Soviet satellite service, there are all sorts of feuds going on, different nationalities disagree or working for the Voice of America, I wouldn't think you would have…

LAGAMMA: No we didn't have that in the newsroom because we had a different kind of mandate. That may have been going on upstairs. I did know people in the Africa division of VOA where they had a House service and a Swahili service and a French service. I got to know some of those people. There may have been feuds among the different languages services. But our job was to produce five minute news programs at the top of the hour that were relevant for Africa. To do that we would mix world news, which had been produced by what is called the central desk, with African news. We would decide what is called the menu which is the order in which the reader would read the news. We would decide if the news of the Nigerian civil war came first, if it was important enough, or something out of Vietnam, or the civil rights movement at home, or something else having to do with American politics would lead the news. We put ourselves in the place of what we thought was our listener and tried to imagine what was important to them. We had no policy concerns as such. Our job was to deliver credible news in the style of the BBC. Only there was one big difference. I mean we did look at the BBC as a kind of model. I will say this heretical thing. I am sure our friends at the VOA will not agree with it, but if you want to go into broadcasting in Britain and you are very good, and you think of that as being a career, your first choice is the BBC. So the best people, they have the pick of the litter. If you want to go into broadcasting in the United States, you go into the networks if you are good enough to get in. So we were left with not the stars of the American firmament as far as broadcasting was concerned. One of the things that I was able to contribute, and we had frequent fights over it, was what to say to an African audience, what an African audience was interested in. I remember one of my colleagues at one time wanting to reject a story about Martin Luther King, and I think the march in Birmingham, because she considered him a rabble rouser. Why should we make this an important story for our African audiences? I would fight that kind of thing because there was a provincialism on the part of some of our writers who didn't understand. I had only been overseas for a couple of years, but they didn't really get the sense of what foreign

audiences were interested in or African audiences. That was more or less what I considered my job.

Q: How did we at that time what was the view you were getting from Voice of America USA of the Biafran war in Nigeria?

LAGAMMA: Well my sense first of all was that the Nigerian civil war was a terrible tragedy for all concerned. Secondly, that there was great sympathy among Americans for Biafra and its suffering and the starvation of the children which was partly true and partly propaganda of the Biafrans. I mean there certainly were a lot of starving children, but the Biafrans made sure that it was put in front of everybody and everybody's noses. There were a couple of different schools of thought on the Nigerian civil war. One was the same argument I made about the Congo: that it was important for an African country not to fragment, especially an important country like Nigeria. The other argument that you get was that these people had the right to self determination. They shouldn't be forced to be part of a country that they didn't feel they belonged in, and that this was a natural part of the process. Of course the feeling among Africans, and something that I had learned in my few years in Africa, was that once you start this process of dismemberment, where does it end? There were factions within Biafra who were not favorably disposed to the Ibos. They thought that the Ibos had brought this war on Biafra, upon eastern Nigeria, and they didn't want any part of it, that they wanted to be part of Nigeria. So where do you draw the line for those kinds of things. The other thing was there was a very heavy commitment on the part of the West and the British and the United States in eastern Nigeria. What I have come to learn with the passage of time to understand this better is that the easterners found the West to be very congenial to them. They had never organized themselves into any kind of a kingdom or an empire. The Hausa Fulani in the north had, and they were very centralized, and they had a sultan and an emir. They were highly structured. The Yoruba were somewhere in between. They had decentralized kind of kingdoms, but the Ibos never did. They were individualistic, and when the British landed on the coast, they were the first contact. They took to Western ways and Western culture and Western education. So you had highly educated, very westernized elite in eastern Nigeria. Chinua Achebe, the great writer is an Ibo. These were people that liked the West and felt that the West was a kind of lever against the Muslims in the north that were trying to dominate them, they were trying to Islamize their country, and who dominated the military. I mean that was the cause when the leaders were killed. The northern military stepped in. They dominated the officer corps and immediately there was an exodus of easterners from the north where a lot of them were commercial people. So the east was Christianized, heavily missionized. It was the most heavily educated part of the country. When I was assigned to Nigeria I got to know a lot of easterners. They use a phrase for the United States that I am sure they used even back then in the early 60's, "God's own country." They considered the United States to be the epitome of perfection in every way. It was where they wanted to go to study, to live.

Q: Well also this is a period that there is a group that moves around. I don't mean to be overly pejorative, but sort of the glitterati, the Hollywood stars, the rock stars, the intellectuals. They usually pick on, I mean they support the Sandinistas and various

places, and they really lit on Biafra which caused an awful lot of problems or a policy of trying to hold Nigeria together.

LAGAMMA: That is right. Well their cause was very effectively promoted. It wasn't so hard to promote it because these were people that had an identification with the West, and they tended to be very interesting people, very personable. Very into connections with Americans and Europeans, much more so than northern Nigerians or others in Nigeria. They were able to convey a sense of the suffering that was experienced by the eastern Civil war. They made the case that Biafra was an heroic little country striving to be free. Who could oppose that, especially since we had gone through the whole Wilsonian kind of sense of the inevitability of self determination of African nations. These people were free now from colonial powers, why couldn't they also be free from the domination of their own people.

Q: Yeah. It is strong, the whole idea of holding Africa together. It is a sensible policy in the abstract, but when you get to critique it sometimes it gets a little bit dubious.

LAGAMMA: Well yeah, but we mustn't forget one of the underlying causes of the civil war. Why did Biafra think that it could be as successful independent country. They knew that there was oil, and they knew that if they could attain independence, they would control that oil. That oil is now the number one source of energy from Africa.

Q: Well after a year about '69 or so, where did you go?

LAGAMMA: Well I had my year at the Voice of America which was '69, during the Nigerian civil war, which was a lot of our news. Then '70 to '71 I went to Boston University for a masters program. It wasn't supposed to be a degree program, but I went there for African studies.

Q: This is one of the major centers for African studies.

LAGAMMA: Boston University, yeah.

Q: I got my masters degree in history there back in '55.

LAGAMMA: Oh boy. Martin Luther King was going to school there too.

Q: I think so but he was a year before me.

LAGAMMA: He earned his masters in theology I think. They had one of the earliest African studies centers. I knew the director because he was a specialist in the Congo. He had come out during my time in Lubumbashi. I had gotten to know him and like him. His name was Christiano. He had been kind of a pioneer director of the African studies center. He encouraged me to go there. It was a wonderful year. I was free to study anything I wanted. It wasn't rigorous. I chose to do African studies, but when I went to see my advisor at the university he said, "No, you shouldn't limit yourself. You know a

lot about Africa already. You can study some Africa, but why don't you study Aristotle too? You know, become an educated person." So I did. I took a course in Greek philosophy and I took a course in public administration, which I thought might be useful because I knew nothing about public administration. Which foreign service officer among us does? It is a big gap I think. I did some courses on Africa. It was a glorious year. I took a course from a radical historian, Howard Zinn, who was a wonderful teacher. He has written a book called "A People's History of the United States." Which is opposition to the traditional views of history. By this time the Vietnam War had heated up. There were massive protest demonstrations in Harvard square and elsewhere that I witnessed. I took a course at Harvard. Two of the best people in the field at that time taught it collectively, together, Rupert Emerson and Martin Chilson, were wonderful teachers. It was a great year and all. I asked to stay on through the summer so I could finish up a degree, and I got my masters degree.

Q: Did you get any feel for how African studies from sort of the Boston perspective, how were they looking at Africa at the time?

LAGAMMA: Well I have stayed close to African studies throughout most of my career. I have known most of the academics who have been the leaders of African Studies at major campuses, at UCLA, at Northwestern, at Indiana. I have known a lot of them personally. I have sort of followed the ebb and flow of African studies. One of the interesting things I did that year was I went to the annual African Studies conference in Montreal. This was a time of great contention in the field. There was a strong argument on the part of African Americans that the field had been co-opted by conservative whites in America, and that they by virtue of their ethnic connection to Africa, African Americans were the authentic interpreters of Africa to Americans, to American students, to the American public. So there was a militant movement within the field of African studies. It manifested itself in Montreal as a takeover of the conference by strong-arm guys who were sent there by the militant African Americans to disrupt the conference and to insist on the assertion of certain militant demands in the declaration of the conference.

Q: What happened?

LAGAMMA: Well they were very successful in disrupting it, and for many years thereafter there was a battle over the leadership of the African studies association. This led to some compromises and the integration into the leadership of some of these more militant scholars. It became a little less militant once they became part of the mainstream.

Q: This was the time when black studies were also going.

LAGAMMA: Yeah, that is right. One of the demands was that African Studies and Black Studies should be linked in the minds of a number of African Americans on campuses. And that more black Americans should be hired to teach African history, African politics, than had been the case before. So there was a growing set of demands that the academic community, as far as African studies is concerned, should be, if not dominated, at least should have African Americans as major members of that community.

Q: Well this is complicated to a certain extent by gender studies. I think later on what I gather is you don't find too many men teaching what I guess they call gender studies.

LAGAMMA: It is a bit different in that we are talking about the study of a very sizable part of the world that had not come into being or existed previously in the form of studies of colonial Africa. That was a major field in Great Britain and to a lesser extent the United States in places like Boston, Indiana, and Northwestern which had African studies programs. This was a kind of a takeover or attempt at a takeover by a surging minority in the United States that believed that it was the proper interpreter of Africa. There are connections with women's studies, sure.

Q: It was probably more subtle I think in the gender studies because you had a lot of women…

LAGAMMA: Well gender studies though was kind of a new field, where as African studies had existed.

Q: Was there say on your side and others who were dealing with Africa, was there a growing sense of disillusion about these new African states that were coming up, the extent of the corruption and military takeovers. Had this hit you?

LAGAMMA: Not yet. I mean one of the things that I now look back on with a certain surprise is that it hadn't hit yet. In fact American academics were still very optimistic about Africa. They hadn't been terribly disillusioned by the Nkrumahs or the Sekou Toures or the failures of some of the leaders to achieve their goals. The feeling was that there hadn't been enough time yet.

Q: How about as people were talking, what was sort of the conventional wisdom of what was going to happen in South Africa?

LAGAMMA: Having served in South Africa after majority rule, after Mr. Mandela became president, I was elated because all those years previous to change in South Africa, I was firmly convinced that it probably wouldn't happen in my life time. That was certainly true in 1970-'71. The sense was there was going to be a bloodbath one day in South Africa and that there was not going to be a happy ending to the story and that race oppression was probably going to continue for some time.

Q: Yeah, I can recall, I was in Africa INR dealing with the horn of Africa back in '60-'61 or so, and there the impression was that there was going to be a night of the long knives. That seemed to be the only solution.

LAGAMMA: We saw the Mau-Mau in Kenya years before. There certainly was going to be a lot of violence. I was very disappointed throughout that period, well up until majority rule happened in South Africa, by the reluctance of the American government to do more at least in terms of lip service and identifying with the majority of South

Africans and talking about our values and what we hoped to happen. I guess it took the greatest form of disappointment when Ronald Reagan was president and when Chet Crocker was Assistant Secretary. We talked about having to support our old friends who were with us during the Second World War. Of course half of them were on the side of the Nazis. Reagan exaggerated greatly. And the fact that he vetoed legislation to impose sanctions on South Africa because we would hurt the people there while the ANC was calling for sanctions and saying the hell with that, we need our liberation. The Congress overrode the veto which gave us some argument that at least the American people were behind it. The fact was that we refused for a long time to identify with the oppressed majority. I think this will be held against us for at least a generation among those South Africans who had hoped for better from us.

Q: In your studies were you getting any feel for the French, the Francophone area?

LAGAMMA: Yeah, I had a wonderful professor, probably still at Boston named Gustan. He was a Belgian who knew the Congo very well, better than I did even though I had been there a couple of years. He had written extensively on the Belgian role in the Congo, but also had a good sense for the French role in Africa. The French were always far more widespread, many more colonies. For Belgium it was the whole game. The Congo was the only real colony they ever had of any size. It was to be exploited. They had their own peculiar system. Here was a small country divided itself by tribalism…

Q: The Walloons and the Flemish.

LAGAMMA: …who was ruling a big country they couldn't ever effectively manage. With France it was different. France is a powerful country which had a long colonial history. It had its own philosophy about the world.

Q: This is tape 3, side 1 with Bob LaGamma.

LAGAMMA: So it meant these French colonies, former French colonies together even after independence had their link to Paris, their link to French culture, their personal links with French political leaders, and their link to the French language. All of that served to differentiate them from the Anglophones who were largely regarded as kind of adversaries and competitors. The Nigerians after all were the 800 pound gorilla in Africa, the most populous and potentially the wealthiest and potentially the most dominant. The Francophone Africans looked to France as a kind of protector in many ways against a number of things. Against the insurgency within their own countries, threats of military coups. There were coups in Francophone Africa, but not in the most important colonies. For the longest time the French made it clear there would be no coup d'etat in Cote D'Ivoire, in Senegal, and in Gabon. Gabon for its oil, Senegal because it was kind of the centerpiece of French colonization, the one that they had the best relationships with, and Cote d'Ivoire because of its well rounded economic development up until a certain point was really a successful colony. Actually Senegal was more prosperous than Cote d'Ivoire, and that leads me to where my next assignment was, Cote d'Ivoire. I went to Ivory Coast after Boston University, after being disappointed. My assignment while I was

in Boston was to have been Conakry, Guinea, where I was assigned as PAO. But what I learned several months after that, after I sent my shipment off to Guinea, was that the Ambassador would not concur. I don't know who he was at that time, but he decided that an African American PAO in Conakry would be much more credible and would give him much better access to the country's leadership. Therefore they took the cultural affairs officer out of Cote d'Ivoire and sent him to Conakry, and sent me as CAO to Cote d'Ivoire, Abidjan.

Q: So you were in Cote d'Ivoire from '70…

LAGAMMA: '70 to '72.

Q: How did you feel at that time about the attitude of the Nixon administration towards Africa?

LAGAMMA: I don't think I ever had any strong feelings except that I was not very fond of Nixon as President of the United States because of many policies. I don't think that Nixon gave very great attention to Africa, and that was always one of the problems. We were always fighting to be recognized and to get some resources and to get some attention on the 7th floor or the White House. Of course one of the measures of how importantly a president regarded Africa was how much aid he could get the Congress to appropriate. I don't think it was very high under Nixon. It really fell from the level of Democratic enthusiasm under Kennedy at the time of independence. It was more or less continued by Johnson, the high level of interest. It fell from that high plateau. I remember finding a notebook of one of my predecessors in a desk when I went out as PAO. It covered the period of the early 60's. It was kind of a diary of important American visitors. This was actually in Togo some years later. But what he recorded was an incredibly high level of visits from people like Bobby Kennedy, to important civil rights leaders, to Soapy Williams, to major American political and social and cultural figures. Duke Ellington came out to Africa at that time. It was I don't think ever equaled in ensuing decades. We had given a high level of attention to Africa during the Democratic administrations of Kennedy-Johnson. Under Nixon it was given a much lower priority. But in Ivory Coast it didn't matter much because we never had much of a presence in Francophone Africa. We didn't much care. We more or less conceded the lead to the French.

Q: I was going to say going to the heart of Francophone cultural French dominance to be the American cultural affairs officer sounds like a non starter for a job.

LAGAMMA: No it wasn't, not at all. Because Ivory Coast wasn't the jewel in the crown of French colonialism. It became the jewel in the crown of French post-colonial experience. Senegal was always the leader up until 1959, on the eve of independence in Ivory Coast, when they opened the canal that created the great port of Abidjan. It was at the time of the end of French colonialism that all of a sudden Abidjan became the most important port in West Africa for the French. It became the opening for the agricultural boom that took place in the next decade, and incredible development and great prosperity

ensued. Then it became the focal point for the French. It became the focus of assistance in the form mostly of technical assistance and personnel. They sent an unprecedented number of what they call assistance technique people to help run the ministries and to help man the schools from the university on down to the secondary schools to staff the faculty. I think if you look at the comparison between the British Raj in India, which was the jewel in the crown of the British empire, and compared it to the French in post colonial Ivory Coast, you would find at least per capita far more Frenchmen running that country, the Ivory Coast, than were running India for the British. They just poured in a tremendous amount or resources and they ran the country. There was no one there to stop them because they were needed. Unlike in Senegal where you had highly trained people who were capable of managing ministries and running things, the Ivory Coast people were much less educated. They were again a little bit like the Congolese only not quite in that state. They really had fairly little contact with the outside world until their prosperity of the 60's began. The French made it a major interest, but there was friction between ourselves and our French counterparts. Our French counterparts being much more numerous, they had a huge cultural center; we had a small library. But we were the superpower, and they weren't, so there was always a rub there. There were always Ivorians who were interested in the United States when the French didn't want them to be. They were interested in the civil rights movement. They were interested in our educational system. At one point the minister of finance who later became the prime minister, sent one of his key staffers to my office who said, "Mr. LaGamma, we have been looking into our needs for the future, and we would like to sent 100 Ivorians to the United States to study management to earn MBAs." He said, "You know our finance minister has been ambassador to your country, and one of the things he notices is that the French that want to get ahead in business and management come to your country. So why should we sent our students to France?" He said, "We would like 100 scholarships please." I said, "Well AID has a program and we maybe can get some in there and maybe we can get a couple of others through our Fulbright program but 100 sounds a little odd." I queried Washington and they said, "It sounds a little odd. No way are we going to do that." They financed it themselves. They sent them to the Thunderbird School, they sent them to Harvard management for MBAs. They sent them to the best schools in the United States. They trained them in English before they sent them, and they arranged for programs in the United States to give them intensive English. It was a vastly successful program that led later on to these people being called Les Americains. And staffing most of the key positions in government ministries. I don't know where they are now, probably working for the UN or something because of the chaos in the Ivory Coast. But it dramatized the tension between an affinity for French culture and affinity for American, the United States We had one great friend at the university in Abidjan who was head of the English department. His name was Bernard Didier. He was a novelist who had written a book, critical of the United States, called "Patron a New York," Boss of New York. But he became a great friend of ours because he was attempting to introduce African literature into the curriculum at the university, Francophone African literature. Anglophone, he was head of the English department, in Anglophone African literature. He wanted to teach the Nigerian authors, and the French didn't want that to happen. It was kind of regarded as a threat to the dominance of French culture. If you could have Wole Soyinka being taught as a paragon of literature, what does that mean about Moliere

in the eyes of students? Here is an African. He is right next door, potentially a Nobel Prize winner. He wasn't then, but he was regarded as a great writer. So he was source of inspiration to African students, but he couldn't get them to accept the idea of teaching African literature. We worked out an arrangement because of his interest in African literature, and this was very unusual, with works of the African writers series. I got multiple copies of every novel written by an Anglophone Africa writer from Ghana, From Nigeria, from Tanzania, and I put them on our shelves, and he encouraged his students to come and read them, and we couldn't keep anything on our shelves. And this was in blatant conflict with our own policy of only having American works. But we wanted students to think of our library as a source of Anglophone culture, no matter where it was coming from. The other thing he said was he couldn't get them to allow him to teach African literature. He introduced Theodore Dreiser into the curriculum. He introduced other American authors. He began teaching American literature which was something that they would permit him to do as something that wasn't quite as subversive as the African literature he wanted to teach.

Q: Had there been a body of French colonial African literature or not?

