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Information Series

DELL PENDERGRAST

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INTERVIEW

Q: Today is the 24th of June, 1999. This is an interview with Dell Pendergrast. This is being done on behalf of the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training, and I'm Charles Stuart Kennedy. Well, Dell, let's start at the beginning. When, where were you born, and can you tell me something about your family?

PENDERGRAST: I was born November 23, 1941, in Chicago, Illinois, exactly two weeks to the day before the bombing of Pearl Harbor. I don't necessarily make any connection between those two events, but that did occur. And I grew up in the Chicago area during my formative years. My background, growing up in the >40s and >50s, was, in the context of the time and my origins, perhaps somewhat improbable in terms of preparation for the Foreign Service. In that period, of course, the Foreign Service had not diversified significantly and was still heavily dominated by people from the Ivy League, from the East, from, shall we say, the "internationalist class" that prevailed before the diversity of gender, race, and region began to take hold later on. My background was very distinctly Middle West, provincial, parochial, even perhaps, one might even say, xenophobic. My parents, although both university-educated, were rural in their roots. Their families were from Midwest farming communities, and they reflected, I think, the best and the worst of the rural Midwest culture: self-reliant, independent, sturdy, often deeply religious, but at the same time, distrustful of the outside world, even the big cities of America, the East Coast, and Washington as well - to say nothing of the world outside the United States. The rural Midwest was isolationist, and that certainly was reflected in my parents' attitudes and values that were passed on to me during the >40s and >50s.

Q: Sounds like Colonel McCormick's favorite ground troops.

PENDERGRAST: Absolutely. My parents were great fans of Colonel McCormick and the *Chicago Tribune*, which of course delivered its unambiguously isolationist message every day to my doorstep. And I did, obviously, in those early years absorb many of these attitudes and values that my parents reflected, a rather improbable preparation for the Foreign Service.

Q: You say your mother and father were both college graduates. Where did they go to school, and then what were they doing?

PENDERGRAST: Well, both my parents were graduates of Northwestern University, of the Medill School of Journalism there, one of the premier professional journalism programs in the country. The product of a small Central Illinois high school, my father was an accomplished athlete in both baseball and basketball at Northwestern in the Big Ten and captained the basketball team there. My mother went on and had an early career in journalism in the Chicago area but later became, as we call it now, a stay-at-home mom when the children came along. My father, instead of journalism, went into the public relations field and was a public relations executive with several companies in the Chicago area. Although from essentially rural backgrounds, they did make that transition through their university experience to a metropolitan lifestyle. But there was always, of

course, those roots in the values and attitudes of the rural Midwest, strongly conservative and isolationist. They were not only great followers of Colonel McCormick, but strong supporters of Robert Taft, the conservative Republican candidate for president in the early '50s. When he was defeated for the Republican nomination in 1952 by Dwight Eisenhower, it was a dreary, black day in our household. It was again something I remember quite vividly. My parents viewed Eisenhower with some suspicion despite his war-hero status. He was too closely identified with the Eastern Establishment, the liberal Dewey wing of the Republican party, which my parents lamented as little different than the New Deal Democrats. As you can imagine, Franklin Roosevelt=s name was rarely uttered in our house without appropriate condemnation.

Q: Did you have any other family, I mean, other brothers, sisters?

PENDERGRAST: I had a younger brother and sister.

Q: Was there a lot of talk around the dinner table and all that?

PENDERGRAST: Always. My parents being both university educated and very engaged in local community and often political affairs, there were very frequent discussion of politics but with a distinctly right-wing edge to it, very distrustful of Washington, of the Democratic party particularly, and I recall now, of the State Department. The Department at that time was clearly associated, in my parents' minds, with Alger Hiss and Dean Acheson, who somehow took on a rather demonic character. Effete, Eastern Establishment types who sold out the country, at least in the eyes of my parents. And you can imagine that the idea of the Foreign Service was an unthinkable prospect to me, taking into account where I was growing up during the >40s and >50s.

Q: Where did you go to school? Let's talk about grammar school first.