LAGAMMA: Yes, there was. I mean obviously there was Senghor, the President of Senegal. There were novelists from Mali, a number of novelists from Senegal itself, Sembene, "God's Bits of Wood." There were novelists from a number of different countries, Congo Brazzaville. Dan Whitman knew some of them when he was there. Yes there are a fair number, but not as many as from Anglophone Africa because they hadn't been as well educated on the whole. You see, the literature that had been written by Francophone Africans had mainly been written with a French Audience in mind. It was kind of an exotic literature that would help explain people that the French didn't know very well. In Nigeria and other Anglophone countries the main readership of novels was by Nigerians and local people, and in fact there were big debates about that, but the Meecha market literature written by the Yugos was sold very cheaply for a few pennies in the marketplace. It was like during the time of Dickens, popular literature in England. There was a big debate in East Africa about the use of English literature and wouldn't it be better to use Swahili. People started writing in Swahili, mostly in Kenya and Tanganyika, Tanzania, for their own people, but if you look at the readership of Francophone African literature it was mostly in France.

Q: In a way and probably showing my prejudice, I would imagine that if you are writing in French and if it were a francophone country there would be sort of an attempt to trot their stuff to the intelligentsia in France which is mostly unreadable to the normal citizen of France.

LAGAMMA: The readership was not only in France, it was the intelligentsia of the Francophone world. That included neighboring Francophone countries where there had been French trained intellectuals who had the same kinds of interests as the French readers so they also were interested.

Q: I am getting to a certain strata of society which is not popular.

LAGAMMA: Yeah. But the Nigerians, people like Ekwensi were enormously popular and sold great huge numbers of books and were writing for relatively uneducated people, people who were obviously literate but were not necessarily university trained.

Q: Telling stories.

LAGAMMA: Telling stories, yeah. "My life in the Bush of Ghosts" for example which was an irrational novel by a guy who had a very traditional background writing for his own people.

Q: Did you find you clashed with the French? Were you on speaking terms with the French cultural types?

LAGAMMA: It was on and off again. I didn't care for the mentality in Abidjan which was very arrogant. The French thought they owned everything. They though they were still running the place. They were in all key positions like the ministry of education which I had to deal with. So when I went to the ministry of education I might speak to an African official but they had a Frenchman right there by his side to make sure I wasn't committing to something that the French wouldn't like. I had an experience with a guy who was a French official in the cultural ministry. He came to me once and he asked if he could put on a production of a Eugene Ionesco play in our library. I was very puzzled about it. I said, "We don't usually do this kind of thing, a French play." He said, "We just want to use the space. We will do all the work. Can we just borrow your space to put on this play?" I said, "Sure why not. We will have an audience here. It will be a cultural event. Sure, there is no reason why we can't lend you the space. It is not being used for another purpose that evening, and you are going to do all the work right?" "Sure we will send out all the invitations. We will invite the audience. We will handle the physical arrangements. You don't have to do anything." OK. Well it turns out that he had been refused the right to do this play at the French cultural center. A couple of weeks after we agreed, he came to my office with his tail between his legs and said, "Mr. LaGamma, I am terribly sorry, I am going to have to withdraw our request to have our play at your cultural center." I said, "Why?" "Because the French embassy has told me that if I do it there they will kick me out of the country. They will fire me." It turned out that this play was not regarded by the French government as being very flattering to French culture or the French government. They refused to allow it to be done. They turned it down at their own cultural center and they would be damned if they would allow the Americans to be the host for this play. That is the kind of thing that would go on. That demonstrates again how important culture was to them. But we did a lot of things in Ivory Coast that were a lot of fun to do and were ground breaking, never had been done before. I think I was probably the most activist CAO that they had had. I started a program called the international camp counselors program. And this was something that a French professor brought to me. He said, "I have done this in France. I have taken French university students to the States where they have acted as camp counselors for the summer. I would like to do it here. But there are some wrinkles on it, and we need your help. So I said, "Ok what is the nature?" The YMCA has an international program where they bring

students from around the world to work at their camps throughout the country. It is a big network. We worked on the program together. And we got 30 university students out of about 100 who applied. We interviewed them all. They were mostly English majors, so their English was usually pretty good. We interviewed them for their English capabilities and general personalities. Would this person be good with American kids? Did they have the necessary skills? One of the things we found is that African kids in general, the exception were the women, but the men were almost all like American Indians. "Can you lead a hike in the woods?" "Of course, I grew up in the forest. We did that all the time. We used to go hunting." "Can you make a fire?" "Of course, we make fires all the time" "Can you tell stories?" "Well yes, maybe there could be a problem with the language, but we tell fables all the time. It is part of our culture." That was just an oral tradition. "Can you do anything with sports?" "Well I played soccer for the university team," which means that he is much better than any American university student. On the soccer field. "What else can you do?" "well we hunt with bows and arrows." I mean it was like they were out of central casting, these kids. They were highly motivated because they knew that with their OK English they could get a start at an American camp, and by the end of the summer they would be fluent, or else they would die. It was sink or swim. You had to learn the language because you are completely surrounded. There were no French speakers at the camp. Then the trick was how do you afford passage to the United States? And that was easy because Ivorian students were all on scholarships, and they even got for the summer months money to tide them over. So we said OK, that money that you are getting, you put it toward your airplane ticket, and we will match it. So it was like a couple of hundred dollars they had and a couple of hundred we had, and it made for a round trip airplane ticket. Then there was the orientation. We spent a lot of time with them, and with the French professor. They put on plays in English for the American school, so they could work on their English. We gave them cultural orientations on what to expect. I had worked as a camp counselor, so I knew what they were heading into. Then we arranged with the YMCA to give them a three week tour of the United States at the end of their camp counselor season which coincided with about the time they would have to return to university. So they got a look at one region of the United States. They got to choose, New England or the Mid Atlantic states, New York, Philadelphia, or all that. They came back incredibly Americanized, loving their experience because how can you not like that kind of experience. It was a summer of pure fun, learning, getting to understand the United States. They were students of English, and they were all sophomores or juniors so they were continuing their study, and they could use their English. They all brought books back with them, American literature. It was a tremendously successful program. The next year we got 400 applicants, and we sent 40. After I left, it continued for 10 years. So we had about 500 university students that had a summer in the United States, and it was probably a more formative experience than if they had gone there for university or graduate school.

Q: Oh sure, if you can catch them at that age and put them in where they are mixing as opposed…

LAGAMMA: And they all want to go back. Over half of them wanted to go back for a second time.

Q: Did you get any feel for people who had been trained in the United States there? Were they finding themselves frozen out if they tried to get jobs?

LAGAMMA: Absolutely. American degrees were not highly regarded. That was one of the things we tried to work on. What was the equivalent of an American doctorate. In the Ivory Coast the French were very rigid about not accepting American doctorates as the most advanced degree. They wanted the equivalent of a Doctorate which involved producing the equivalent of a 1000 page book. It was after what was called the Doctorale of the troisieme cycle in the French system which was like a kind of fancy masters degree, which had involved course work. But the Doctorale d'etat was something with the production of a major work in the field that you had to publish. So there was no such thing as equivalent. But we tried to make them develop an understanding in the ministry of education in the Ivory Coast that a doctorate from an American university was to be taken very seriously. And that they shouldn't automatically assign equivalency. They should look at what the person did in the course of studies and what that university was, and if it were a reputable university, one of the top 100 universities in America, then they certainly should accord it the right to teach at the university level. We brought over an education person that was assigned to UNESCO to talk about equivalency at the university for a couple of weeks.

Q: What was the impression of Houphouët-Boigny?

LAGAMMA: He was very authoritarian, but he was regarded as enlightened. He was an authoritarian guy who was doing great things for the economy of the country and thereby for the people. He was getting lots of French assistance for the Ivory Coast. His main raison d'être was his economic accomplishments, the growth of the economy. It was probably the highest level of growth in Africa at the time. It was a success story, and he was presiding over it. In the work that I do now with democracy, I haven't deviated one inch from what I felt then, which was different from what our embassy felt, or the department felt about the Ivory Coast. I thought of the Ivory Coast as a country that was so dominated by the French that it wasn't capable of making decisions in the interest of its own people. I thought it was an authoritarianism that had developed no institutional framework that would sustain it after Houphouët left power. That has proven to be true. I can cite a number of ideas I have had over the course of the years about Africa that haven't proven true. But this one has. I was firmly convinced that as long as he was in power the thing would hold together. Once he departed power he had subverted any alternatives to himself and his system. That is what happened in the Ivory Coast. I mean the parliament was a rubber stamp. The judicial system was totally in his hands to influence as he wished. There were no opposition parties. There was no free press. There was no civil society of any consequence. So he was everything.

Q: Who was our ambassador while you were there?

LAGAMMA: John Rouse. A very fine aristocratic character. Very I think, well liked and respected.

Q: I knew John Rouse because he ran the senior seminar when I was in it, '74-'75.

LAGAMMA: Yeah I guess I liked him very much. I didn't necessarily agree with him. I mean I was only the CAO, what did I know. I got into trouble once and he sort of helped me out. When I had been in the United States previously I lived in Arlington. I had a neighbor who was a civil rights worker, I didn't know very well, but we would exchange greetings. One night he invited me to his house for dinner. We had a pleasant evening at the end of which he gave me something for my car's bumper. It was a peace symbol. I thought that is fine, I believe in peace. So I took it and put it on my car. That is the time when Vietnam was on. It was early in the Vietnam war. I hadn't gone to Boston yet and we hadn't had the big protest. So I thought it was innocuous enough, but I had that car shipped out to Africa. One day the DCM saw it in the embassy parking lot. He ordered me to have it removed. I said, "I will not. If you can indicate to me or provide any evidence that this affects my work or standing in the community aside from your own disapproval, then I will take it off. But I don't think that anybody has taken note of it and assumed that I am an opponent of my government because of it." So he was going to have me shipped out. Rouse wasn't there at the time, there was a chargé. There were inspectors there from Washington. I asked to see the inspectors. By some luck they were enlightened guys. They told him to knock it off. That this would be a bigger problem if he persisted. So he did.

Q: What was social life like there?

LAGAMMA: I don't think I was in the center of it. I had some Ivorian friends at the University, a British friend at the British Council. I spent a lot of time with university students. We had a house on a hillside and we would invite them and show films. We had classic American films and we would show Casablanca and stuff like that. I had a movie screen that was about 20' by 20' I would set it up on the hillside. It was like a drive-in movie. I think we may have caused some accidents down on the road below because cars would go by and they would try and watch the movie. We would get 100 students at a time. They would come and hang out with us and talk to us. Students at university in Francophone Africa tended to be in their early to mid 20's, up until 27-28, so they were about my age.

Q: Was there a university, a lot of university Marxists as there so often are in universities?

LAGAMMA: Sure.

Q: Did this cause problems?

LAGAMMA: No not in the Ivory Coast because they were marginalized. The Ivory Coast was considered a success story so there wasn't a lot of traction for Marxism at the time. There were in other countries but not so much in the Ivory Coast. So radicalism was not a feature of Ivorian society. What was considered subversive were ties with

Americans, ties with the civil rights movement, ties with other Africans who were radical. The Ivorians were trying their best to discredit the legacy of Nkrumah, saying that is the wrong path. The biggest single story you hear about their path to capitalism was a story about Sekou Toure. Sekou Toure had been a trade union leader in guinea and had broken with the French in 1957. He was the one leader that decided that he wouldn't participate in this new community that was being produced after independence. He said I want immediate independence, in 1958. The French pulled the telephones from the wall and they left, they left nothing behind. Guinea suffered, and became a radical Marxist state, nationalist state. The story was told in the Ivory Coast that Houphouët had said, "Poor Sekou Toure, he will never again walk on the Champs Elysees." That was the ultimate.

Q: I am looking at the time, but I think it is probably a good place to stop. We will pick this up the next time, is there anything more you would like to talk about the Ivory Coast?

LAGAMMA: It was a place where I developed an interest in African art. It had one of the richest traditional cultures of any African country. It had something like 40 different ethnic groups. Each with their own language, usually not understandable. And their own artistic traditions. Ivorian art, especially Baoulé art, is really at the top of my preferences for African art. The diversity in that small country is amazing. I began collecting African art. A little man would come by the house with a bag. A little man with a beard who looked like some of the objects in the bag. And he would have all kinds of junk some of which had been buried in his back yard to make it look old. It was there that I developed a taste for African art. Over the years it is still one of the things that I enjoy most, going to museums. My daughter is the Africanist at the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Q: Well Bob, we will pick this up where did you go when you left Cote D'Ivoire?

LAGAMMA: I left Cote d'Ivoire in '72. I came back to Washington. No, I am sorry I missed a whole chapter. I decided my experience in the Ivory Coat was disappointing in terms of the relationship I had with my boss the PAO, and with the home office, the African Bureau, office of African Affairs. I said, "I want out. I want to go somewhere else. They have been talking about the need to diversify one's career, OK, I will buy into that." I would like to go to Europe. There was an opening in Milan, and I applied and got the job. After which the office of African Affairs was very disappointed because I had had a year of African studies. Well I had the tour in Africa following that, and I was going to come back to Africa and spend most of my career there, but I wanted to try something different, so I went to Milan.

Q: OK so we will pick this up in 1972 when you are off to Milan.

LAGAMMA: I am off to Milan and then Florence after that.

Q: OK today is 5 October 2007, and Bob you wanted to add something to what we had done previously I think.

LAGAMMA: I wanted to add that the highlight of my tour in the Congo was the birth of our first child, who has gone on to be an Africanist herself, in Lubumbashi. She was born in 1967, Lisa. By the time we moved to Milan, which is the next chapter in my foreign service career, we had a son, York. He was the second of five children.

Q: All right we will be touching on the LaGamma dynasty form time to time. You were in Milan form when to when?

LAGAMMA: I was in Milan from ’72 to ’76.

Q: OK, could you talk a bit about sort of the political, economic, cultural situation in Milan when you were there to begin with, then we will talk about what you were doing.

LAGAMMA: During my previous tour we had gone on R&R to Italy. In the course of that, the place we really wanted to visit, which was Florence, my wife and I stopped in Milan overnight. In the course of that overnight stop we walked down to the Emanuele past La Scala and into what seemed to me a fascinating world both culturally and intellectually. I stopped in a book store where there was a very lively debate going on over a recently published political work. It seemed like a place where ideas were important, and that is the way it turned out. Milan was the intellectual center, I think, of Italy in that part of the 20th century. We learned that it had been the birthplace of both Italian communism and Italian fascism. A lot of the radical ideas that were circulating in Italy had their origins in Milan or had their leading exponents based in Milan. So this was an exciting challenge. I remember getting a cable from my boss who was the branch PAO telling me what a fast moving sophisticated environment I would be working in. This gave me a chuckle because coming from New York City I thought I was used to a fast moving, sophisticated environment. So the one problem was I didn’t have the time to go back to Washington to study Italian. My assignment was predicated on my doing half-time study for about a year while I was working. So that first year was half devoted to learning Italian and half devoted to me getting up to speed at work. It was a grab bag of doing everything.

Q: Bob I would like to bring you back to my original question. What were the politics of Milano and the environment?

LAGAMMA: Yes, the politics of Italy at the time were very interesting. Eurocommunism was on the rise.

It was very strong communist-socialist alliance in Milan that eventually came to be the ruling city government and regional government. Our policy was to take our distance from that attempt on the part of the far left in Italy, principally the communists but with some socialist allies, to show there was a compatibility with Italian policy towards the United States. We made every effort to show our friendship to our traditional allies, the Christian Democrats and other parties in the center-right part of the spectrum and some on the left but not strongly allied to the communists and socialist alliance. So it was an exciting time. There were only two of us there for USIS, but we had a magnificent

cultural center on Villa Vicci which was staffed with a superb Italian foreign national staff. We were housed in the lower levels of a school of Romante palace, former palace. We had a magnificent entry with columns in the renaissance style with a courtyard and a garden in the back and a magnificent library, and a program space downstairs. We had a traditional cultural program. We had American musicians coming to Europe offering their services gratis in exchange for having a platform to perform. We had many resident American artists who would offer to show their works. The only problem there was the selection and choosing of good people and keeping out some of the more mediocre ones and not stirring up a lot of controversy. That wasn't always easy. We had the major press institutions of the country based in Milan, Corriere della Sera, La Stampa in Turin which we were covering also. The Il Sole 24 Ore which was the economic Wall Street Journal of Italy, and many of the magazines. Many of the equivalent of Time and Newsweek magazines were based in Northern Italy. We were also responsible in the economic sector, programming on trade and investment issues and relations between the United States and Europe on the economic front. We also had in our district the military base at Vicenza which we were responsible for to make sure they kept out of trouble and out of the news, and that there was no bad publicity coming out of that. We did a lot of NATO related stuff. We organized regular trips to NATO in Brussels for briefings for Italian editors. We took them to places like Vienna for the MBFR, for briefings on that. We took them to Geneva for briefings on the SALT talks. We took them to Germany to take a look at the east-west confrontation in Germany. We took them to military bases along the border of East and West Germany so that they could see what was at stake. My very favorite, that we did frequently, was we took them on trips to carriers underway in the Med. We flew out on the Cods that carried the mail to the sailors, and did that arrested landing which was one of the most spectacular events of my life. You look down and see a little postage stamp, and them it becomes an aircraft carrier, and then you land on it, and get pulled up by these arresting instruments. You get off the plane and you are in a world of 5000 people. One of the striking things I remember was getting off that plane and finding the 10 journalists with me were being covered by the media of the carrier itself. They had a TV crew out there because we were news, and it was being broadcast live to the members of the crew. We were also on the front page of the newspaper which was published that evening. I got a copy of it showing our arrival on the aircraft carrier. I remember the first time I got to sleep in the admiral's cabin because the admiral was not on board and the cabin was empty. They said, "Who is the leader of this group?" I raised my hand instantly and they said, "OK you stay in the admiral's cabin." I got to see the phantoms taking off at night from the position of the admiral's chair. It was really an extraordinary period in Italian-American relations. John Volpe was our ambassador. He brought with him the policies of the Nixon administration and also his own particular spin on Italian American relations having been an Italian-American of immigrant parents. From Abruzzi. He was very folksy and very warm and people liked him for that, but he wasn't the polished diplomat that my next ambassador, Richard M. Gardner, was. And intellectually there was amazing contrast between John Volpe and Richard M. Gardner.

Q: One of the problems I have heard is that when you as so often is the case the sons of Italian immigrants becoming ambassadors, they make their money and all and they want to go back. And they often go back speaking to particularly to Roman ears an

incomprehensible hillbilly dialect I am told that some of these ambassador the public relations public affairs people had a problem.