PENDERGRAST: Well, I went to grammar school in a suburb of Chicago, Park Ridge. Curiously enough, we lived two blocks away from another person who went on to somewhat different pursuits in Washington, Hillary Rodham, as we knew her at that time. Hillary was, in fact, younger, of course, than I was, but she was a childhood playmate of my sister's. My sister, however, does not have a particularly fond memory of Hillary Rodham. As my sister has told me, AI really didn't like Hillary very much because she wanted to run everything." So those childhood memories obviously have enduring meaning for some people. But it was a comfortable, serene, affluent Chicago suburbC secluded and parochial in many ways (as Mrs. Clinton has remembered it publicly too). I went to grammar school locally and then on to high school at Maine High School, in a neighboring community.

Q: How about early reading habits and interests?

PENDERGRAST: Well, my early interests in those formative years during the '40s and '50s were dominated very heavily by competitive team sports, a passion I guess inherited from my father. My main sports interests were football and baseball, and I did reasonably

well in both those pursuits in the various youth and high school leagues. Intellectually, I was I guess pretty successful at school but my reading interests did not extend much beyond classroom requirements and the conservative political tomes which my parents encouraged (I remember Bill Buckley=s GOD AND MAN AT YALE making a big impression on me). Also one of the things that I sort of inherited from my mother was a great interest in writing. At the age of 10, 11, 12, I was writing my own little detective stories and adventures stories that were circulated widely around the local community. The passion for the written word and putting well crafted sentences on paper continues to this day. I really learned a lot from my mother, who was herself a proficient writer who returned to journalism briefly before her untimely death at age 47.

Q: How about in high school? What courses were you concentrating on?

PENDERGRAST: Well, I was focused on university preparation during my high school years and taking a fairly general college prep program. I was probably most interested, I think, in history. I also - and reflecting, again, I suppose, my parental interest - became very involved in journalism and took a couple of journalism courses in high school and went on to become the editor of the high school newspaper, the main extracurricular activity besides my sports activities.

Q: How did the school paper run in those days in high school? I mean, were you pretty much given your head, or were the teachers sort of sitting on you?

PENDERGRAST: Well, shall we say, it was sort of a benign dictatorship by the newspaper advisor, a young teacher, a good friend, who actually gave us relatively significant latitude without ever losing control. And, we did try to do a number of interesting initiatives in the high school.

Q: You graduated from high school in 1959-ish?

PENDERGRAST: 1959, yes.

Q: Did politics enter into school at all, or were youC

PENDERGRAST: You know, in this rather narrowly Republican suburb, there was really not much party politics. There was certainly a rather significant level of internal school politics which engaged me, primarily in my position as editor of the high school newspaper. And, as I said, we tried some initiatives that somewhat challenged the ordinary life of a school in the placid, conformist 50s, for example, setting up what we called "honor study halls," study halls without any teacher supervision, and that was very revolutionary for the time, but it worked reasonably well.

Q: Were you at all involved in such things as Junior UN or international type? Was there much of that?

PENDERGRAST: Yes, in fact, one thing that sort of moved me in transition from the

isolationist parochial Midwest to a broader international stage was an experience that I had in my senior year of my high school. I was selected for the Illinois Model United Nations, a role-playing simulation exercise with other high school students from across the state. And this was, for me, not only an introduction to international relations, but also an engaging personal experience in the dynamics of international affairs and how countries view and deal with each other. It was not a simplistic, black-and-white world that I had pretty much taken for granted. The experience was probably the first thing that pushed me in the direction of foreign relations.

Q: By the time you graduated in '59, where were you pointed towards?