LAGAMMA: I will give you an example of that. John Volpe was not just an immigrant's son. He had become a fabulously successful businessman in Boston, Massachusetts. He had been governor of Massachusetts and a cabinet secretary under Nixon and was a Republican powerhouse. So that won him respect. He was not just an immigrant boy; he was a self proclaimed success story of what the immigrant experience could be translated into in the context of America. So this was a kind of baggage that he brought that made him a respected figure. On the other hand what you said was entirely correct. John Volpe spoke not Italian but dialect. He spoke, ___ He spoke it rather fluently but to most Italians it was broken Italian. It was not sophisticated Italian, it was not the Italian of the educated man. He also frequently made references to his immigrant background and the reasons for which his father and mother left Italy, namely that they were starving and had nothing to eat but olives, and they decided to go to the new world where they found a land of opportunity and the streets were paved with gold. This was a speech he made over and over again and it was a wonderful speech for anybody that believes in the American dream. It was not a very appropriate speech for anybody that remained behind in Italy and who were proud of the kind of new Italy that was about to achieve what has been called the surpasso. At that point in Italy the economy was about to outstrip that of Great Britain. And they were enormously proud of their recent accomplishments. Up until WWII, despite Mussolini's pretensions, Italy had been an agrarian society without much institution based in the modern world. The economy was very backward. They set off to war with mules pulling their artillery. And that kind of thing. After the second war, Italy became part of modern Europe. We were in the 70's when that was in full course. So the message that the ambassador was sending about modern Italy didn't resonate very well. Especially in the north where I was. To cite the example that I was going to cite, John Volpe in 1976, the year of our bicentennial, wanted to make a tour outside of Rome We proposed a schedule for him, we the consulate with some input from USIS. One of the things we proposed is he give a bicentennial speech at the Casa Manzoni, Manzoni being the Shakespeare of Italy. Milan was his home town. There is a wonderful historical landmark, which is the house of Manzoni, that has been very beautifully preserved. It is a crossroads for intellectuals and people with a sense of Italian history and a sense of Manzoni and his role in the unification of Italy. So we arranged for an illustrious gathering of the 300 most important people in Milan, editors, politicians, opinion makers to hear the ambassador speak on a theme related to the American bicentennial. My boss, Walter Wells, was an Italophile, and he knew a great deal about Italian history. He wrote a magnificent speech about the influence of the Italian enlightenment on the French, on Rousseau and how that affected the American Constitution, especially Cesare Beccaria's essay on cruel and unusual punishment, which went right into our constitution, and those kinds of ideas which were influential on the French during the enlightenment and therefore influenced Jefferson and all the others. He made all the connections historically and wrote a very eloquent speech for the ambassador and which we dutifully sent to Rome a couple of days before he was supposed to come up. So on July fourth or fifth, I don't remember the precise day, he was in the Casa Manzoni before this group of very bright, sophisticated northern Italians. Volpe begins reading this wonderful speech, and

about one page through it he is sort of stumbling over some of the big words. He puts it down and, as he did so often, he said, "Ladies and Gentlemen, I am going to put this speech aside right now. I think you get my drift. I am going to speak to you from the heart." Then he proceeded to speak in his dialect about his parents and how they were starving in Abruzzi and how they went to America and how they made a great success of their life by abandoning the country that these people that he was talking to represented. And it was about as bad as you could imagine in terms of the reception that he got for this speech. Very quiet it was but clearly people were probably, I would say, offended by this.

Q: Well often this is the case. You know I switch it around have somebody who has left the United States and gone to another country and then come back. You know I left your country because I didn't want to serve in the Army during Vietnam or something. Now here I am back as the Austrian Ambassador, and gee I have done very well in Austria. Now that doesn't…

LAGAMMA: I don't think that happens very often if at all, but yeah, your point is well taken. On the other hand I think there are ways to use this to advantage and it really requires a great deal of skill to play it both ways, to show the connection and to show how this connection can serve the mutual interest. I mean it can be a very powerful case to make. I mean the blood tie between the United States and Italy, between the United Stats and Poland, between the United States and Hungary, the United States and Israel, obviously is a very strong tie, and this is the backbone of the relationship. And it can be used by a clever diplomat to reinforce the consciousness of the importance of the relationship. You know, we are related; we are cousins, we are family; we share history; we share culture; we share food; we share all those things. We have introduced into the fabric of American society the essence of Italian culture and we have become important in the United States. We have created a wine industry in California. We have created the Bank of America. We have created great music and so many other things, This could be done to very good effect, but you cannot stress peasant origins or the rejection of a country that no longer exists as it was when your parents left it.

Q: No, well this is of course the problem with so many of the people who become ambassador to some of these countries want to go back really to say Gee I really made it. I am going to show you.

LAGAMMA: That kind of speech is more appropriate for the audience back home for that particular ethnic group where you talk at a Lions Club and you talk about your ethnicity in that way but not for the folks back in the other country.

Q: Well I suppose this almost impossible if you have a powerful ambassador to tell a candidate, the guy cut out the crap. This is what your job is, and this doesn't go over well. Let's stick, change it the way you want it but let's not dwell on this because it is not appropriate.

LAGAMMA: Yeah, it is hard. And especially for somebody who comes from what is considered the south to go to the northern part. There is an intense sense of regionalism in

Italy, probably more than any other European country. While depending on where you come from the south begins south of where you are from. For the Milanese the south begins below Lombardy. For the Florentines it begins below Tuscany. For the Romans it begins at Naples. For the Neapolitans the south is Calabria and Sicily. They have a very intense sense of regionalism and localism.
Q: Were there many immigrants from the Milan area?

LAGAMMA: Very few. There were a lot of Italian immigrants who fled Italy after the failed revolutions of 1848. That was a different kind of immigration. 1848, what happened in the United States in 1849?

Q: The gold rush.

LAGAMMA: Exactly. So the people that fled Europe after the conservative backlash in 1848 went to the United States and got caught up in California. That led to the creation of the Bank of America, the wine industry and everything of that sort. That was northern Italian. When we get to the 1870's we begin to get the southern Italian immigration because of economic failure. So that is the immigration from Naples and from Sicily and from Calabria where my grandparents came from, and from Abruzzi. There was another immigration. The only immigration which can be said to be northern Italian to the United States in that period was from Lucca. Lucca is a Christian Democratic stronghold, was when I was there, with people that were tied up in agriculture. They were northern Italians and during a period of recession and agriculture problems, large numbers of Lucchesi came to the United States. I got to know a number of them when I was based in Florida.

Q: Well now what were the politics of the Milano consular district?

LAGAMMA: Well, it was national politics. We had a consulate in Turin. Although USIS covered Turin because there was no USIS post there at the time; there was a consul general in Turin.

Q: That was Agnelli land. They all scattered because he was there.

LAGAMMA: Well also because there was an economic powerhouse. I mean Turin is very important. La Stampa, one of the most important newspapers in Italy, is based in Turin, and other important cultural activities. Of course Turin was the scene of the monarchy that unified Italy. Vittorio Emanuele was from Turin. So Turin historically was very important, and sort of a gateway to France. As far as Milan is concerned we were interested in trade between the United States and northern Italy. There were a lot of major manufacturers who were interested in trade policy, and we USIS did programs on trade.

Q: There was a trade fair there too wasn't there?

LAGAMMA: Yes. The Milan trade fair. We had a Department of Commerce unit that wasn't based at the consulate but was based at the trade fair itself. It had offices there.

And they put on shows. We had a very strong interest in everything economic. When there was a question of the safety of nuclear energy and General Electric was preparing to sell ten nuclear power plants to Italy, we put on a major effort to talk about that issue in Milan. We brought specialists from the Atomic Energy Commission in Brussels down to talk about the safety and efficacy of nuclear power. To the national Italian Society of Engineers which was based in Milan. So we had very interesting audiences. Economic audiences, political audiences. We brought a lot of speakers in to talk about economic policy issues, labor management issues, how you get labor movements to cooperate in the interests of the economy so that they wouldn't make unreasonable demands and go out on strike. All kinds of strikes in Italy, very different kinds of strikes, a very destructive economic activity. We had a Nobel Prize wining economist come and give lectures on that. Our consul general at the time, Tom Fina, was very interested. He asked us to develop a strategy for identifying a dozen or so issues that would convey some American strategies for dealing with contemporary urban issues that confronted a place like Milan or some of the other cities in northern Italy, that they weren't doing very well. Garbage collection, taxation, issues of that kind. So we generated a series of programs on those kinds of things. That was from the USIS perspective. The Consulate was involved in relations with the political parties and the parliamentarians from that area and the issue of Eurocommunism and the socialist-communist partnership.

Q: The Mayor of Milan, where did he come from?

LAGAMMA: The mayor of Milan while I was there was a socialist. I don't remember…

Q: Milano was not part of the Red Belt was it?

LAGAMMA: No it wasn't.

Q: That was from Bologna and on down.

LAGAMMA: Bologna and in 1975 or '76, Gabbuggiani became mayor of Florence and the Red Belt extended further down. In fact that whole Tuscany and maybe the Romagna area was part of the Red Belt, with the sole exception of the city of Lucca which was very different.

Q: Well did we at that time not from the ____ perspective but the people appeal, did we view the communist party as being a real menace or was this a local phenomenon which probably for practical purposes really wouldn't affect American relations.

LAGAMMA: I can't give you a definitive answer. I have my own views. I think that nothing would have shaken the fundamental relationship between the United States and Italy even given the rise of communism. We were not talking about a majority Italian communist party. I will give you an example. ABC News had done an hour documentary on Italian politics in the mid 70's, '74-'75, somewhere about there. And it was becoming an important issue in the United States. CBS then sent out a team to do a similar documentary. They were in Rome and Milan, and they came to see us and we talked to

them a lot. One day the producer came to me and said they pulled the plug on our program. Why? The editor called me and said, "Is it true that the communists may win the next election?" I said, "No you don't understand. It is not a question of whether they win the next election. It is a question of whether they go from 31 to 34 percent. If they go up to 34 % they will have that much more influence and they could very easily make a deal with the socialists and come to power as a coalition of the left. That would be very important. It would be a real breakthrough for them." I heard a silence at the other end. Then my editor said, "31 to 34? That is worth five minutes not an hour." They cancelled the program. Because we weren't talking about going from 30% to 51%, or some kind of majority. We were talking about a subtle shift in the political spectrum, such that those of us who were working on Italian affairs thought that it was very important. But it wasn't an earthquake. It was a tremor in the relationship. I later had a conference with major authorities on Italian international relations who were knowledgeable about Italian politics. I called it Whither Italy, and I had people like Huntington and Barnes and Organski and major academics come out. We were having some heated discussions about this before an Italian audience. Then we took a break for a cup of coffee. I remember my friend Ken Organski, who was a professor at University of Michigan, came up to me and said, "Bob don't get so excited. Italy, she is going nowhere." I said, "What do you mean?" He said, "Look at the economics. It is very powerful. It is clearly not going to drift away toward the Soviet Union. Look at the blood tie, and the cultural tie and the political ties and all of these things," and he was absolutely right.

Q: The military tie too.

LAGAMMA: The military tie of course. We regarded it as a kind of acid that was eating away at the relationship. What can you do when the communists increase in power and you have all these military bases. Italy, after all, was a kind of aircraft carrier in the Mediterranean with lots of U.S. military bases including nuclear facilities. We used to go to Vicenza a lot to do some shopping at the commissary and we weren't supposed to know what the boys in Vicenza were doing. It was never talked about. One day I remember we were in the cafeteria with our kids having a hamburger, and I looked at the bulletin board. There was an index card up there it said please don't forget to send your comics for the boys at the sites. All of a sudden this struck me. Here were Americans 18 or 19 year olds who were reading comic books to pass away the time, and they were sitting on nuclear sites right nearby.

Q: Oh yeah. Did you find was there a disconnect between say Milan and Rome because the sort of thing they would be an election and what does this mean coming from Rome which seemed to get it was such a small circle there. Then you want on to changing ministers.

LAGAMMA: Absolutely. You know there was a rotation with the same faces over and over again.

Q: Andreotti...

LAGAMMA: Was prime minister over and over and was out and then in and had shifted ministries. The Christian Democrats to a large extent had a stranglehold on power up to a certain point and then they made a coalition with the socialists. There was a lot of corruption going on. It was absolutely Byzantine as far as we were concerned. Rome was another planet. The situation in Milan was more straightforward. You were working with modern folks who saw the world not so differently than we Americans, and yet the Italians were living in some past time warp. They were doing politics as they had always done it in a very different way. I mean in Milan, who was influencing political thinking and ideas? It was the industrialists, it was the Agnellis.

Q: OK you say it was the industrialists who were top dogs.

LAGAMMA: These were modern people. There were intellectuals. They were very western in their thinking. They fit in nicely with the rest of Europe. These were modern Europeans. The Milanese and the Turinese and the others in the north that we dealt with. The folks in Rome were considered to be a different kind of people obeying their own logic of politics, fairly corrupt, and you know not changing, not keeping up.

Q: It is almost inconsequential what was happening in Rome.

LAGAMMA: Except that they had the power. And they could allocate resources and they could make national policy in ways that affected everybody. This was resented in the north, and the folks down there were considered to be out of touch with reality. So it was a wonderful introduction into Italy, a different kind of Italy than I would have had, had I been in Rome. The thing about our post in Northern Italy was that we were a relatively tight knit unit, relatively small in the provinces in Northern Italy. Rome was vast. It was a big embassy. When we called them they were always in meetings. It seemed they were never out on the streets in touch with the kinds of people we were. We were always dealing with what we thought were important contacts. We were out there having meetings at the university or at the newspaper or the Institute for International Studies. There was very little bureaucracy in what we did. I was always concerned in every one of my posts after that about the bureaucratization of large embassies. They talk to each other more than they touch base with the world they are working in. I can see that in Iraq today. How do those guys get around and do the work that a normal embassy would. They can't; It is not a normal country. But does anybody in a big embassy get anything done when we have this bureaucratized system, this system of clearances. You get involved in writing a report and you have to spend forever in getting approvals for every little change.

Q: Well in your area of competence, how would you describe the influence on the intellectuals, the intelligentsia, the chattering class, I mean in England they are pretty powerful, in fact they are bloody powerful. But how about in Italy in a hotbed of intellectual activity.

LAGAMMA: Well what I learned in Italy was that the cultural world and the political world are a seamless web. There are all kinds of connections. Unlike the United States,

there is a high respect in the political world for creative achievement. That is very often linked to politics. We had a case where my boss gave a lecture on opera, and he wanted to recall the centennial of the death of a famous tenor who had made his fame in the United States a la Caruso. He had come back to Italy to found the Verona Theater, the amphitheater that has been converted in the summer to an opera house. He gave a wonderful lecture. And our audience consisted of the superintendent of La Scala who was the number two man in the Italian Socialist Party. The Mayor of Verona came over. It was front page news in Corriere della Sera that Americans show respect for a famous Italian tenor. Those kinds of things, the Manzoni connection that I cited on the bicentennial are the kinds of cultural connections that Italians relate to. The art and cultural world are very important. The kinds of audiences we would get for our concerts were political movers and shakers and not society. You know the journalists and the academics cared for art and music and were involved in politics. There is not a separation as there is very often in the United States. It is more like Latin America I think, where you have an ambassador who was maybe a Nobel Prize winning poet or becomes one.

Q: In France there is a division between , a certain division. Did you feel so often the intelligentsia or something have subscribed with a lot of leftist doctrine.

LAGAMMA: Oh sure.

Q: Not quite communist but it is a nice and which ends up by dumping on the United States.

LAGAMMA: That was especially true, and it was one of our big problems in Italy with the very leftist bent of the universities. To give you one very relevant example: the teaching of American studies and the very anti American bias in teaching of American studies was a major component of how they approached this subject of how do you study American history, how do you study American literature. Instead of studying the Whitmans and the Melvilles and the Hawthornes, they would very often pick out a radical black writer under the black consciousness movement or the black power movement and give a course on that writer to students who had never studied traditional American literature. We thought that was a kind of aberration usually. Because what did the students know about America, American culture and American literature to have fastened on that one aspect of American culture which was usually a very negative one and emphasized Anti-American perspectives and was destructive, intellectually destructive. But of course on the other hand you had the publishing industry who would readily translate Saul Bellow, and everything in mainstream American literature into Italian. So you had this informal and very powerful publishing industry making Italians aware of traditional American ideas, the latest in American ideas, and the whole range of subjects, and then you had these intellectuals homing in on some very negative aspects.

Q: Well speaking of the universities, how did things work out during that time. I am thinking of the Red Brigade and Prima Linea and these radical deadly groups and other groups that maybe weren't as deadly but still were very influential within the student body. What was the situation as you saw it then?

LAGAMMA: Well it was really very hard to work with Italian universities. That was one of our objectives, one of our emphases. We found it somewhat difficult. I remember this was during the time of Alistair Cooke's wonderful tribute to the United States, the BBC series on America. A 13-part series, pictorial essays about some aspect of American life and culture and very pro American. We acquired that series and we would show it at our cultural center. I remember bringing it to the University of Padua and a couple of other universities and showing it in the evening to student audiences. I don't know. I think there was an acceptance of the fact that their might be two Americas. One which was predatory and repressive and responsible for the Vietnam War. The Vietnam War was raging at that time. And identified with Nixon who was not at all popular in Europe, in Italy. And yet there was another America. Italians had a great cultural admiration for the United States even when they were politically at odds with it. They saw the United States as producing great cultural achievements.

Q: Did you feel at all threatened by these extremist groups in the time you were there?

LAGAMMA: I did not personally, but a year later came the kidnapping of Dozier.

Q: General Dozier.

LAGAMMA: And then the assassination of Aldo Moro. And at that time '76-'77-'78 things heated up. I was in Florence by then. Florence was even more exposed. We were, there were risks to local…

Q: Well you went to Florence. You were there from when to when?

LAGAMMA: From '76 to '78. I was there in the bicentennial year, and therein hangs a tale. I got there about summer.

Q: Is there anything else we should cover.

LAGAMMA: No I think we have touched on everything. We had the birth of another child. We had a third in the Ivory Coast, and a forth in New York and a fifth in Milan, and her name was Florence. We left for Florence shortly after she was born. In fact my colleague who was responsible for my getting the job in Florence learned that I had named my daughter Florence. He called me and reprimanded me and said, "I want to congratulate you on your assignment to Ouagadougou." But we went to Florence with Florence and that was the fifth and last of our children. And when we got there it was the summer of '76. The bicentennial was in full swing. The Communists had come to power in Florence. Gabbuggiani, the mayor, was a Berlin Wall style Euro Communist. They were out to show the communist party of Italy that friendship was the United States was compatible with Euro communism. They were going to show it in Florence more than any other place had shown it. So we had more bicentennial events in Florence than everywhere else in Europe combined. We had a festival in which the city of Florence brought several theatrical groups to Florence for performances. We had a music festival

where American jazz groups were bought over for concerts in the park. We had a celebration of the 20th anniversary of the Syracuse University program in Florence which was celebrated in the city hall in the…

Q: This is tape 4, side 1 with Bob LaGamma. You were talking about the festivals.

LAGAMMA: The Communist Party of Italy and the City of Florence which was under the control of the Communist party, hosted a wonderful reception for Syracuse University at the Palazzo Vecchio in the Center of Florence. They held a USIS exhibition of the photographer Paul Strand and his magnificent photography of Italy. We placed that in the city hall. Robert Rauschenberg had an exhibition of his work at the Divine Comedy at the Castle. There were dozens of American cultural events designed to celebrate the relations with Florence and with Italy, and Florence being sort of the cultural center of Italy, and of course the new Communist capital of that part of Italy. I haven't personally done the research on it but I am told by colleagues who have that it was later demonstrated, when the Soviet archives were open, that the Soviet Union had funded this American cultural activity in Florence. They had given the city of Florence or the communist party of Florence the money to host this activity to demonstrate the compatibility of Italian Communism with American friendship.

Q: Was there any caveat or instruction or something from our embassy or elsewhere saying be careful of this?

LAGAMMA: Yes. When I was beginning my assignment I went to Rome for instructions. To be succinct I was told to be cool and correct. In other words I could attend these events, but I wasn't to appear to be too chummy. They didn't want to see pictures of me laughing and patting the mayor on the back. I was permitted to participate in events, but I also was instructed to do everything I could to associate with our "friends". That meant frequent trips to Lucca which was still controlled by the Christian Democrats, and had that American tie of blood with a lot of immigrants having come from there. I did that as often as I could, and also to make sure that I worked as much as possible with our non communist friends or was seen publicly working with them.

Q: Well who was consul general when you were there?

LAGAMMA: Robert Gordon, who had been a political counselor in the embassy at Rome at one time. He was there during my two years. Robert Gordon had lost his sight while he was in Florence.

Q: Later he was ambassador to the Seychelles.

LAGAMMA: Yes. He functioned extremely well in his blindness. He had a secretary that was able to read cables to him. Many people did not realize that he was blind when they met him at a public function. Because he behaved as if he could see.

Q: Florence is the center of several schools of Americans coming to Italy to study.

LAGAMMA: Wrong. Not several. Many.

Q: OK.

LAGAMMA: Would you believe about 40 or 50.

Q: Oh my God. I didn't realize that.

LAGAMMA: We had a huge number of programs. Some of them were summer only. Some were semester. Some were full year programs. There was the Stanford program. They had a beautiful villa in the hills right outside of Florence that brought Stanford professors and the courses were given on the grounds right outside the villa. They occasionally brought Italian professors from Universities in and around Florence to lecture at the courses. That was one kind of experience. There were other university programs like Syracuse. They integrated their students into families so they had home stays and took courses in the program for foreigners within the Florentine University of Florence. Some of them were integrated into the University of Florence courses. We used to address them every year when a new crop came around. We used to go around and talk to the university students. Our most important message was, "Guys stay away from drugs. The penalties are so severe, and we are not going to be able to do much for you if you get caught. The penalties are much more severe than they would be back home. Stay away from that stuff at all costs." That was our basic message. Some of these programs were very good. There were some graduate programs too. There was SAIS up in Bologna, the Johns Hopkins school for advanced graduate studies which is a wonderful program, very successful, very serious. But there were many programs that I considered to be unserious. This was a kind of problem. My colleague, Dick Arndt, who was the cultural affairs officer in Rome, used to call this the extension of the grand tour: that it was thought that kids had to go to Florence to get some culture and get some exposure to Europe, and this was a great place to have a good time. From Florence, students traveled all over, and I am not sure how many of them studied very much. It was kind of an immersion in the pleasures of being in Italy, and there were so many distractions. Unless the university had a rigorous, disciplined program, and unless they picked their students very carefully, there was a tendency for these programs to be very unserious. I did not have a great deal of respect for most of the programs. Some of them were quite good.

Q: By this time you had a new Ambassador.

LAGAMMA: Yeah, Richard M. Gardner.

Q: How did he play in?

LAGAMMA: Totally changed work environment under Richard M. Gardner. He was a serious intellectual. He had a sense of how does this fit into U.S.-European relations. He had a good sense of the history of Italy. He had been back and forth to Italy many times. His wife is Italian from Venice. So he had a stake in Italy and he knew a lot of the

players. Gardner was the first ambassador named to a country by Jimmy Carter. He had been a member of the trilateral commission. Andrew Young was the first ambassador named by Carter; Richard M. Gardner was the second. So we knew that here was a man who was high in the esteem of the President of the United States, had worked with him on the trilateral commission. We were going to get a lot of attention. This was going to intensify the importance of the relations between the Untied States and Italy. Gardner obviously thought that if he was named ambassador to Italy, Italy had to be a very important place. He made it that. I think he had a lot of policy input at State.

Q: Were you able to use him in your area?

LAGAMMA: Yes. He traveled a lot. We did use him. I arranged for him to make a few speeches around Tuscany in the area of Pisa, in Milan, elsewhere.

Q: Well he also, one can use him to let's say face student audiences couldn't you? I mean he came out of Columbia.

LAGAMMA: Sure he was a professor. And he knew how to address that kind of audience. He knew how to address the kind of left wing bias a lot of Italians had, and so the anti Americanism. He was very well versed in Italian influential life and politics. So he was about the best prepared ambassador for an assignment that I have ever known.

Q: He could be a difficult person.

LAGAMMA: I never found it so. I had a high degree of respect for him and I always enjoyed when he was in our area. There were obviously high demands. You had to be very careful that you were highly professional in organizing the visit. You don't want to make too many mistakes when you are dealing with a guy like that. So he was very good. I think he was good for morale. I am not sure that he was right in his orientation. It is easy to say in hindsight, and I have looked at his book on his time as ambassador and it is good. The question that you raised earlier is the question that I would have for him if I were talking to him right now. That is, was the threat as serious as you took it Mr. Ambassador? And who took it extremely seriously? At one point one of my colleagues said to him as he was preparing to go on vacation, "This is a critical moment. Do you really want to be known as the ambassador who lost Italy?" You know lost Italy like losing China. Well I think that is nonsense. I think we probably could have better understood the depth of the relationship with that country and how Italy was going nowhere. So we probably over dramatized our role and our ability to influence events.

Q: Were you aware I don't want to get into details but of the corruption and this has been spelled out in books about how certainly before the '48 election how the American intelligence services were supplying the Christian Democrats with money. Later on I think it became almost an addiction. Was this a problem? Did you feel this at all?

LAGAMMA: I now look back and see what the depth of our involvement was, and I think I can better understand it. I have to admit that I didn't know what was going on at

the time, and I didn't know the depth of our role there. We were aware of the massive corruption of the folks that were in power and the folks that we were in bed with. I don't think we understood how deeply supportive we were to them in elections and funding and all those kinds of things. We committed excesses in the name of the cold war, in the name of fighting communism. I think you know probably our reputation is soiled for those excesses.

Q: Well did you run into the problems in your area as opposed to the south of Italy but in your area of the equivalent to the Camorra, the mafia, the criminal elements there and a criminal network that was pervasive?

LAGAMMA: Not that we were aware of. I mean you read about it in the newspapers so to that extent yes, but not in your daily dealings and in your work. No, Milan was not the heartland of the Mafia in Italy. I don't think it greatly influenced political, social, economic life.

Q: I was consul general in Naples in '79-'81, and of course there the Camorra and then farther south the Cosa Nostra the whole thing. I mean they were very evident.

LAGAMMA: Not in the north.

Q: It might be criminal but it was in many cases more corrupt than criminal whatever you want to call it, their joining together.

LAGAMMA: Yeah, the level of political corruption is notorious. And we were aware of that, but we weren't aware in northern Italy of criminal connection. I think the powerful industrialists took up that space and were influential in shaping decisions and politics and all that rather than gangsters.

Q: How about unions? Was this something we can address or were they, I mean the unions were split along political lines, but sort of the labor side, were you able, or did we make much of an effort to go to them labor wise?

LAGAMMA: Not a heck of a lot. There were communists labor unions and socialist labor unions and those were not always very friendly to us and they were not very accessible. There were some Christian democratic unions, but they weren't the majority by any means. No, I must say I don't think I ever worked with trade unions.

Q: In a way you had these unions but they seemed to be more annoyances. I mean they would have these one day strikes and all.

LAGAMMA: Hiccup strikes.

Q: And all of a sudden you just kind of say OK, but I mean really you couldn't take them seriously.

LAGAMMA: Yeah, and they seemed to be shooting themselves in the foot a lot of times too because they would anger the population and they wouldn't achieve their objectives.

Q: Yeah, a one day shut down of the banks.

LAGAMMA: I will give you an example. I was taking a group of Italian journalists to Brussels on one of these NATO trips. We were leaving from Florence and took the train down to Rome and went to the airport and got to the airport for a flight to Brussels that was supposed to leave about noon. We hadn't had lunch. We were going to be in Brussels by about 1:00 or 2:00 or something. So we were told when we arrived at the airport that the flight was going to be a half hour late. OK, we can survive a half hour. Then we were told that the flight was going to be another half hour late. And on through the evening until 8:00 at night without anything to eat or drink. People with children, older people who had health problems were made to endure this eight hour wait. They finally announced that they were going to take off soon, but all passengers for Milan which was going to be a stop, we would not be stopping in Milan because we were so late. We would go directly to Brussels. So half the passengers had to leave after eight hours. Then we got on board and they were going to give us snacks or sandwiches or something but then they announced that they couldn't give out food or drink because they didn't have the requisite number of crew members on board to do that even though the food and drink had been boarded and was there. There was practically a hijacking of the aircraft at that point. People got up and were furious and were yelling It was all a part of a work action, work to the rules. You know we got into Brussels about midnight, and everything was closed. These poor journalists. We found one place where we were able to get a sandwich. It was torture. It was so painful. And what was the purpose? We were angry at Al Italia, but more specifically at those workers that we saw who were doing this to us and inflicting the pain.

Q: It just didn't seem to…

LAGAMMA: In Milan we had strikes that affected the trolleys and the buses and you never could predict, so work schedules were thrown off on a regular basis. And then a modern city like that you could never count on things working the way they were supposed to.

Q: Well then you left Italy in '78, was that it?

LAGAMMA: I left Italy in '78 to go back to Africa. I went to Lomé, Togo. From Florence to Lomé, what a difference.

Q: You were there in from '78 to when?

LAGAMMA: '81.

Q: Let's talk a bit about Togo. '78 to '81.

LAGAMMA: I was there with a wonderful USIA ambassador named Marilyn Johnson. Marilyn was an Africanist. She had been a Wave during WWII. She had been an English teacher in West Africa after that. Her French was fluent. She had been a PAO in a couple of West African places. I guess she had been assigned to Moscow as the cultural affairs officer and ran into problems there and decided there wasn't going to be a good assignment. John Reinhart, who had a special regard for her, decided she would be ambassador. We were looking for women ambassadors and she was highly qualified. She obviously had fluency in French and knowledge of the region. The only problem I guess was that she had not been State so she had a cultural adjustment to make there to the department. So I went into a place that was an authoritarian country, a dictatorship, one man rule. One of the longest standing dictators, Eyadéma.

Q: I met him.

LAGAMMA: Eyadéma had been a soldier in the French army, had been repatriated back home. His president, Sylvanus Olympio, wanted to downsize an already very small army. As a result Olympio was assassinated on the back steps of the U.S. embassy, shot. A terrible tragedy because Olympio had just been received a year or so before his assassination by President Kennedy in one of the first state visits of an African leader. He had been given an honorary doctorate by Fordham University, my wife's school. His name was on the steps of Fordham's honor roll of honorees and he was one of the members of the French parliament during the colonial period along with Senghor and Houphouët. So he was one of the grand old men of the African independence movement in Francophone Africa. Olympio was replaced by a guy who was essentially a thug. A very adroit thug, but somebody that had no reluctance in using force to eliminate or marginalize his enemies. This was still during the cold war, and we had next door the republic of Benin which professed Marxist Leninism and had Soviets, Cuban, everything else, embassies there. Togo was a pro western, pro French, pro American dictatorship. So we wanted to cultivate this relationship with Eyadéma because we were able to have friendship visits and all kinds of other things. We gave a little aid, not much. We had a large Peace Corps contingent. I ran a small cultural center right across the street from the American Embassy with a nice little library. We were manned by about a dozen very capable FSNs. One of the best FSN staffs that I have had. We worked with the university, we worked with the newspaper, and the radio station, and the TV station which were all in government hands. We worked with non governmental organizations such as they were. We talked about human rights in a country that didn't respect them very much. I got in trouble once because my press assistant told me that one of our good friends, who was acting editor of the newspaper, had dared to run a story about Amnesty International. Nothing to do with Togo but the president saw that and said, "Arrest him." He went to prison and was tortured, and was not fed for a number of days. I sought to intervene with a visiting Cameroonian journalist who was very influential, and said, "Can't you do something to help them free this guy?" Our ambassador was called in by the president and was told that I was interfering with the internal affairs of Togo and that he wanted to expel me. At which she said, "I would have acted in the same way," to the president. Therefore I was not expelled, after which I went to the AP correspondent and told him the story and two days later the editor was freed.

Q: Well Mitterrand's son was sort of Mr. Africa for the French.

LAGAMMA: That is right. He became a minister. The minister of cooperation for the French under his father. He was a nice fellow at the time and relatively uncorrupted as far as I know.

Q: The corruption factor came in later.

LAGAMMA: Yeah, I think so.

Q: Well how did you find, I mean in a way was there much to work with in Togo in your field?

LAGAMMA: Yes. It was challenging because the Togolese were a bright bunch. Togo had been a German colony before the First World War. The Germans found the coastal people very congenial to their rule. They decided that these would be the administrators of their African empire. They sent Togolese clerks and other officials off to Tanganyika, to Cameroon, and to what was then South West Africa, today Namibia, where you still find Togolese names in the telephone directory. So this was the Meister Colony, the place that generated the administration for the other colonies. And so we found a bright bunch of people, a disproportionate number of which were in international organizations, UN, UNESCO, other places because they were capable. They weren't the great intellectuals of Africa. They hadn't produced any poets or novelists. But they produced very competent people. So this was an interesting group to have conversations with, to discuss policies, to talk about human rights. They were very receptive to learning about the United States. We had lecturers on American literature, very good audiences for that. We did a number of conferences on international affairs. Towards the end I especially got involved in human rights issues, because of the Carter administration I guess.

Q: On this human rights thing. You had your thug running the country, so what could she do?

LAGAMMA: Well you could talk quietly to people over lunch. You could have conferences in which American speakers would address the new policy of the United States on these issues and how it was being applied in various places. So at least they knew where we stood on the big questions of human rights. You didn't necessarily have to say yeah we are all for that and we are going to get rid of this guy, although they might have said that when they went home to each other. You know there was a receptivity to those kinds of discussions because the Togolese were clearly unhappy with their own political situation.

Q: Well then did Patt Derian come there?

LAGAMMA: No, she didn't come there. We knew about what she was doing.

Q: Well was there any spillover from Benin of Marxist affection for that country?

LAGAMMA: No, I think it was a veneer. I had a British neighbor businessman, who covered Togo from Lomé and covered Benin as well. He would go over there often. I asked him once about how bad was this Marxism over there. He said, "Well it is easier for me to do business in Benin than it is in Togo." Subsequently the Beninois got rid of their dictatorship. It ran out of steam. It became a democracy of sorts. They had a nice transition and they had good free and fair elections. They are now counted in the Democratic column whereas the Togolese are still in the midst of civil strife and partisanship and a lot of violence.

Q: Well did Togo have any strategic resources or anything other than being….

LAGAMMA: The only thing was it was one of those pawns in the cold war. Where it was our country and Benin was theirs. Otherwise it had no economic importance whatsoever, and it had very little other importance. It was a strip of land near Nigeria and Ghana. But otherwise very unimportant.

Q: Germans ever come where they had an interest?

LAGAMMA: Germans were strong. They had an embassy there. They had a very fine cultural center. The German institute was important to them there. As late as the 70's, there were old men in villages who still spoke some German from the colonial times.

Q: Well I was just thinking this might be a good place to stop and put at the end we will pick it up in '81 whither?

LAGAMMA: Ok, I will just say one more thing that my wife was very busy in Togo teaching at the American school. We had a little American school there. It was a happy time for us there. It was a time of innocence. I loved the work. I focused most of my attention developing university linkages. Togo was a good place for Americans to come who were serious about Africa and studying French. So we developed a capacity at the university there to teach French as a foreign language to American students before going to the university and taking courses on African politics, African society. We developed relations with UCLA and a linkage there. We developed relations with the University of South Carolina. And in several other major American institutions that were sort of looking for a soft landing in French speaking Africa. That was I think one of my major accomplishments.

Q: Great. Ok, so we will pick this up next time where did you go in 1981?

LAGAMMA: In 1981 I came back to Washington to work as the culture coordinator for our Office of African Affairs.

Q: OK, today is 22 May 2008. Bob we were at 1981. Y*ou came back to Washington. What were you doing?*

LAGAMMA: I had been in California under the Pearson program at the University of California at Santa Barbara for a year. We came back and bought our first house in Reston. I took on the job of cultural coordinator for the office of African Affairs at USIA. I found this to be an extraordinarily exciting job because educational cultural exchange was always something I thought was essential to what USIA did. There were a lot of opportunities.

Q: You did this from when to when?

LAGAMMA: '81 to '84. '84 was when I went to Senegal. I worked with Art Lewis who was director of the office of African Affairs and later our ambassador to Sierra Leone and my good friend Kent Obi who later went on to direct the office of Middle Eastern Affairs in USIA. We had a very good team in our Africa office. It was my job to coordinate the work of the educational cultural bureau and try to link it as best as possible to the needs of our overseas posts. That meant in part trying to get more resources for Africa because Africa was always at the low end of the totem pole. We always had to struggle to get what we thought were an adequate number of international visitors, Fulbright grants, other kinds of grants. The European Bureau, Asian Bureau and others, Latin America, always had an advantage over us, could cite a higher priority in terms of our national interests. But our African posts we always felt used the resources better than everybody else because we got a big bang for the buck in Africa. We sometimes made do with very few resources. We were able to make extraordinarily important impacts on our audiences, and so that was the basis of our argument. That we needed adequate resources for those posts that were doing effective work. So whenever we saw a post that was particularly well led, an opportunity for advancing U.S. interests in that particular country, we tried to get them resources we thought they needed, grants, more IV grants, that sort of thing.

Q: Did we have a sort of order of priority of target countries, a sense about this country, we want to get them more familiar with the United States or not?

LAGAMMA: Sure. There were some cases where countries moved from a column of being unfriendly to the United States to a transitional situation where a new government all of a sudden wanted to open up ties with the United States. We thought of those countries as important priorities for beginning the work of opening up relationships by getting key people to know us better. There were some situations like that during the course of my three years. We attempted to get focused on those kinds of opportunities. Those were the kinds of things the ambassadors always called for because they felt they had opportunities, sometimes unprecedented opportunities, to make hay with the new elites, the new people in power. But of course there were certain countries that were among the top priorities who got more resources than others. Nigeria was always important and so was Kenya and so was Ghana and South Africa for different reasons. We were trying to get grants to open up ties or a dialogue with the majority of the population under Apartheid that was not in power.

Q: You mention Nigeria. Nigeria is sort of a reputation as being one of the most corrupt governments in the world, correct me if I am wrong. But what sort of impact or what difference did it make and how?

LAGAMMA: We weren't picking out the most corrupt government officials and providing them with support. We were picking up people from the academic world, journalists who were frequently critical of their own governments and looking at these issues of corruption. We were providing grants to those that we thought were appropriate. Nigeria has a remarkable people. There are individuals in Nigeria that are world class. They very often have the right values. Our working with them sometimes reinforced their ability to have an influence over their country, not that that has transformed it over the course of time. You know how these things are. If you believe in them at all you have to have faith that in the long term some of these things are going to work out better or are going to be helpful. But sure, the most dramatic case of what you are talking about, I think, is Liberia. There we built a Fulbright Foundation with tremendous resources, more than any other African country per capita. Probably more than we had for Nigeria; and here was Liberia, a small western African country with which we had historic ties. The reason for that was during WWII the United States built the port of Monrovia and the airport for Monrovia.

Q: It is a great transit point for planes flying back and forth.

LAGAMMA: Going to North Africa.

Q: Going to Brazil and then over.