PENDERGRAST: Well, there is a somewhat complicated story there. I had done very well in both the classroom and on the athletic field, and I was being recruited by number of universities as a football player. But as a Midwestern lad growing up in the Chicago area and starting to look at the world beyond, I began to have the ambitions of going to, shall we say, a bigger stage, which I saw as the Ivy League. And both Yale and Dartmouth were very interested in having me there mainly for football, I have to admit. In the winter of 1959, I took a college-sponsored recruiting trip out to Dartmouth and to Yale, the first time I had ever been on an airplane or, indeed, ever traveled east of Kalamazoo. I was very impressed by Dartmouth College and interested in it from both academic and athletic perspectives. The problem was both my parents were graduates of Northwestern University, a school which I had come to know over the years because we were physically very close in the Chicago area, about 10 miles away. My parents were active alumni of that distinguished private university in the Midwest, perhaps the finest private university in the Middle West. But because it was so close and so familiar, I really wasn=t that interested. But my parents were interested. For my father, I suspect, his dream of having another Northwestern athlete in the family. Northwestern had offered me a full athletic scholarship, while Ivy League had a less big-time football approach and could offer me only tuition. It basically came down to a dollars-and-cents decision, which as a self-centered teenager, I could not understand, although now as a parent of two sons, I appreciate the financial side much better. My parents basically announced that I would go to Northwestern, the source of great happiness and tension in the family for a while, but as a parent today, I recognize the concerns of my father and mother, who still had two younger children to educate. In the end, I was very pleased with my experience at Northwestern. Once I got there, I might as well have been a thousand miles away; I was independent and deeply engaged in my life at Northwestern. I think my experience at Northwestern probably also deepened and enriched my appreciation for my family and regional roots.

During my four years at Northwestern, I had the opportunity to become very close to my maternal grandfather, a retired journalist who lived in Evanston just a few blocks from me. My Grandpa Frazier was an extraordinary individual who rose from modest origins in Kansas to become an internationally recognized figure in the printing and publishing industry. He had a wisdom and no-nonsense perspective on the world that I am so pleased to have shared. He represented all of the good values and common sense of the Midwesterner. I think, in retrospect, it was healthy for me to remain in the Midwest in

those years. As I've gone on over the years to different parts of the world, I always had this reference point in middle America and the quintessentially American values and patriotism which that region reflected. If I'd gone East into the Ivy League, I might not have been the same person in later years.

Q: And of course, Chicago has a very honored place in the intellectual life and all, "city of the big shoulders" and all, great architecture, wonderful writers and all that.

PENDERGRAST: Absolutely.

Q: I was born in Chicago, too.

PENDERGRAST: Oh, you were. Well then I guess you were theC
Q: We left early, but there's a residue of people. . . . Actually I lived in Winnetka, in that area.

PENDERGRAST: I know it well.

Q: Talk a little bit about football. How did that go?

PENDERGRAST: Well, again, I was there with the legendary Ara Parseghian, the football coach who had come to Northwestern and turned around a weak football program. We never went to the Rose Bowl but began to win games in the Big Ten, an unusual experience for Northwestern. Ara was a gifted, charismatic coach who went to greater fame at Notre Dame. My own performance was at best mixed. I did well as a freshman but as time passed I began to lose interest in football. I developed other interests at Northwestern, both academic and extracurricular, and football never played a major role in my life, although I was grateful that my academic expenses were covered.

Q: Well, let's talk about Northwestern. AcademicsCwhat was your major and interest?

PENDERGRAST: Well, I started out in liberal arts. I had a vague notion that I was going to become a lawyer some day. I don=t know where that came from, but it was something that I had in my mind. But it was a period of enormous change and transition in my own life, particularly the tragic early death of my mother during my sophomore year at Northwestern. She had been such a powerful intellectual force in my life and never really appreciated that fact until she was gone. As I began to look at myself and my future more seriously and moved back toward the communications world. And I shifted from liberal arts into the study of communications in the School of Speech at Northwestern. I ended up taking a lot of political science courses, especially some work in international relations, which was becoming more and more an interest to me.

Q: You would have been, I guess, a sophomore during the election of 1960, which engaged so many. So many of the people I've interviewed were engaged by the Kennedy-Nixon thing. Did this hit you at all? Or coming from you background, I would have thought that this would have. . . I mean, "Nixon's the one," and that sort of thing.

PENDERGRAST: Well, you're right. I was, like many young people in college and elsewhere at that time, very much engaged by that election, and particularly by the candidacy of John Kennedy, who seemed to exemplify youth and energy. I remember a great deal of debate and discussion in my fraternity house and elsewhere at Northwestern about that election. But my family loyalties rooted in my Republican background in the Chicago suburban area and the Midwest, certainly were with Richard Nixon. But like a lot of young people, I was unavoidably impressed by this young, dashing, dynamic gentleman from Massachusetts, and the spirit and enthusiasm and confidence which he exuded. The first truly 20th century American presidential candidate. It was something that very much had an impact on me, and I think over the next few years Kennedy and his elevation of public service became a major factor in my joining the Foreign Service. Of course, we also have to recall how he projected himself and his policies to the country at that time. Although liberal in domestic policy, but in foreign policy, his approach was clearly something that a conservative Republican could support: the sense of Cold War mission, the commitment to American values in the world, the resistance to the perceived danger from the Soviet UnionCall of this had a resonance with me.