LAGAMMA: Yeah, going to Brazil, Dakar or Monrovia and then up to North Africa to supply the North African campaign and the European campaign. When we turned that airport over to the Liberians after the war, the United States expected some form of payment. The deal that was struck was that the Liberians would pay us back for those facilities. We would use that money for educational and cultural exchange, a lot of it for scholarships. So over the years from the 40's on through to the 70's or 80's, we had a massive exchange program with them. Liberia, like Nigeria, was a very corrupt country. A country dominated by a very small coastal elite descended from slaves that were settled there by America before the Civil War. And as a result, I always question the impact of spending all that money for such a small elite, a very small proportion of the population was in the modern sector. What we found in a number of cases was we were giving grants to the same old folks four or five or six times in some cases because there simply weren't enough qualified people for those researches to go around. So in the case of Liberia I was very critical of what we were accomplishing, if anything. In fact it might have even been counterproductive to have spent those resources in that way.

Q: What about Kenya?

LAGAMMA: Kenya was a special case. If you have read about Barack Obama, his father was one of the early beneficiaries of the scholarship program. President Kennedy, when

he was a senator, had some conversations with Tom Mboya who was the labor leader, one of the early leaders of Kenya in the pre independence period. In the course of their conversations Kennedy said, "What could the United States best do to help Kenya move toward independence and have your independence successfully consolidate its efforts to be a prosperous and healthy country." Mboya said, "Education. That is what we need. We don't have these institutions, and so it would be extraordinarily helpful if we had scholarships." So Kennedy arranged for what was called the Kennedy airlift that sent hundreds of Kenyans to the United States on scholarships, a lot of them to the University of California. Barack Obama's father whose name was Barack Obama as well was, I think, among those that were at the tail end of that and went to the University of Hawaii.

Q: What about looking at that particular swath: Liberia, particularly Nigeria, Kenya, maybe Uganda. What about the universities there? How did we view them? Were they good?

LAGAMMA: We viewed them very positively. At the time I was in Washington in the early 80's, there was a big oil boom going on in Nigeria and a great expansion of higher education. There was an entity based in Washington called the Nigerian Universities Commission branch of something that was headquartered in Lagos. It was their task to recruit and arrange for the services of American professors. Because of the oil boom, this is the first time that this had happened anywhere in Africa, they were prepared to pay competitive salaries for American professors who would also benefit from housing and free interest car loans and all that kind of thing. A lot of benefits. Hundreds of American academics went off to teach in Nigerian universities. There were several great universities still at that time that had been created by the British: the University of Ibadan in Nigeria, the University of Legon in Accra, and Makerere University in Uganda. Those were the three big ones and then there was Fourah Bay in Sierra Leone. That was the nucleus of the Anglophone African university system. Nigeria created new universities like mushrooms all over the country. It was one of the things that a politician would promise during an election campaign. "If elected, I will create a university in my home town." So as a result there were 20, 30, 40 universities created in Nigeria in a relatively short time, a growth that was really quite unsustainable in terms of the quality of the institution. We conducted a very active Fulbright program bringing over graduate students for further study and training at the level of doctorate in the United States. We helped with the Nigerian University Commission program and provided some scholars and researchers to work in Nigeria during that period.

Q: Well were there universities in the United States, colleges that were particularly attuned trying to do something for African students?

LAGAMMA: There were. The American universities that were particularly known for African studies included Northwestern, Indiana, some of the California schools, Berkeley, Boston University was one of them, Michigan State was another. There were also universities that were funded by USAID that helped establish universities in Nigeria. An incredible process of building universities. Port Harcourt was created by, I think, Michigan State. The University of Wisconsin was also deeply involved. At one point

when I was in Nigeria, I brought Crawford Young, a senior Africanist, to Nigeria, and we traveled around to a number of universities. He was greeted everywhere by professors and deans and even presidents of universities that had been his students.

Q: I talked to Henry Mattox who went out to Nigeria and …

LAGAMMA: Yes, in 1990 more or less. I was there when he was there.

Q: His experiences were not very positive, that the universities were shut down most of the time; the students weren't responsive and there wasn't much equipment or anything else.

LAGAMMA: Ok, this is very interesting. When you talk about Nigeria, there are many Nigerias. When you meet somebody in the hallways of the department, and they have served in Nigeria, and you are about to go out to Nigeria, don't expect that the Nigeria that they lived in is anything like the one that you are going to. The Nigeria of 1960, maybe post-independence, had a feeling of ebullience, anything was possible. They were really feeling their oats. They had had no bad experiences. They were very optimistic. The Nigeria of the civil war, however, was a very different Nigeria.

Q: The Biafran War.

LAGAMMA: Yeah. The Nigerian Civil War was a major catastrophe and created a great deal of pessimism. I think has led to a lot of corruption that we see now, led to the military coming to power for one thing. It was, after all, a war that was probably more than anything else caused by the presence of tremendous oil reserves in Biafra. With that oil had Biafra won its independence it would have been a very prosperous, very pro-western very pro American country. But that wasn't to happen. So in 1971, when the war ended, we have another Nigeria. A Nigeria that by the 1980's was still very prosperous because of the tremendous oil resources that had begun to flow. Building occurred everywhere. There was economic prosperity. There was lots of corruption. There was again a feeling that maybe anything was possible, but there was also the experience of a very bloody past because of the civil war. That died out later on , with a succession of military governments and a very heavy authoritarian hand and massive corruption. I remember going to Nigeria in the 90's. The military leader made an appeal to the people of Nigeria over the radio. He was calling on them to avoid excessive corruption, to go back to a more reasonable past where the stealing was at the level of 10% on contracts, and not the massive building of villas and the acquisition of wealth in Europe, putting money away by the hundreds of millions of dollars in Swiss banks and in the Middle East which had become more common. So there had been a fundamental change probably beginning in the mid to late 80's running all through the 90's. The avarice that had taken hold in Nigeria was exploited by a series of military men and politicians who really didn't appear to have the interest of the Nigerian people at heart. So times were harder. Nigerian universities began to collapse. This overbuilding of Nigerian universities led to the inability to maintain infrastructure. I visited one university where students were sleeping eight to a room in shifts because there wasn't enough space in the campus. They

actually had hours where they could go in dormitories and sleep in a bed that somebody else had slept in an hour before.

Q: I guess South Africa, at the time you were doing this South Africa was still under apartheid.

LAGAMMA: Still under apartheid in the 80's yes.

Q: What was our policy in your particular job?

LAGAMMA: Well, these were the early days of the Reagan administration, 1980's.

Q: This would be Chester Crocker.

LAGAMMA: Chester Crocker, constructive engagement, a policy that I did not agree with. From the perspective of the rest of Africa, constructive engagement won us a lot of enemies. It was a gratuitous dialogue with a racist regime. A dialogue which we engaged in in public to indicate that we felt that these were essentially people you cold reason with and who you could move to change by talking and by exerting what seemed to be minimal pressures, without any sanctions. This was anathema in most of the rest of Africa. They couldn't understand this, how you could do a deal with the devil. South Africa, for the Nigerians, the Guineans, not so much for the Kenyans, but for most of Africans especially African intellectuals, especially African leaders, was public enemy number one.

Q: What were we doing cultural wise in South Africa?

LAGAMMA: Well we had an exchange program that was based on maintaining a dialogue with all concerned including civil society. We had grants for visits to the United States for people that were opposed to the government. Even some that were supportive of the government. F. W. de Klerk went to the U.S. on an IV grant in the 70's. He said it opened his eyes a lot to potential race relations. So there was that hope that a look at American society and the exploration of some American ideas and identification with the civil rights movement could help open the door to a different way of doing things in South Africa.

Q: Did you run into any trouble of trying to arrange grants or visits from South Africa?

LAGAMMA: Sure. In order to be able to come you needed a visa and the South African government had to issue a passport. In many cases people were turned down.

Q: Did we try to use pressure to get them, how did it work, I mean just…

LAGAMMA: No, I think we tried to go with those that we thought had a reasonable chance of being able to come to the Untied States. In the case of scholarships we had an AID funded scholarship program that allowed South Africans to be picked up in

neighboring countries, in Zimbabwe, in Angola and Mozambique, because they were in exile. So there was a program for majority population students who were in exile.

Q: Did we pretty well write off the French speaking countries as being sort of France oriented and…

LAGAMMA: We didn't write them off but we had a more difficult time in the French speaking countries. First of all most of them were small by comparison. There was no French speaking Nigeria. We had countries that range of eight to ten, twelve million maybe. We had very strong French influence. The French sometimes challenged our people when they taught English because they said who told you that you could teach English in this country? They felt they had a strong hand. Many of their officials were in key positions in the ministries. They had a lot of influence because of their aid. They had a lot of French cooperation, literally running things in Senegal and Cote D'Ivoire and other former colonies where they maintained very strong presence. Every former French colony, with the exception of Guinea which had broken with them at the time of independence, they held a very strong hand through the 60's and 70's. It waned in some places later on, but yes we had a more difficult time. The universities weren't as open to our ideas. French deans or professors opposed the idea of introducing American literature for example in any of their curriculum. I had been in Cote D'Ivoire earlier when the new minister of finance, who later became the prime minister, president asked us for scholarships for management in the United States. We looked at our scholarship program which was quite small and said, "Well maybe we could do one or two this year and one or two next year." He said, "One or two? I want 50. Fifty places at the best American universities, and I am prepared to pay for it." He sent them and many of those people today are running the country. The French didn't like that at all.

Q: Did you feel at all in any of these places you were in competition? Did the French see competition when we were just trying to do our job?

LAGAMMA: We saw the French presence as probably necessary and likely helpful to a degree in supporting the economy of these countries and the technical needs and the problem that we had was that there were a very large number of French nationals in these countries that regarded the United States as a potential rival and thought that we were out to supplant them. There was nothing that we could say or do to change their minds about that.

Q: Did the Horn of Africa attract any of our attention or at that time it was a rather different place.

LAGAMMA: Well the Horn of Africa was always important and it was always difficult. Ethiopia had been traditionally a very strong friend of the United States under Haile Selassie. When he fell there was a Marxist-Leninist dictatorship in his place, but we had more Ethiopian students in the United States than Nigerians. Probably the highest number of students in American universities from Africa were Ethiopian. Those figures change when Haile Selassie was deposed. There were no new ones, but there continued to be a

lot of old ones who stayed around for awhile. The numbers total was always Ethiopians, Nigerians and Liberians and Kenyans in American colleges and universities. Those were the top four by far. They were separated by a big gap from the others.

Q: Did any particularly I am thinking of any nationality, Nigerians but any others who went to the United States but then sort of faded into the woodwork?

LAGAMMA: Sure. We have an enormous number of Nigerians in the United States, many of whom went to our colleges and universities and some of whom married Americans, became American citizens after awhile. Blended in here. The question was always when is a good time to return home? And for the Nigerians there was never a magic moment where it seemed that conditions at home would allow you to have the kinds of opportunities that you had in the United States. So that was the cause of the brain drain from Nigeria to Britain, the U.S. other countries. Many Nigerians feel, and they probably are right, that they are qualified to do jobs in the first world and when they get the opportunity they come in our direction.

Q: Was there much consultation at your level between the State Department African Bureau and what you were doing about how we should plan and deal with the cultural side?

LAGAMMA: We would attend weekly meetings with the AF bureau at State. Sometimes I would go but more often my boss or his deputy would go to represent us. We always had some culture items to report on -- performing artist groups going to Africa, new scholarship programs, new initiatives. People that were in the United States or who are coming to the United States who would be seen in the department or that the department could help make appointments for.

Q: How did you find the sort of cultural side, the performing artists and authors and all that/ Any particular ones that stick in your memory?

LAGAMMA: Not necessarily from that period, but I always thought this was one of the more neglected sides of what we did. We didn't always have sufficient resources to do it as well as we might have. At the time of Zambian independence in 1964 we had Woody Herman and his Thundering Herd, one of the big bands of the period. That was really quite sensational. Later on when I went to Nigeria we had Dizzy Gillespie and a quintet. We had a vast range of musical events coming through Africa, and they were always very successful, always very well attended. People remember them for many years. When I was in Senegal we had a New Orleans marching band that was absolutely sensational. We commandeered a train from the national railroad system. We brought this New Orleans Jazz Band to Saint-Louis which had been the first capital of Senegal, for awhile the capital of all French West Africa, and had been built at the time the French were building New Orleans. It looked like New Orleans, an African New Orleans. We had them march through the center of town. Tens of thousands were going absolutely nuts and loving every minute of it. We had the train stop every ten or 15 minutes on the way, and we had a flat car on the back and had them perform for the people waiting to hear

them. One of the most sensational things I have ever done. Musical events were always welcomed. Arts were welcomed when we could have a show of an American sculptor or painter, when we could show our appreciation for African artists or African musicians and arrange for an artist to go to the United States and visit museums, make contact with fellow artists or go into some kind of a program for artists or writers. The impact of those programs was substantial and was one of the more effective things we did. One of the things I most lament about is what has happened to the former activities of USIA, because this is one thing they neglected.

Q: About '84 or so you left that job.

LAGAMMA: Yeah. I looked at a half a dozen positions that were coming open overseas. Among them were Liberia, Tanzania, and one or two others. All of a sudden Dakar opened, and I said that is where I want to go, because I had been in Francophone Africa. I had been in Cote D'Ivoire.

Q: How did you find Dakar?

LAGAMMA: I loved Dakar.

Q: Why Senegal, you went there in '84.

LAGAMMA: '84 to '88.

Q: What was the political situation there?

LAGAMMA: Well Senghor had handed over power to Abdou Diouf who was something of a technocrat. He had been his prime minister. Abdou Diouf was a very competent guy, not very charismatic, but somebody that seemed to be able to run a country fairly well. It was a relatively good period in the history of Senegal, the mid 80's. Senegal was the capital of French West Africa, and it was the place going way back where the French made a major cultural impact. They had sent delegates from Senegal to the Etats General in France in the 18th century. So the ties were deep, and the elite was highly Europeanized. There was a survey done on where people in Senegal got their opinions on world issues from, media surfing, and what we found out was that the people that mattered in the country got their opinions from Le Monde. Now Le Monde is very expensive and it is printed far from Dakar. So these were air subscriptions that had been ordered from senior French civil servants, when this was a colony, and they hadn't been cancelled after independence. This was already in the 80's. So for 25 years or more the Senegalese senior officials were getting subscriptions to Le Monde, were reading it, and having it shape their opinions about the world. The other thing about Senegal that I loved and was reading about before I got assigned there was it was the center for so many creative people. Novelists, the best in Francophone Africa, maybe the best in Africa. Film makers, people like Ousmane Sembene. They were the best at everything. There were senior officials of UNESCO including M'Bow who we didn't care for very much.

Q: He was UNESCO's…

LAGAMMA: … director general at the time. So these were world class people. These were people that moved in intellectual circles in Paris. Senghor certainly was a French poet as well as an African poet. He was a member of the Academie Francais.

Q: The time when you got there, who was the ambassador when you got there?

LAGAMMA: Charlie Bray. Charlie had been deputy director of USIA. He was a State Department officer, but he had gone over to USIA during the Carter administration serving with John Reinhart who was a USIA career guy who became director, the first time that had happened. Charlie was a Francophile. He insisted that all new officers coming to Dakar would have to have a minimum 4-4 in French. Because he said you really couldn't function well in Senegal unless you had a mastery of the French language. I actually had to go back to language school for a couple of months to get my French up to that level.

Q: Well the way you are describing it you went there as the cultural officer?

LAGAMMA: No, PAO.

Q: PAO. Well then you are in charge of the whole thing, but let's talk about the cultural side. You basically for the Senegalese and for the French side represented the barbarians trying to get into the act or something sure enough?

LAGAMMA: Well it wasn't rivalry. The French felt threatened whenever we did anything that was successful. Shortly after I arrived we moved into a new building, and we had a spanking new cultural center with a wonderful new library and lots of classrooms for English teaching. We had moved from a crummy old building where we shared a floor with USAID. It was really falling apart, where the elevator hardly worked, to a whole building for ourselves that we had designed to our specifications. Yeah the French were always very jealous of us, paid a lot of attention to what we were doing, felt that we were overstepping the bounds sometimes of what we should be doing. But we had a good post. We had an IO, myself, a CAO, and assistant CAO, and then we had a couple of regional officers based in Dakar that we got some benefit from, a regional English teaching officer and a regional librarian. So we were the best staffed post in Francophone Africa. And we had an ambassador with a lot of imagination who understood better than anybody I have ever worked with how to get the most out of USIA, out of educational and cultural exchange and out of the press. Charlie Bray had been the spokesman for the Department so he knew a lot about press relations. Senegal had one of the few free presses in all of Africa. Not a very big one, but they did tolerate divergent opinions. In addition to the government press which was big, there were a lot of journalists who started their own publications: weekly, monthly, pull outs, sporadicals. It was a lot of opposition opinion out there. One of the first things the ambassador called me to do was very interesting. We were trying to get the Senegalese, who were very state-enterprise oriented, to privatize, to open up their economy to market forces, to be

more competitive. All these state enterprises were dominating the economy and they weren't doing very well. They were inefficient. They were corrupt. How do you get them to move in the direction that the world bank and the IMF were pushing them in. Charlie said, "Bob, I want you to do an idea strategy for me." I said, "What is that?" He said, "What are the ideas that we would like the Senegalese to adopt, consider, move in the direction of, and figure out how to do it with the resources that you have, with grants, with scholarships, with international visitors grants, with other kinds of resources, and tell me what the audiences are for them, and let's aim with what resources we have at those people on those themes." And that is what we did when I first came. We focused on the elites, the opinion makers in government, in the press, in the academic community, people whose ideas made a difference. And we provided them with grants and we started moving the discussion, not dramatically overnight, but over time in the right direction.

Q: That is a very good idea. How about your French counterparts? Did you get the feeling they were looking over your shoulder?

LAGAMMA: Oh sure. There was a very intense rivalry. Later on in Senegal, when Lannon Walker became ambassador, we faced the challenge of trying to sell the Senegalese things that they needed. We had an abundance and we could provide them with things at good prices and break the French monopoly. And the first thing we tried was wheat, grain for the making of bread. Up until that time the French had a vertical monopoly on the production of French grain sending it to the mills for grinding into flour, on sending it to Africa on their ships and on making it into bread in their bakeries. And Lannon said, we have said to the Senegalese, "We can sell you wheat flour at lower process than they can. It will be better and we will do a deal where if you buy it, money you spend on it will go into development projects, a pretty good deal. Better than anything the French could do." Before we knew it we were hit with the rumor that you cannot make Baguettes out of American flour. You can only make it out of French flour. So we worked out a strategy and Lannon had one of the big grain companies, Cargill or something, send over something like ten bags of flour by air. When we got the air shipment, he had arranged for a local bakery in the African quarter of Dakar to bake the bread into baguettes. He then sent it around with his chauffeur with a little ribbon tied around it and a note tied to the ribbon telling the minister and the secretary of the minister of every ministry in the country, "Good Morning, bon jour, we want to you to have this bread. It was just baked in your local bakery from American wheat." It was as good or better than anything you could buy in Dakar.

Q: Well done.

LAGAMMA: We managed to sell wheat to Senegal that year under those terms and never again because the French said to the Senegalese, "If you do that again, our aid package will be cut by the amount of money that you spend on that American flour."

Q: How about exchanges? Was there much interest? You really need English don't you?

LAGAMMA: Well not for the short term exchanges because we could have an interpreter escort accompany the French speakers. There were plenty of regional projects for Francophone Africa that we could put them in, so, yes, we tried to focus as much as possible on economic grants for people in some of the ministry plans, of finance according to the strategy that we had developed. Professors of economics, economic journalists. We oriented our programs heavily in one direction, but we also did a few other things for what we thought were outstanding individuals.

Q: Was there any interest in sort of American cultural things, movies, music events, that sort of thing?

LAGAMMA: Oh sure. We had regular showings of American classic films at our cultural center. Yeah, American music was very popular. The Senegalese were into the music scene in a big way and knew a lot about American music. Sarkisian was an American of Armenian background who called himself the music man for Africa and did a VOA jazz program. We got him to Senegal to talk about American music, to give some talks, and he was very popular, Leo Sarkisian.

Q: Did Senegal have a replication of the intellectuals in Paris at all?

LAGAMMA: Oh sure. There was a lot of back and forth between Senegalese intellectuals and France, inspired in part by Senghor himself who was a giant. I had the opportunity of meeting with him privately on two occasions. He lived not far from the center of town, and I asked on two occasions for an appointment to see him, and he was very kind to receive me. Both times. We had long conversations about the United States and what he admired about it. He said that we were headed toward what he called Mestize Action, a mixture of people and cultures unlike anywhere else in the world, and he thought that was marvelous. That was going to create a new culture.

Q: How did our South African policy play there or was it too far away to create much interest?

LAGAMMA: I think there were some people who were politically aware who opposed our South African policy, but Senegalese were far from the scene. They saw things in a little more nuanced way through French eyes and thought of the complexities of the situation a bit more than most Africans did. They were a very sophisticated bunch.

Q: What was social life like there?

LAGAMMA: It was very rich. We had access to Senegalese from just about every level of society. I remember the first time I had a dinner about two weeks after arriving. I invited about 60 people, the 60 people that I thought were the most important to our work to my house for a buffet dinner, and 70 came. People brought people. It was very easy to get them to come to your house, and more than any other African country I have ever worked in, they sometimes invited you to their houses, even if they were modest. They had a sense of reciprocating hospitality, especially during the end of Ramadan, where

there was a lifting of the fast, we would always be invited. During Ramadan I used to remember doing what I called my Catholic lunches. The Muslims couldn't come to lunch during the day, so there were a certain number of elites in Senegal that were Christian so we would work with them during that period.

Q: Were the Soviets at all a factor?

LAGAMMA: No, not really, not much. The didn't give too much attention to the Soviets. By the 80's they were there, they were present, they were active, good music. It was in Senegal that my friend the station chief asked me one day if I were going to the concert at the Soviet embassy. I said, "No, is it good?" He said, "Don't you know?" I didn't. "That when you finished second in the Tchaikovsky competition you get to go Senegal and Abidjan and other places in Africa. If you finish first, of course you go to New York, Paris, and London." But the Soviets in their exchange program had control of the best artists. They would bicycle them around to Africa, so if you were fortunate enough to go to a concert at a Soviet embassy, you usually got some very good music.

Q: How did you find them I mean w as Libya messing around, Qadhafi and all, there.

LAGAMMA: Not much. No he didn't have that much influence. The Senegalese were very pragmatic and they didn't get involved in those kinds of politics, and they weren't very much influenced by them either. The French really had a stranglehold, so we didn't have a real problem. The British were present in Dakar, and we had close relations with the British institute, the British-Senegalese Institute. About the time we were opening our cultural center, we learned that the Secretary of State Shultz was coming to Dakar. I thought, let's hold up the opening of our cultural center until the Secretary of State comes, and we will let him open it. So we put that in our cable to the Department of suggested stops. The know nothings on the desks responded what precedent is there for an American Secretary of State to open an American cultural center. So when I got that question I was so happy because I ran right over to the British-Senegalese Institute and I copied the plaque on the wall and I sent that back in a cable. It said, "Here in 1981 March 13, in the presence of Leopold Sédar Senghor, and Queen Elizabeth II was dedicated this cultural center." I sent that back saying "There is a precedent!"

Q: Oh my God.

LAGAMMA: So we had George Shultz come out; he came to our cultural center. There was a lot of construction going on in downtown Dakar, so the water table had shifted, and our library, half of it was downstairs in a kind of basement. So we woke up the day before his visit, and found it flooded. So we ran over to the main hotel downtown and borrowed pumps for pumping water. We dried it out very quickly. It was in good shape. We had about 100 key people -- the minister of culture, the rector of the university and those kinds of guys come to the opening ceremony. I also invited a kora player, one of these wonderful stringed instruments from Senegal. He was the musician used most often by the national theater for special events, a wonderful musician. He would make up songs and sing them and play his instrument. So I had him there just before the ceremony. The

State Department security folks came by and said, "What is this guy doing here? Who authorized it?" I said, "Nobody authorized it. He is here for the secretary's ceremony." "Get him out of here. He is not cleared. He has these big robes on." I guess they figured he had all kinds of weaponry in them. So I said, "Yes very well." They had their sniffer dogs come by and they sniffed everything, and I told them not to pee on the rug. So I took our kora player and I put him in a waiting room off to the side until these guys were gone, and then I had him come out again. So when the secretary's motorcade came down the street and he got out, there was this guy playing this song. And Secretary Shultz, an amazing man, a wonderful sense of humor, great sensitivity, I loved him. He paid so much attention to this guy that we could hardly get him away to attend the ceremony. This guy was singing away on his kora, and saying something about Secretary Shultz da, da, da, da, singing his praises in a praise song. Shultz loved it. And it was really the hit of the ceremony.

The other thing we did in Senegal is that we had an English teaching program. When I got there it was a kind of little mom and pop operation that we had a local American woman run. She was doing it as a business in our premises, and making a little bit of money at it, but not doing it very well or very professionally. So I ended that, and we got the agency to hire a program director to come out to Senegal, an English as a foreign language specialist. He organized the program for us in a much more professional way in our new quarters with five English teaching classrooms. We ran this program, and because we have the ability to recycle funds we earned $60,000 a year in profit, which we were able to use for exchanges. We used it for an annual English teaching seminar, American studies seminar which was aimed at the teacher training college at the university. We used it for sending people to the states, and we used it to buy books, and we used it for all kinds of purposes. It was a wonderful vehicle, and we were able to teach English professionally at the same time to several hundred students. It was the most successful enterprise that I have ever run.

Q: Well did you have any particular crises or great problems?

LAGAMMA: There was a political crisis in Senegal. The policemen's strike at the end of my tour, I think it was about '90 or '91 where the police were on strike and they were going to march to the presidential palace. Just in front of our cultural center the president ordered the military to stop them because they had to come up main street through the square, and we were right on that corner. They set up a gun emplacement overlooking the square. The police were at one end of the square and they were threatening to march down out toward our position where the military was. My driver came up and he was smiling. I said, "What are you smiling about?" He said, "My brother is down there; he is a sergeant. He is in charge of that position there." I said, "Go downstairs and ask your brother what his orders are and see if he will tell you." So he came back up five minutes later and he said, "My brother says that his orders are to fire on them if they march up the street." I thought, oh my God, so I reported that immediately to the ambassador. They didn't march up the street. So I mean that was a near miss. But at the time we had Dejan's, New Orleans Brass Band coming to Dakar. There was a curfew, and we had to figure out what to do with it. As I told you, we sent them to Saint-Louis on this

wonderfully successful trip the New Orleans of Africa. They performed there and all the way on the way. There was no problem there. The problem was in Dakar. But then when they got back to Dakar, we were going to take them to Goree Island, the island from where the slaves left for the Americas. We had to go out there on a ferry and we were told by the authorities that there was a curfew in effect. They didn't want gatherings of large numbers of people. I saw no possible harm arising on Goree Island because it was across a body of water and there were not any police out there or anything. So I fortunately knew an advisor to the president, and I called him on his phone. I said, "Listen, can't you get this lifted for the period of our concert. People will love this." He said, "Yes." Ten minutes later the order was lifted, and we marched around Goree Island with this band playing everywhere. It was very successful.

Q: Well you left there in '84.

LAGAMMA: I left there in '88.

Q: '88, whither? Where did you go then?

LAGAMMA: I went directly to Nigeria as PAO. Nigeria from '88 to '91.

Q: Well this must have been Nigeria, it is one of these places with great potential…

LAGAMMA: It is said that Nigeria is a country that will always have great potential because it will never realize it.

Q: What was the situation there when you got there?

LAGAMMA: Well it was a military dictatorship led by a kind of benign looking general by the name of Babangida who had a wonderful gap in his front teeth and always was smiling. So you had a sense that this was a menacing military guy, but he could be quite tough. In fact there was an attempted coup once during our time there, I think it was about '90 or '91, which really shook people up because they never expected it. Babangida kept on promising a transition to democracy because that is what you do when you are in Nigeria if you are a military guy. Throughout the history of Nigeria the feeling was people want some kind of a democratic government and you are only there temporarily. If you attempt to make it appear as if it is permanent, the people will act against the military, and there are 140 million of them these days, so there is no military that can keep that in check permanently. So the military people, including Babangida always promised a transition. We used to refer to it as a permanent transition because it never seemed to happen during their time. So there was a certain tension there. We wanted to encourage the transition that never happened while I was there. I served under Lannon Walker who came a year after I did. Our first ambassador for my time there was Princeton Lyman who was absolutely wonderful. Lannon was good as well. They were both excellent ambassadors, both were different. Lannon wanted us to develop an aggressive attitude towards this possible transition to democracy. He thought we could make some headway. The United States was highly regarded in Nigeria. Most Nigerians

thought the world of America, liked American ideas, models. When there was an increase in the number of states to I think it was 25 during one point of my time, somebody asked me when I thought this new increase in the number of states is ever going to stop. I said, "That is simple, when it reaches 50." That would be their goal just like us. A part of Nigeria, the eastern part, the former Biafra, was a place where America was absolutely worshipped, and I use that in the sense quite literally because their term for the United States was God's own country.

Anyhow it was God's own country for the easterners, and it was very popular among the Yorubas. It was a little less popular among the northerners, but still highly respected. So we launched a democracy program. Lannon worked very hard. He persuaded AID to unleashed $3 million which was an unheard of amount for a PAO to manage. They gave us three million dollars for a program I designed. We knew we weren't capable of administering a very complex kind of exchange program with the three million aid dollars. You need a lot of people for that and a lot of expertise. So what I tried to do with that, I designed a simple program. I said, OK, we are going to identify eight or ten issues that are important toward making progress on democracy in Nigeria. We are going to fund partnerships over three years between Nigerian institutions and their U.S. counterparts using this money. It would be money for back and forth travel. It would be money for training. It would be money for research, money for a variety of activities, conferences of all sorts. For institution strengthening activities. So, for example, we funded a relationship between the American Bar Association and the Nigerian Bar Association on strengthening rule of law in Nigeria over three years. We funded a project between the league of women voters and the association of Nigerian women which was called Women into Politics, to try to get women to participate more actively in politics because we generally believed that women, who weren't as linked to corruption as men, could move Nigeria in new and better directions. We funded a project on constitutionalism. We funded a project on strengthening the free press between the International Center for Journalists, the International Center of Foreign Journalists, ICFJ and the Nigerian press Association. We did a series of training sessions for journalists, on managing the media, on investigative reporting, on covering elections , those kinds of things. It was the most ambitious program that I think any PAO ever presided over in the history of Africa because we had all this dough and we had some very good people. We even picked up the institutions that we thought ought to be doing the projects on the U.S. side, and we persuaded them to put in grant proposals because it is not easy to get people to work in Nigeria. It is notably a hard place to work. We got a number of universities involved. The University of North Carolina at Charlotte had a head of African studies whom I knew very well who worked on this local government project to try to strengthen local government. So we had all of these ten projects for a three year period that was funded by this three million dollars. My colleague the AID director, when we first launched this project asked me, "Bob, how are you going to spend all this money? Do you really have the capacity?" AID had just opened a new office in Nigeria. They hadn't been very active because Nigeria was an oil producing country. But at that point they started opening up an office and they had rented a building. The rent of the building for several years was a million dollars. So when he asked me how are you possibly going to

spend that money, I said, "Gene, we will just rent three buildings like you just rented." It worked out very well. It continued after I left. It went from about 1990 to 1993.

Q: Were we in rivalry with the British or how did that work out?

LAGAMMA: Not really. Nigeria was a big enough country where there was space enough for everybody. Although the British had the traditional dominant role there, the Untied States had long since supplanted the British as a major market for Nigerian oil and as a major seller of products. And as a major destination, which is something I noticed in 1980, of Nigerian students and scholars. Much more interesting for them to go to the United States than it was for them to go to Britain.

Q: One of the big problems is that so many of those don't come back.

LAGAMMA: That is right.

Q: Did you run across any of these get rich schemes that have dominated the internet recently?

LAGAMMA: Oh yes. I first ran into those in Senegal and then, yes, Nigeria was rife with them, with fraud. Fraud was a major economic activity in Nigeria. Fraud and drug smuggling. Nigeria by that time had become a major transit point for the smuggling of heroin into the United States.

Q: How did it go?

LAGAMMA: Well it went by mules, by people hired to put drugs into their body cavities. Some of them died.

Q: You are using the term mule is the drug term for person.

LAGAMMA: A person who carries drugs on aircraft essentially. There was a Nigerian Airways connection to New York as well as a Pan Am flight. There were so many unemployed youths and impoverished youth in Senegal. There was an article in an American newspaper while I was there that studied the phenomenon of Nigerians who had been arrested for carrying drugs into the United States. The Nigerians found that life in American prisons was far superior to what it may have been at home. Living in a wretched slum without adequate sustenance. So they took a chance at getting rich quick or the worst case scenario was better than what they had to go back to.

Q: What about car smuggling? Was that a big thing there or not?

LAGAMMA: Yeah, there was car smuggling. There was hijacking. There was armed robbery, a lot of security problems in Nigeria. Everybody had high walls that were protected and guards. Even then there were examples of people whose houses were broken into even with all the precautions. I remember the Ford Foundation guy who had

been there just before us had had a very violent intrusion into his house, his wife was raped. He was badly beaten. This was the Ford Foundation that took care of its people fairly well. So this was a constant problem. It was made worse by a law that was passed by the Nigerian government which imposed the death sentence on people caught in armed robbery, which made it advantageous to kill their victims because there was no more penalty that could be exacted. Robbers didn't want witnesses to survive so if you were the victim of armed robbery you had a chance of being killed.

Q: Was it hard to keep staff?

LAGAMMA: Oh no, our jobs were very good. There was no problem in keeping staff. In fact the difficulty we had was getting rid of dead wood. Because we had had people who had been there forever who were not very good in some cases.

Q: How about travel. Is this a place where someone really got around and all that?

LAGAMMA: I got around pretty well. Travel by air was dicey. The roads were not always very well maintained but there were some good ones. So travel was not easy. You had to worry especially when you were traveling with people that needed restrooms. You had to worry about were you ever going to find a rest room. Hotels were poor. Our branch PAO, before she moved into her house, stayed in the best hotel in Kaduna and wound up with lice in her hair. Those kinds of problems. You would have a good hotel built and then two years later it would be a terrible hotel. Things went downhill fast in Nigeria.

Q: Were there any other crises or anything of that nature?

LAGAMMA: There was an attempted coup. We woke up one night and heard artillery shells in the military camp which was not too far from where we lived. We wound up riding around town that day looking at what was going on. It was a very near miss. They almost killed the president. He managed to survive and prevail. It was a group of army officers that were tried and convicted and sentenced to death. They were executed. So that was the biggest single crisis. But in Nigeria there were crises every other day. One kind or another, personal crises you get involved in problems. I got a call one day about one of our American researchers who was off in the east and she was hospitalized and apparently getting worse. I went out there to visit her and had the embassy doctor with me. He said they were treating her all wrong and that she wouldn't make it unless we got her out of there. So we literally abducted her from the hospital without checking out in any way because they weren't going to release her. We took her to the Airport, and flew her to Lagos, and put her in a private clinic and she did quite well there. But it was that kind of problem. Medical care was very spotty. People would come down with predictable health problems. Cerebral malaria was a problem. The head doctor at the University Hospital had his son die of cerebral malaria. Problems of criminality were major issues. You had to be very careful how you moved around. We were there during the first Gulf War. We had problems with Libya. We lived near the Palestinian embassy. We lived near the Iraqi embassy. We used to take walks around the neighborhood. So

that was always a worry. There was the problem of Muslim fundamentalism in Nigeria when you went north. Came on very strong. It was mostly the fault of the Saudis but also Iranian influence in the north. The two different kinds of Muslims: Shia and Sunni. The Saudis built big mosques and sponsored Islamic schools. They were the source of the spreading of anti-western hatreds. The Iranians added fuel to the fire from another direction, so we had a lot of nasty situations in the north. Our consulate was besieged at one point by northerners during the Gulf war.

Q: This was at Kaduna?

LAGAMMA: Kaduna. And when the consul general called for help from the government it didn't come. So Ambassador Walker issued a travel warning, had the Department issue a travel warning for travel to Nigeria. The Nigerian government was furious. He said, "Well too bad. I am here to protect American citizens and unless we have the firmest possible guarantees we are not going to lift this travel ban. You didn't help us when we needed it, and we are not going to lift it." As a result they did protect our facilities after that.

Q: Well this is probably a good place to stop, Bob. You left in '91?

LAGAMMA: I left Nigeria in '91.

Q: And just put at the end where did you go?

LAGAMMA: I came back to Washington to be deputy director of our office of African Affairs. Then went on to be director of that office.

Q: OK we will pick it up then.

LAGAMMA: I want to mention one other thing which I forgot to mention in the course of my talking about Senegal. During the course of my African assignments, I perceived the need for a different kind of exchange program. We had on the one hand our very formal Fulbright program and on the other hand the international visitor short term kind of things. I felt that we needed something very different for the kinds of Africans that we dealt with. That eventually led to the creation of the Hubert Humphrey program. Which was for usually government officials, younger officials of the range of 25 to 35, who were up and coming people within their ministries and who had some academic training but needed some kind of combination of practical experience and a little more academic work. That led to the creation, when I returned as the cultural coordinator, of the Hubert Humphrey, a one year non degree program in about 10 universities around the country which specialized in certain fields. After the first year, when it was for Africa only, it became world wide, but it always has had a disproportionate number of Africans because the Africans tend to be better candidates in this category. If you are a European and you are 25 to 35 you usually are not at the top of your game in your ministry where in Africa you may well be. So we always had the best candidates for this program. I was especially proud of having led the agency to create this program which still goes on to this day.

One other thing. When I was in Togo and later on when I was in Senegal we felt the need for another kind of exchange program that would link universities. So I was responsible for the creation of the university affiliations program that USIA launched and which exists to this day.

Q: Sister universities.

LAGAMMA: Sister universities which is funded by the U.S. government and allows for back and forth exchanges between two institutions which are defined in a proposal that is competitive. The best ones get funded each year. It is very competitive because there are lots of institutions seeking these grants. So those are two programs that we started as a result of my African experience that I brought to Washington with me.

Q: OK we will pick this up in 1991 when you are coming back to Washington to USIA headquarters. OK, great.

We are adding a little more. This is something else you asked.