Q: Of course, there was that confrontation with Cuba. I mean, this was certainly not a wishy-washy liberal type thing.

PENDERGRAST: Absolutely, and I remember hovering in front of the television set at the Sigma Chi house watching the crisis unfold and not knowing if the world would erupt in an all-out nuclear war. It was a chilling experience and made me appreciate more than ever how international relations can affect the lives of people, even in the Midwest. I think it also helped to shape my interest in the world and eventually my professional engagement and interest in the Foreign Service. The Cuban Missile Crisis was something that was another defining experience in my life.

Q: Did you find that Northwestern opened up a different world, too, in that you had grown up essentially in a well-to-do Midwestern suburb, gone to grade school and to high school? And Northwestern, albeit, is the same area, but it was drawing in people. Did you find that you were meeting a broader spectrum of people at the university than you'd met before, or not?

PENDERGRAST: Well, in honesty, at that time, Northwestern did not feature an especially meaningful diversity of backgrounds. It has changed obviously since those years, but then it was primarily a white, upper-middle-class university, a product of its prohibitive cost, and before more aggressive affirmative action not different than other large, top-ranked universities, including the Ivy League. I don=t recall that the university itself provided me with a socially expanding experience in terms of introducing me to different parts of the world. In sports there, I had a fair amount of opportunity to get acquainted with people from different backgrounds that were there to play football , and particularly from the black community. It was a new experience for me, but overall Northwestern did not itself engage me that much with the world. I did get involved in student politics while at Northwestern, but it was not, certainly, one that introduced me to

the broader world outside.

Q: Well, you graduated in '63.

PENDERGRAST: That's right.

Q: By the time you graduated, what were you ready to do?

PENDERGRAST: Well, I think that I was still searching and absolutely certain what the future held for me, so I decided to go on to graduate school. The program that seemed to follow on my undergraduate work was at the master=s program in communication at Boston University. I was ambiguously considering an academic career, but also I still had this idea that I might go into the communication field in business. But I think that at that time my life and values came under a new, powerful influence and that was my wife.

Q: Oh, yes.

PENDERGRAST: And her influence also had a great deal to do in moving me toward the international world and into the Foreign Service itself. My wife was not a student at Northwestern, but I had become first acquainted as a friend during high school. Although born in the U.S., she had a very European upbringing in many ways. Her mother was born in Germany and came to the United States in the '30s to marry my wife=s father, who was himself the son of German immigrants. A European atmosphere prevailed in that household. My wife had visited Europe with her family, but she herself also spent her junior year in France and had an international style and interest which intrigued me. It was very different than the traditional, Midwestern environment I had known my entire life. We got together during the college years, literally got married a few weeks after graduation, and headed toward graduate school in Boston. My wife would be a teacher of French at a suburban high school. She had become the dominant force in my life and we started thinking and talking about doing something overseas.

Q: What was Boston University like then? I got my master's degree there in '55 but that was on a GI bill and it was one year in history, and I met my wife there, but how did you find Boston U. and the Boston community?

PENDERGRAST: Well, we were actually fascinated by our overall experience in Boston. We were there two years. Living the graduate student existence mostly on my wife=s salary, we were certainly not rich, but we enjoyed the whole atmosphere and flavor of the Boston area. Boston University had a urban campus with a fairly wide range of backgrounds in its student body and exposure to the city=s richly diverse multicultural population. We loved wandering the neighborhoods of Boston and Cambridge and the wonderful dynamic of its two dominant ethnic groups, the Irish and Italian-Americans. And we, I think, were stimulated by the cultural and intellectual experience there (often going to the famed Boston Symphony for its Friday afternoon concerts at just a couple of dollars each). I also have this eerie memory of seeing John Kennedy on the streets of Boston just a few weeks before he was killed in Texas. My wife and I were walking

along a street one balmy October evening and then out of nowhere comes this relatively small caravan of cars with John Kennedy sitting in the backseat of an open vehicle, a long way from the imperial, protected presidency we would witness in later years. It was just amazing to have seen the him right there on the street in Boston and I would think about it often after the assassination the next month in Dallas.