LAGAMMA: Yeah, I wanted to just talk about a vignette that will illustrate something I did during my time in Washington in the early 80's. USIA had something called the voluntary visitor program. If somebody could get themselves to the United States and otherwise didn't need money for international travel, our office, International Visitors Office, could pick them up and pay their per diem and local travel. It was very inexpensive. The thing usually cost less than an thousand dollars for a week. It had a high impact. The idea was that if somebody was in the United States for a World Bank visit or for an academic trip paid for by their own institution or their own government, they could then do something else at our expense professionally. That wound up usually being a very good bang for the buck. I conceived of trying to use this for African ambassadors to the United States, who never got much out of Washington as a rule because they couldn't afford it, because they were too busy doing other things. As a result they never really understood what the United Stats was about. My justification for this was that anybody who was the ambassador to the United States was a potential foreign minister, because that was the most important job that an African country could give to a diplomat. So we would have very high powered people here who were really impotent to do the kind of job they wanted to because they didn't know enough, and they couldn't travel. So I conceived of an African ambassador trip, voluntary visitor trip around the United States. We organized it for a two week period. We sent out invitations to all the African embassies. 35 of them said yes we would love to do this. So we had yeses from 35 ambassadors or chargés. We devised a program that included Boston, Mobile, Alabama, because there was a place called Prichard, Alabama, that had a special significance for Africans, and Little Rock, Arkansas. The first week was in Washington. In Washington we had a series of lecturers talk to them about the American press, the Congress and those parts of the U.S. government that they didn't usually have much to do with but were important to their work. The Department of Agriculture, the Treasury Department and so forth. It was a very successful program in Washington. We had very good

attendance for these guys who otherwise were being pulled away. But then it was even more successful when we hit the road. I didn't do the first part; I sent my assistant to Boston. They met with the Boston Globe and the Christian Science Monitor and the governor had a reception for them and the mayor. The African American community in Roxbury held an event for them. It was very effective, and they went to Harvard as well. A terrific couple of days. Then I picked them up when they went to Little Rock. We went to Little Rock High School. We saw an integrated high school which had once been segregated and what been the battle ground over the integration of schools in Arkansas in the south. The most beautiful in the nation in the time it was built. It cost I think $100 million. They really did it up grand. Then we visited the rice council which provided rice under PL-480 for Africa and discussed the rice trade. We went to Heifer International which was a Rockefeller project which provided livestock for the rest of the world, and got back to Little Rock to find that the governor wanted to have a reception for us. That governor was Bill Clinton. He and Hillary had a wonderful reception for us that night. He was incredibly well versed in and had been briefed by his staff about why Arkansas related to Africa. In what ways. So he was able to talk to the Nigerian and the Senegalese about special interests that Arkansas had with Africa. It was a tour de force. When I went back to my hotel, I called my wife and said, "I think I have met a future president of the United States." This was in 1982. Then we went to Mobile, Alabama, where there is a little town next door called Prichard, and a monument that was being created called Africa Town. It was the place of the last slave ship to arrive in the United States in 1859, well after the slave trade had been banned. As a result the slaves on that ship hardly experienced slavery at all because a couple of years later they were freed at the end of the Civil War. Most of them came from one place in the country that is now Benin and used to be Dahomey. Most of them retained some vestige of their language and their customs. They all had come from the same place and had that recent experience which they passed on. So we arranged for a sister city relationship with Benin. And a whole bunch of exchanges. They also met with African American mayors who were gathered in that town for a conference. There were more African American mayors in Alabama than in any other state. We got plaques sent to us by representative of then governor George Wallace making all of the African ambassadors honorary citizens of Alabama. George Wallace had gone through a change in his politicking and decided that if he wanted to stay governor he had to get African American votes and so was reaching out to the African ambassadors for that reason. It was an enormously successful trip and one of the most successful things I have ever done.

Q: Great. OK well Bob I will put at the end once again we will pick this up in 1991 when you are coming back to the United States.

LAGAMMA: OK, great.

Q: Today is 8 July 2008. This is an interview with Bob LaGamma. Bob we are talking about 1991, and you are back from Nigeria and you are going to USIA headquarters.

LAGAMMA: Yeah.

Q: You were doing that from when to when?

LAGAMMA: Well I was in Washington from ’91 to ’95 when I left for my last assignment to South Africa.

Q: OK, well let’s talk about what were you doing from ’91 to ’95?

LAGAMMA: Well I had actually two jobs in the same office. I was deputy director of USIA’s office of African Affairs for the first 2 ½ years, and for the second 2 ½ years I was director of that office. Probably the most interesting job of my career.

Q: All right, let’s talk about it. When you took over the job in ’91 what was the situation that you were particularly concentrated on, situations?

LAGAMMA: Change was in the air because we were at the end of the Cold War obviously. The kind of strategic importance that Africa had during the Cold War and the competition between the Soviet Union and the United States for the support of African countries was over. African countries were struggling to find a different path in the international community. The Soviet period was over. Support to dictators both by the Soviet Bloc and by the United States meant that a lot of the regimes that had depended on the support, the authoritarian regimes no longer had it, and were struggling internally in many cases to become viable states in a new dispensation. That meant that some of the dictators actually fell from power. So this was an interesting time because it marked a resurgence of the free press all over Africa. It marked a revitalization of civil society. And a call for greater freedoms on the part of many groups who had been subjected to authoritarian rule in many countries. And we were on the road to a very different kind of Africa. I saw USIS’s role in that as attempting to be helpful to the kinds of people that we had traditionally dealt with in civil society and the academic community and the press. I thought our proper role was to try to encourage these kinds of groups and individuals in their struggle to try and broaden the freedom within their countries. We could play a kind of lead role in that regard because we had our people in our cultural centers in Africa had good contacts with just those groups.

Q: What sort of response were you making let’s say to reporting in newspaper things. What could we do?

LAGAMMA: I saw as our objective to try to strengthen the press, the free press in Africa, the media in general. And one of the contributions that I felt we could make was in training. And so USIA organized a great many training programs for journalists in those years. We worked in partnership with the newly created center for foreign journalists here in Washington. It was created by Tom Winship, editor of the Boston Globe, and others to try to help the African press or the international press that was just becoming freer all over the world, in East and Central Europe, the former Soviet union, Asia, Africa, Latin America. So they were one of our greatest allies. Our own program people were capable of recruiting journalists for training programs. We tried to do several things. One, we tried to improve the professionalism of reporters so that they knew what

their responsibilities to the truth were and how to gather the news effectively and what constituted good reporting. We also thought it was important to strengthen the management of the press because so many of these newspapers and radio stations that were popping up all over were very fragile. They didn't have solid financial bases. It was very important to try to help the leaders of these new media to organize more effectively so they would survive in a new environment, a competitive media environment where they had news space. There was a great temptation toward irresponsibility because the boundaries were not clear and the personnel they had at their disposition were not well trained.

Q: Well weren't the papers as in many countries, sort of the creatures of a particular party or individual?

LAGAMMA: Yes, in many cases they were. My previous assignment was in Nigeria and before that in Senegal. Both places were known for relatively vital energetic presses . And in most cases the new independent media was created with an eye to influencing policy. In the case of many of the Nigerian papers, we had 16 daily newspapers at one time in Lagos. Many of the publishers were presidential candidates at one time or another when they could be. And so they were jockeying for position and the newspapers were one of the ways of doing that. That had been true in Africa from the days of Nkrumah in Ghana who was a newspaper guy and Azikiwe in Nigeria. The newspaper was a way of acquiring influence.

Q: Looking back on our own history particularly in the early years, papers are very partisan, in the early years.

LAGAMMA: Yeah, but the interesting thing about what was happening in Africa was that all of a sudden we had many voices and they were competitive. They were competing for the attention of the public, readers, and viewers and listeners. This had not been the case before. Many of these countries had only known government owned media, and this new situation was much more interesting because people had choices all of a sudden. They could read a variety of different opinion from different sources. The composite represented to me a free press. Not any one individual paper which might have been very tendentious and partisan, but the collectivity of a whole bunch of newspapers all of a sudden each representing a different point of view. This was something new and vital, and supported this rise of civil society, a multi party system for the first time where you had many factions that had voices.

Q: Were there any country could you kind of list where this was kind of working and also the countries where there were still very heavy hand of the ruling party.

LAGAMMA: Nigeria had the most interesting press tradition and the greatest variety, but at that time in the early 90's it was still a dictatorship; so there were still constraints. The government would only let the newspapers go so far. Occasionally they would arrest journalists and editors, close newspapers. But there were always others, and the old ones would always crop up again in a new place with new names. So it was a kind of losing

battle. Once the genie gets out of the bottle it is very hard to put it back in. Nigeria was one. There was an incredibly interesting example in Mali. It is just one of the poorest countries in the world and couldn't easily sustain a lot of newspapers. But once they started moving toward democratic rule, there was a proliferation of community radio stations. About 20 of them in Bamako at one time, in the early 90's. Some of them were commercial, some of them political, some of them entertainment, some business oriented. But all of a sudden publics had a variety of voices to listen to. This was common in many places, even in some of the more authoritarian countries. There were newspapers that cropped up. Cameroon has had a history of lots of newspapers even though the lid was on them, has always been on them. Togo, Benin, is a good example, because Benin was one of the first democracies after then end of the cold war. Many other countries.

Q: How about Zimbabwe? It is in the news right now because of Mugabe digging his heels in.

LAGAMMA: Zimbabwe is an interesting case. Zimbabwe had the British tradition of free press. That was curtailed by the Smith government during their unilateral independence period. Then with the coming of Mugabe there was fresh hope that the press would be more independent, I remember taking to the editor of one of the papers in the late 90's who was visiting South Africa. He was warning his South African counterparts. He said, "In the euphoria of the new order we suspended our critical judgment. Be careful that you don't do the same thing. Now that you have majority rule, don't let the new governing party, the new political leadership, get away with things simply because they are better than their predecessors. That can erode, as it has in Zimbabwe, where Mugabe put lots of limitations on how free the press could be."

Q: All right, well let's turn to sort of the big news and that is South Africa during the time you were in Washington.

LAGAMMA: During the time we were in Washington, South Africa experienced its negotiation for majority rule. Mandela was let out of prison. The ANC was allowed to operate. Negotiations went on between the ANC and the Nationalist Party. There was great excitement. We began to see that there was going to be majority rule. There was going to be an African government led by Mandela. During the Clinton period we worked very hard to try to assist that process along at the Washington level. I attended a number of meetings at the NSC at which it was decided that we should provide assistance to South Africa to help make the transition as successful as possible and to find ways in which to contribute to the process. At the end of that period we had Princeton Lyman as our ambassador to South Africa. He did a magnificent job, and wrote a very fine book about the transition during the time that he was ambassador. I served with him when I finally went to South Africa in '95 for a brief period until the end of his assignment some months later. A very successful period as ambassador. He was very innovative in finding ways in supporting the democratic transition without interfering with it.

Q: During again when you were in Washington what were you doing? I mean support and all?

LAGAMMA: I was traveling a lot. I made about 15 trips to Africa. Each trip involved stops at between 6 and 8 countries. So we were managing our posts in the field during really the last years of the independence of the U.S. information Agency. A time in which I felt that we were operating at a level never before experienced in the past because the tools that we had refined over the years, the exchange programs and the speakers programs, and the arts programs and the press programs, were beginning to bear fruit in the African countries and other countries around the world. You could see it in central Europe. I think we had never been as successful because we had been freed from the constraints of the cold war. This was precisely at the time when Jesse Helms was arguing that USIA was no longer needed because he saw it as a cold war instrument. We were liberated from a lot of constraints that the cold war imposed on us that kept us from being as effective as we could have been. So that meant that we had a lot of latitude in operating in African countries and providing assistance. I remember the debate over the creation of the National Endowment for Democracy (NED). The National Endowment for Democracy was suggested by Ronald Reagan during the Westminster speech, the famous Westminster before the parliament in London. There were debates within the U.S. government at that time as to whether it was necessary. Whether we couldn't carry out the functions that many of us thought we were capable of carrying out if only we had those additional resources. The question that I raised at the time in opposition to the creation of NED, an organization that we are now quite close to, was couldn't these resources be made available to us at the U.S. Information Agency so that we could use them to enhance our exchange programs and our grant programs. One of the things that we found very effective was the small private sector grants program where we could give grants to American institutions to operate abroad. In my case we directed a lot of attention to our African hosts to give grants to organizations to help strengthen the free press in Africa. I had the experience of a three million dollar AID grant in Nigeria that allowed me, through our private sector office in Washington, to arrange for grants between American institutions and their Nigerian counterparts. I wanted to see more of that happen in Africa. We did a fair amount of that kind of work. For example, the League of Women Voters and African women's organizations, that kind of thing. Some of the universities that had specialized programs in federalism or in local government. The kinds of things that we thought were very necessary. Grants in places that wanted to work on their rule of law. Grants for organizations that wanted to strengthen women's rights, human rights in general, a whole range of things that we had been working on; only without a great many resources in the field for many years. All of a sudden there were opportunities to open up with these new countries in transition to more democratic forms of government, and we could provide grants, not at the level of USAID.. That was something we always thought was complementary to what we were doing. But quick hitting, small grants at the level of 25, 50, 100 thousand dollars a year to do a project that might involve bringing leaders from African countries to the United States, U.S. experts to Africa in the same field, and having them work together in the course of a year or two years or three years, So we did a lot of that in those fields: law, press, women's rights, federalism, local government, constitutionalism. We did those kinds of things for South Africa with the expanded resources that we were getting just as we did in Nigeria. We had an arrangement with AID to funnel resources to us during that transition period to

increase the number of exchanges we could do in the fields that were relative to the transition.

Q: How did you find you are basically working at the end of the Bush administration when you are doing this. You are working…

LAGAMMA: End of the Bush and the beginning of the Clinton.

Q: Well let's talk about, yeah you were giving both. What about the Bush administration. How did you find sort of the agency at that time? What was the support they were getting form the political process and all?

LAGAMMA: One of the most dramatic things happened at the end of the Bush administration. I remember vividly our discussions about what we should be doing with Somalia during the crisis there. Very great humanitarian crisis, refugees pouring out of the country, starvation going on. U.S. involved in the humanitarian effort to try to relieve the suffering. I was making a trip through Africa and I landed in Ghana. Having lunch at the ambassador's residence, and the ambassador came to me and said, "Bob, what do you know about this business about our sending Marines into Somalia?" I said, "Mr. Ambassador, I have never heard of that. I have been participating in discussions at the NSC, and nobody raised that as an option. We were going to provide protection for our aircraft that were delivering relief supplies. We were going to try to find ways of distributing food more effectively, but nobody ever proposed military intervention." I reminded him that we had never intervened militarily in sub-Saharan African internal affairs in the history of our country. I found that rather astonishing. Well we soon found out that we had landed marines in Somalia. I remember going back and talking to the USIA deputy director about that. He had attended the meetings along with me at the NSC. I said, "Where did this come from, this decision to send troops into Somalia?" He said, "CNN." The President was watching the news coverage of Somalia and he couldn't stand to see the starving children. He overrode everybody and said, "We are sending the Marines in." It was rather astonishing because nobody at the level of the joint chiefs or defense secretary or secretary of state had recommended this course of action. The thing that troubled me about Somalia was really our lack of knowledge of how that place worked. How were we going to operate militarily in a place that we so little understood. That was a major departure from past policies. I must say it worked out rather well. I always think of the Somali military intervention in two parts. One was the military intervention to provide relief supplies to the people of Somalia, which I think was very successful. The second part was the attempt to find the political solution and to oppose the war lords who were messing around, who were intervening in the process and were interfering with the UN, which later assumed a major role, and actually the killing of the Americans during "Black Hawk Down." That occurred after some UN troops were massacred by some Somalis.

Q: I think they were Pakistani.

LAGAMMA: Pakistani, yes. The U.S. decided to go after the warlords who were responsible.

Q: Aidid.

LAGAMMA: Mohamed Aidid in Mogadishu. That led to the killing of a number of Americans. My friend Jim Bishop was ambassador to Somalia at the time. Despite his warnings to the department and the White House that they needed a strengthened reinforced military with armor, he wasn't listened to. The military intervention occurred without the proper equipment.

Q: In the Horn of Africa you had Somalia. Was there anything…

LAGAMMA: You had Ethiopia. Ethiopia was very important. That was a rather historic turning point. Hank Cohen whom I had served with in the past was the Assistant Secretary at the time. Hank had cultivated relationships with the rebel leaders who had opposed Mengistu, the Marxist Leninist leader of Ethiopia. When the rebel surge occurred it looked like they were going to enter Addis Ababa, Hank made it known that the United States welcomed the rebel victory and called for the peaceful taking of Addis Ababa because it could have been a great disaster. It could have been a terrible bloody combat for the capital. I think his call for an end to the conflict helped provide the kind of support that was needed for the new government to come to power and for Mengistu to be overthrown without a lot of bloodletting. As a result of his good relationship with Meles Zenawi, we were able, during the Persian Gulf War, rather surprisingly, to get overflight rights over Ethiopia, which was strategically very important for us, to supply our troops in the Persian Gulf.

Q: Were we able, I assume that was Somalia, we never were able to develop any exchange programs because it was so chaotic.

LAGAMMA: I remember my good friend Bill Zartman, I remember meeting him in the hall of the State Department. Bill was a professor at SAIS. Many years before he had written an article in an important book on Africa in which he talked about the divisiveness, the factionalism in Africa that was causing many African countries to experience great conflicts and inability to govern peacefully. He said the conflicts in Africa were caused by ethnicity which we all know, and they are caused by religious differences in many places, and they are caused by groups that have different histories, different cultural backgrounds. Very hard to put all those things together and to form a country that is unified in the African continent because there is so much splintering. He said, 'the one exception is Somalia which has one language, one religion, one culture." Really no divisions of any consequence, and therefore has all the requisites for being a country that can have a kind of unity that most other African countries can't expect. So I reminded Bill of this article and he said, it is unfair. That was many years before. The thing is that people hadn't predicted that Somalia would fall apart. But Somalia, this region of the Horn, has been conflict ridden since the late 50's. Sudan, civil war, Conflict within Ethiopia itself. Somalia and Eritrea fighting for independence. Eritrea liberation

groups. The whole region was highly divided. I remember attending a lecture that Hank Cohen gave, a briefing at the Congressional Research Service on the Horn of Africa and our policy toward it. He gave an explanation of what that policy was to a group that consisted of representatives of various groups throughout Sudan, Somalia, Ethiopia, all of them were at daggers drawn with each other. After he had finished speaking and explaining our policy the first questioner raised his hand. I think he was from Somalia. He said, "I disagree with everything that the assistant secretary has said." At which point Hank thought he was making a joke. He said, "you know you can be arrested for disagreeing with the assistant secretary." Everybody in that room, all of these revolutionaries, froze thinking that the FBI was about to descend on them. They didn't realize that it was a joke. A very fractious region. Long histories of conflict and violence. Very bad, great hatreds of one group against another.

Q: How did South Africa which is sort of the big enchilada. How did that during this time you were there, how was that responding?

LAGAMMA: I had been interested in South Africa ever since I came in, before I came into the foreign service, because it was such a great prize. The whole continent cared about South Africa and majority rule. It seemed to be related in some way to our own civil rights struggle in the United States, the struggle for political participation. In the case of the United States, ten to thirteen percent of the population was African American. In the case of South Africa it was more like 85%, so the percentages were reversed, and we are talking about majority rule in South Africa. But South Africa was obviously a painful thing under apartheid for the rest of Africa to tolerate because it represented kind of the worst of the colonial heritage, the worst remnant of what was left of a period of violence and repression on the part of people from another continent. In the case of South Africa, the Afrikaners claimed to have come in the 17th century. They were African too they said, but they were obviously from another culture. They dominated for so long, and at times so brutally. They caused the alienation of land from the Africans, drove off the indigenous populations from the best of the land, put them into Bantustans which were agriculturally usually the worst of the land, not really viable. When the rest of Africa had a certain pride in its own struggle and of its own independence, here was the very painful reminder of the past in most African countries. So when the Reagan administration decided on a policy of constructive engagement, I think I was in Senegal at the time, all over Africa there was a terrible reaction against this notion that the United States would publicly state its toleration of a regime that was so despised elsewhere. There was a very deep animosity toward us over constructive engagement, No matter how hard Chet Crocker tried to make the case for it, it was not palatable. It was probably much more difficult to talk to Africans about that kind of policy toward South Africa to get them to feel that it might be reasonable than it was to justify our presence in Vietnam or the other great issues like Palestine/Israel. They felt more strongly about South Africa because they saw it as part of their cause. They were deeply disappointed in us and it led to all kinds of other problems because during the Cold war. The other side, at no great cost to itself, could declare itself allies with the ANC and the cause of majority rule. To this day, South Africa claims a friendship with countries that are anathema to us and to the rest of the world.

Q: Libya.

LAGAMMA: Libya, Cuba, the former satellites of the former Soviet Union, Russia itself, China. So this was a legacy of apartheid on our foreign policy which was I think badly set back by constructive engagement.

Q: What about other countries particularly England, but the French? During this time were we trying to promote democracy better media and all, were we all singing out of the same hymnbook or was it a difference?

LAGAMMA: I think the U.S. was up front on a lot of this. We didn't really have great support from many of the others until later, in Africa. South Africa was different because the Scandinavians, the Dutch, the British all had a stake in that, a lot of investment, some heritage issues for the British. So there was an involvement there, but not so much more generally in Africa. The French had never during that period and not even to this day--we may be seeing some changes -- admitted that democracy ought to be a part of their foreign policy as an important issue, so the French were rather cynical. During that period in Washington I invited our Africa watcher from the department in Paris, who was on leave, to come and address our desk officers at USIA, in the office of African affairs. And to discuss France's Africa policy. Howard Perlow began by saying that France's policy could be summed up in three letters, OIL. That oil drove French national interest and policy with respect to Africa. And while the older policy still had some echoes in the Quai d'Orsay, give support to old friends like Houphouët-Boigny in the Ivory Coast, and Senegal, the historic centers of French interest in Africa, the current policy was much more oriented towards Gabon which had a lot of oil, Cameroon, which had some oil, Brazzaville, Congo-Brazzaville, and then, surprisingly, Nigeria and Angola, big oil producers. That these had really overtaken French support for some of the more traditional partners who they no longer had the same level of commitment to. In other words, if there was an attempt to overthrow one of those governments of one of their good friends, the French might not intervene. To save them which they had done in the past. So French policy was pretty clear. I asked him about the extent to which there was a great rivalry between the oil companies, and he said, " The oil companies transcend national policy. When there is a problem, when there is a competition, Shell talks to Texaco to Agip, to the French oil companies, and they work out some tradeoffs and it transcends national diplomacy. The ambassadors of those countries probably have nothing to say about it. If there is a rivalry in the Gulf of Guinea over some oil concessions, the French may be pleased to take a new concession in exchange for something in Kuwait that they will give to an American company or a British company." So that was a real eye opener to me. I learned a lot, and to this day French policy is still driven largely by this.

One of the people I ran into during my time in Africa was Joe Wilson who was ambassador to Gabon at the time. I visited Gabon several times. I expect my daughter at one point was doing her dissertation in Gabon, and I visited her there during that period. You know our history. I was very surprised years later that Joe Wilson was sent to Niger

to look into possible Iraqi acquisition of uranium from Niger. Joe contradicted the President Bush's statement about Iraq, about Niger's uranium going to Iraq. He went out to try to verify that. I remember the president's rationale for believing that, had to do with British intelligence. That struck me as so odd because, knowing Africa and having served for some months in Niger at one point, I knew how small the British embassy was there, and how big the French embassy was. I was astonished that we would rely on British intelligence when the French knew everything. The French controlled the uranium trade, French companies. The French embassy was huge in Niger. Why would we rely on British intelligence?

Q: Known as cherry picking. You look for what you want to find.

LAGAMMA: Exactly. I mean if we wanted to know what was going on in Niger with its Uranium we should have asked the French.

Q: Looking back on sort of the administration of USIA at that time, was there much of a transition when the Clinton administration came in?

LAGAMMA: It was rather dramatic. I think it solidified the drift away from the end of the cold war with the fall of the Berlin Wall in '89. And then I think the Clinton administration people that came in had a very different perspective on the world. Joe Duffey was our new director. Joe Duffey was a liberal Democrat. It was a very peculiar reign of the director of the USIA because to an extent Duffey didn't believe that the United States should involve itself so deeply in the affairs of other countries. Many of us felt that to the contrary this was an ideal moment for us to be helpful in the world that we ought to be more involved. I remember a famous meeting that we had with the director when some of our PAOs were very proud of their mission to help with the democratic process in Africa and Duffey responded, "Mission is for missionaries. That is not our job."

Q: Duffey comes across as being almost a destructive force in the information agency. I mean he didn't really, as you say didn't believe in the mission.

LAGAMMA: Didn't believe in the mission. The contrast was very great, not so much with the Bush administration that came just before it, but with the Reagan administration where we had a very conservative director who was a very good friend of a conservative president. Charles Wick had been ferocious in his desire to increase the effectiveness and the resources of the agency. While his political ideas might not have been the most congenial to many of us, his effectiveness with the Congress was great, and that was always the contrast that we made with Joe Duffey. He was not very effective with the Congress. He eventually succumbed to Jesse Helms' idea that we should fade away into the State Department and the deal that was struck with Madeleine Albright to absorb USIA public diplomacy into the State Department. You know most of the professionals thought that this was a terrible idea. We sought the leadership of the director to resist this. We wanted to let the American people and the Congress know that we were extremely effective as an autonomous agency, not as an independent agency but as an autonomous

body in being able to help advance U.S. policy. We could be very flexible to provide a dimension of personal diplomacy that was epitomized in what Edward R. Murrow said that the most important communication is the last three feet. One on one communication that we were best at. Better I thought than anybody else. What I found in Africa during that period was that this was a golden age, that what we were selling was in demand; that what we were attempting to do fostered a tremendous response on the part of all of these newly important civil society organizations, the academics, the journalists, that were always on the margins of these societies and now for a change were out front.

Q: Yeah it really was I think tragic, but there it is. When did you go to South Africa?

LAGAMMA: '95.

Q: You were there for how long?

LAGAMMA: A little over two years.

Q: Who was the ambassador and what were you doing?

LAGAMMA: Princeton Lyman was the ambassador when I got there. Then James Joseph came on afterwards, about six months after. What I was doing was an extension of what I was doing in Washington when I was director of the office of African affairs. I had attended many meetings about what we should do for South Africa. I must say it was an exercise in frustration because we were in a period of budget cutting. The Clinton administration had made it known that there should be no new initiatives proposed to the Congress, and they were holding the line quite tightly. That ran in the face of what we thought was a really urgent need that we help South Africa in a dramatic way. I went to a number of meetings in which we were talking about what kind of aid we could provide after the elections. The amounts that we were talking about were really quite modest and they were being recycled from other accounts that hadn't been spent because no new money was supposed to be asked for. At the end of my time in Washington, I did two things. One was a conference on South Africa called investing in people which I proposed that we do in Atlanta, Georgia, because Atlanta is the historic home of a lot of civil rights activity. It also was a dynamic southern city with a lot of interesting companies that were involved in international trade and investment and that were on the ground in South Africa -- Coca Cola among others. What we tried to do there was to bring together business, the academic community, civil society, people that were interested in partnering with the new South Africa in ways that would enhance educational exchange, investment, trade, to bring the United States and South Africa closer together. We wanted Nelson Mandela to attend, but he was rather busy at home. He sent instead, Thabo Mbeki who was then vice president. I remember meeting him at the airport. He came in on a commercial flight with one aide; the Vice President of South Africa traveled with one aide. I remember having to ask the airline representative if they could please let the Vice President of South Africa off the plane first, so that we could facilitate his arrival, and take him into town. They very kindly did. It contrasted so dramatically with the way that our officials travel, pomp and ceremony and expense. We

actually took Thabo Mbeki in the car with Director Duffey and me into the conference center. Al Gore came, and that was the beginning of a very close relationship between the two vice presidents. We had a successful conference. There were several hundred journalists accredited to the conference. We did forge a relationship. It was one of the bilateral relationships that Gore was responsible for. It committed us to working closely together with South Africa in a number of areas. Which is something that then I proceeded to do when I got there as PAO. Also, I remember attending Nelson Mandela's speech at the White House on the lawn. Our efforts to get the U.S. government to provide more substantial aid to South Africa were not entirely effective. That led to Mr. Mandela wearing a lapel pin during his visit to the United States. The lapel pin was that of a peanut, because in a speech in South Africa he said, "the United States has given us peanuts to help us with our new government." It was rather devastating commentary. I remember also that Nelson Mandela in that speech began, with President Clinton standing right next to him, by thanking President George H. W. Bush for all he had done. I thought maybe the old man was losing it. Everybody was a little stunned that the speech would begin by his thanks to President George H.W. Bush when President Clinton was standing next to him. But then he went on to say that President Bush was the first international person to call him when he was released from Robben Island. He would never forget that. It was kind of a Martin Luther King moment when Kennedy called King after he had been released from the Birmingham jail, symbolically very important to both men, and historically very important. So there was that disappointment with the level of total aid, but we still had a fair amount of resources. South Africa was an important country. Various agencies of the U.S. government were able to help out. AID gave USIA in South Africa about a million dollars a year for the time I was there. Actually it was a total of three million for the 2 ½ years I was there, to enhance exchange programs. It was the biggest bang for the buck that I have ever experienced. We were working in the several areas of the bilateral commission that Gore and Mbeki had established. So there was energy and there was youth and there was a whole bunch of other things, rule of law. We were able to arrange exchange programs with the South Africans, with the South Africans paying international travel and our just handling the local expenses, hotels and miscellaneous expenses. We paid per diem; they paid travel. It was a 50-50 split. They defined their missions very precisely. We would like to sent five people to see Atlanta, Miami, and New York for the following reasons. We would like appointments with these experts to see how they manage the court systems in these places. Our mission would be 2 ½ weeks or ten days. They varied. We did all the administrative work to support that. We went to see the people in the various ministries to help define the projects. We sought support from the USIA international visitors office. What we were doing was what we called voluntary visitors because the South African government was paying for the international travel. They were treated as if they were in the United States already and therefore all we had to do was provide program assistance, help to organize and manage the tour, and per diem. And it was very cost effective program. The unit costs for those things tended to be between five and ten thousand dollars for a group project.

Q: Well where was the initiative planning coming from in the South African in saying we want to go here and having well thought out schedules?

LAGAMMA: The Gore bilateral commission involved various departments of the U.S. government. The cabinet secretaries actually made a number of visits to South Africa, with the vice president, traveling on his plane. They were in touch with their South African counterparts, and it was decided to that there would be projects in various areas. We tried to provide exchange dimension to each of those projects where possible. So once the projects were mutually defined by the cabinet members in each of those ministries, we went to the ministers or to their subordinates to say, OK, how can we be helpful in gaining exposure for some of your people to some of the issues that you are working on together with the United States. It was very interesting, and it was high level. And then we worked in many other projects. We worked with the ANC and other political parties to send officials to the United States. This had been going on before my arrival in South Africa. I was in Washington and working to support it. I will give you an example of one of the things we did. Before the Gore-Mbeki commission, the South African military was going to be integrated. The ANC military wing people were going to come into command positions. They had to find a way of working with the South African defense forces, the Afrikaner officers. And so our embassy arranged that eight officers, four from each side, would come to the United States for a 2 ½ week visit. They would tour some of our military installations and speak to folks at the Defense Department about affirmative action, about how you integrated the military, how you overcame some of the racial problems that had existed before. We had a lot of experience in this area, and so it was arranged. I remember briefing these eight officers at USIA when they first arrived, and saying, gentlemen, this is an historic occasion. We very much want to talk to you when you finish your tour to find out what you have learned. And find out how useful this had been to you. And so, 2 ½ weeks later when they came back to Washington on their way home, before going home, we had another session. I said, "OK, I asked you a question before you embarked on this trip about your sharing with us what you have learned. What was the most important thing?" One of the Afrikaner officers began by saying, "One of the things we learned is that," at first they were at daggers drawn with each other, because they had been adversaries for so long. "One of the things we learned was that we think we can get along together. We also learned that we thought we had been so effective in limiting the ability of the ANC to attack us and prevent terrorism, that there were very few or no bombings of shopping centers or movie theaters any other kinds of things that may be going on in Iraq market places. And we thought we were just so good at preventing them from doing those things. What we learned from them was they were under orders not to attack anything but military installations or police installations by the ANC leadership. This was a deliberate policy." Not incidentally, I think this was one of the reasons for the smoothness of the transition because there wasn't as much bitterness as there had been in Zimbabwe where they had gone through fifteen years of military conflict across borders.

Q: How did you find the media in South Africa?

LAGAMMA: Not as interesting in many ways as the media in Nigeria. I mean the media was very professional, but there was a concentration of media in just very few hands. The Argus group related to the mining companies. There wasn't the kind of diversity of

media. The papers tended to be a bit conservative. The once great Mail and Guardian had been reduced to a weekly when it had once was a daily, one of the more liberal papers. The others were rather staid, and not too exciting. A lot of the traditional news media didn't have good access to the new people. Many of the traditional reporters and editors hadn't been replaced and they still were continuing. For example, there was a Ford Foundation project. The media had never really covered the parliament very well, so they didn't have a good grasp of what was going on with this new majority rule African controlled parliament. They had a project with this organization called Egassa D'eo. To start graduate students from Cape Town University to sit in on important committee meetings at the parliament and report on them and put out a newspaper. So that was an attempt to find a way of telling the people what was going on in the parliament. For years the parliament was just a rubber stamp, and none of the papers had developed a real expertise in reporting on it. The Ford Foundation, by the way, had a very interesting role. It had a bigger program in South Africa than it did for the rest of the world put together. It was the largest single program in the world. They had been working on it for a long time and they had a big office in Cape Town and in Johannesburg I think. Open society was very active there. I think the Democratic National Institute and the International Republican Institute were very active too. There were many other NGOs from other countries, the Germans, the Scandinavians, the Dutch, all had very active programs trying to help with the transition. So it was a very different kind of atmosphere. The press was a little bit staid, not very exciting. Toward the end of my time we began to se the growth of community radio stations, and that opened up the growth of media a lot more.

Q: What about universities?

LAGAMMA: The universities had been largely segregated throughout most of South Africa's history. There were Afrikaner only universities, where the only language of instructions was Afrikaans. There were the traditional and more liberal English speaking universities in Cape Town like Witwatersrand and others. Then there were the historically black colleges which had a certain parallel with our own historically black colleges. It was necessary as with so many other kinds of institutions to redesign the educational system to take into account the interests of the majority of the population, to begin to appoint some academic administrators from the majority black population. To begin to integrate more fully all the universities. And I guess there was one policy that I was in disagreement with AID especially which was working in this area. And with the ambassador who has written favorably about this. And that was the linkage of historically black universities in South Africa with our own black colleges and universities. I thought that the major U.S. effort should be made to help the stronger universities, the Harvards and Yales of South Africa, become more majority population oriented with faculty and student body being brought in there because the other colleges and universities were weak.

Q: You know when we do this there is a tendency in our society or the government, they look to the Black university or black colleges for recruiting foreign service officers. We don't really find, if you want up and coming people of any particular race or creed or

gender you got to our major universities, not to the weaker colleges. You know you can't ignore them but it is attractive.

LAGAMMA: If you go to the weaker colleges I think you can do it, but you have to provide some support. At USIA we had a program, I think it was during the 70's, supported by the Ford Foundation, to take young, very bright students from historically black universities and send them to SAIS for two years. If they were successful at earning their masters and met other conditions they were brought into the foreign service. There was a core of those guys many of whom became ambassadors, very good, but you need that kind of remediation.

Q: Bob I am looking at time, I have go. Before we kind of close this is there any other area during your time in South Africa. How did you find living in South Africa at the time. I would have thought it would have been quite buoyant.

LAGAMMA: It was very exciting. It reminded me a bit of living in Washington in 1962. When I first came to Washington, the capital of the United States was just getting over being a sleepy little Southern town that had been segregated for a long time. I always remembered being told that in the old government buildings in this town the bathrooms were especially large because they used to be black and white in Washington. The federal government had segregated bathrooms in its buildings, in some of them. Of course that is what you found in South Africa. The other thing that was amazing about living in Pretoria in what had been a predominantly white suburb was that we had the influx for the first time of African embassies. That meant that ambassadors and other high level officials of African countries, some 37 sub-Saharan African countries, were now finding housing in what used to be exclusively white suburbs. That was the same thing that happened in Washington in the 60's. In the early 60's, when the Africans became independent and established embassies here, they had diplomatic immunity and weren't subject to segregation. So they could live anywhere they wanted and they started moving into white suburbs. That helped advance integration of housing here in Washington. The same thing was going on in South Africa.

Q: You were saying you have another important thing to add.

LAGAMMA: At the end of the George H.W. Bush presidency, Hank Cohen the Assistant Secretary for Africa, decided that before he left office he would leave behind a basic policy document on Africa. So he brought together an interagency group of about a hundred of us from all over the U.S. government, Treasury, Commerce, AID, USIA, everybody. We worked for several sessions on a document that would be our policy toward Africa. Now Hank had been a very fine assistant secretary in that he saw that the post-cold-war-period was a time of new opportunities. A lot of the ambassadors were asking for support of democratic transitions and support of different kinds. He actually got AID to provide us with money, although they were kicking and screaming about it, because they didn't admit at that time that democracy was their business. They said it was too political and that they had been burned in the Congress about Latin America. This was before the Clinton administration, and then everything changed thereafter. But they

managed to give him some money for a human rights democracy fund, that every ambassador was given, and that was dispensed according to need to civil society organizations that were deemed worthy in small amounts, $5000, $10000. The maximum was about $20,000. Tex Harris, who was then in the Africa Bureau, described it as political risk capital. That we were not going to succeed on every one of these things, but on the whole this gave us tremendous ability to assist on the transitions that were going on all over Africa. And so there was this new direction taken by the Africa Bureau. Well at the end of our consultations on this new policy paper for Africa, we put together a draft and it was circulated. We all looked at it and were about to put it to bed. I raised my hand and said, "Hank, I don't see democracy in this paper. Your time here as assistant secretary has been marked by support for democracy all over Africa, and shouldn't this be in there?" He said, "OK, Bob, you write it." So it did. I had some help from others. And we put together an objective that it was American policy to support democratic transition in Africa. Hank liked it, and he made it the first objective of U.S. policy. It was the first time that we have ever had democracy as a foreign policy objective toward Africa. Not only was it in there, but it was the principal objective, because what we had seen was that the old arguments about the strategic importance of Africa had been faded or diluted by the changes we had seen. The economic importance of Africa, while there was oil and that was important, but in those days it wasn't as important as the oil in the Middle East. So Africa's importance to us in many ways had declined, but we still had many groups in the United States, African American community, business community and others who thought Africa was important to them. Hank thought that for the democracy issue we were in a key position to be able to influence that, and that would be a great legacy of that period in American history for Africa. Of course it was on the edge of South Africa's great transition toward democracy, and our hope was that Nigeria would rid itself of military rule soon. That happened later on. So I think this is one of the most important things that happened, and it was fundamental to what I was doing both in Washington and in South Africa at the end of my career.

Q: OK, well thank you very much.

End of interview