Living in Boston at the time when their native son was killed made the event more gripping than probably anywhere else. The population was in a state of total shock. While a graduate student, I worked as an advisor to the university student radio station, and on the night of the assassination, I went with several students down to Hyannisport, covering the aftermath from the perspective there and the coming and going of people from the family there at Hyannisport. There was a real sense of both history and emotional trauma, which I think affected not only Massachusetts but the entire country more than we even today appreciate. A good case can be made that the Kennedy assassination was actually a fault line in American society that devastated the social and cultural fabric of the country to produce the many years of upheaval, unrest, and uprooting which followed. Our country never was the same again in many ways. Maybe that=s a stretch, but life and society in the U.S. was very different after November 22, 1963.

Q: Your wife had been to Europe and came from her background. Were you getting any feel for something like the Foreign Service or international work or Peace Corps or anything like that.

PENDERGRAST: Absolutely. I had started now to sort of look around at overseas job possibilities, partly influenced by my wife. We both thought it would be interesting go abroad and not get locked into a traditional, suburban, corporate track. One path was the Peace Corps and I learned about the Foreign Service and for the first time the U.S. Information Agency, which at the time jointly did its recruiting and testing with the Department. In USIA, I saw the opportunity to merge my background in communications with an interest in intentional affairs and living abroad. I guess it was in the fall of 1964 that I took the Foreign Service Examination. My wife and I also applied for the Peace Corps, took its entrance exam, and were accepted for assignment as community development specialists in Turkey. Hard to imagine what qualified us for that, but after I passed the Foreign Service written test, USIA became more and more an attractive option. And, I moved on to the oral exam.

Q: Do you recall how the oral exam went, yours?

PENDERGRAST: I do very well remember distinctly that it took place on an exceptionally warm day in Boston, in the spring of 1965. I recall wearing this very thick wool winter suit (one of the few I owned and a legacy of my Midwestern winters) and sweating profusely, a condition aggravated by the fact that you had these three crusty Foreign Service types all looking very sternly at me and making me feel very uncomfortable over a period of, I'm sure is was, at least two hours, probably longer - and not just testing my encyclopedic knowledge. But the exam was mainly focused on testing me as a person and how I reacted to the pressure and the different role-playing situations.

It was the first time I'd ever had this type of experience and it was very intimidating. I was absolutely convinced that I had embarrassed myself and after the exam was over, my discomfort increased by waiting forever in an adjacent, overheated room. One of the testers came in and told me somewhat grudgingly that I had my gaps in academic-type knowledge, but they really liked the way that I stood up and defended my positions and what I stood for. Not really so impressed by my performance, I was in fact accepted.

But even after passing the oral, I knew there could be a prolonged delay waiting until security and medical clearances were done and your name was placed on the list. It was impossible to know how soon you would be called. It might be a year or two, they told me, before I would enter the Foreign Service, because the waiting list was long. Instead of the Peace Corps, my wife and I returned to the academic option at least temporarily and I accepted a Ph.D. fellowship at the University of North Carolina in the fall. We shipped off all of our meager belongings (in a few trunks) to Chapel Hill and went back to Chicago and a family visit after getting my master=s degree. Somehow, my name came up and I unexpectedly got a call in July 1965 offering me Foreign Service officer position with USIA. With little pause for reflection, I accepted and worked the phone lines trying to track down our belongings somewhere in Chapel Hill, North Carolina and get them transferred to Washington.

Q: You came in when, in July?

PENDERGRAST: Actually, I reported, I believe it was August of 1965 and entered the A-100 course with I think about 30 people in that class, 25 State Department and five USIA.

Q: What was the composition of your A-100 course?

PENDERGRAST: It was predominately male and white. The Foreign Service still had not achieved much diversity. I think there were maybe three women in the class and one African American. There was perhaps somewhat greater regional diversity in the class than one would have existed ten years earlier, a fairly wide range of people from across the United States although with a substantial Ivy League element as well. I was one of the few Midwesterners there, and I remember in the training evaluation report that the State Department officer who ran the program - a quintessentially old-line FSO type - he inserted in my report that "Mr. Pendergrast is very proud of his Midwestern background," which I took as a somewhat patronizing remark at this exotic creature from the Midwest suddenly thrust upon the Foreign Service.

Q: Did you sense a difference between those who were going to the State Department and those who were going to the Information Agency, I mean as far as how you were treated, or not?

PENDERGRAST: No, at that time, the Foreign Service Institute and the people running the A-100 program very deliberately ensured that there was no real distinction between the State and USIA people in the class. It was still in 1965 relatively new for FSOs in

State and USIA to be admitted and trained together. And, I did not myself see any real difference between the two groups. My wife and I had good friends in both State Department as well as USIA contingents. Obviously after the six to eight weeks of the A-100 course, we moved into our own training program over at USIA, but I did not perceive any partition or distance between State and USIA during that period. In fact, one of our very good friends in the class, a State Department officer, turned out to be, tragically, one of the Service=s most infamous members, Brad Bishop, who later in the 1970s killed his whole family at his Maryland home and disappeared. And there were subsequent reports, I gather, of people who ran into him in Europe. My wife and I were shocked by what happened because we had looked up to Brad and his wife. They were somewhat older and had some experience overseas. One of the reasons that we got to know them a little bit is that he was a Serbo-Croat language speaker in his army intelligence days, and so he knew something about Yugoslavia, which was my first assignment. We got acquainted with them and found them an exceptionally engaging, friendly and wonderful couple. What happened later just staggers our imagination. It was certainly nothing that seemed even remotely possible back in 1965 and 1966. We lost touch with them after that time. Something must have happened. He snapped and the rest is a disaster.

Q: When you were coming out, you went into training at USIA. What did that training consist of?

PENDERGRAST: Well, at the time, USIA had a special program for its new FSOs that consisted, I recall, of about six to eight weeks where we were given sort of a complete survey of the different programs that USIA conducted, a basic survey of operations from broadcasting and motion pictures to publications and exchanges, which at that time were still administered in Washington by the State Department (and overseas by USIA). So we got a detailed, comprehensive picture of what USIA did overseas through this training program. It was still, I think, a pretty heady time in USIA soon after the tenure of Edward R. Murrow as director of USIA. He had brought to the Agency the New Frontier-type idealism and sense of mission, which was clearly evident and I think sustained well by his two immediate successors, Carl Rowan and Leonard Marks. Rowan was himself a prominent and respected journalist. USIA had other very talented people who came to Washington with the New Frontier spirit, notably George Stevens, Jr., the son of the legendary director, who was the head of the film and television service, and in fact was responsible for the famous film, *Days of Lightning, Years of Drums*, which won an Academy Award.

But at the time USIA=s banner was flying high not only because of the Murrow legacy, but also because of John Kennedy himself, who believed that the Agency had the potential to do something really worthwhile in support of U.S. foreign policy, particularly in the developing world, carrying the American message to countries throughout the world.

Q: While you were going through this, when you and your wife joined up - and I include your wife because, as we all know, this is a team business, particularly in those days (I'm not sure if it is today) - but were you pointed towards anywhere? Did you want to go any particular place?

PENDERGRAST: No, unlike, I suppose, many people in my class, I had no real interest in any particular part of the world and did not make any effort to lobby or otherwise point myself toward a particular country or region. It reflected in large part, I suppose, my background and lack of any real previous experience with any particular region or country. My wife, had background in Germany and France, but I didn't have any strong inclination. I just basically was prepared to take what they had to offer me.

Q: How did it develop, then?

PENDERGRAST: Well, we were basically told where we were going to go on our first assignment late in our A-100 training, and I was informed that my first assignment would be in Belgrade, Yugoslavia, preceded by six months in Serbo-Croatian language training. At the time, I knew virtually nothing about Yugoslavia, but it was in Europe (I guess I knew that), and given my conservative anticommunist family background, it was sort of interesting that I was being assigned to a country which was nominally communist, but I had no really strong feelings about the posting. I just accepted it and went into my training for Yugoslavia with, I think, a good measure of enthusiasm just eager to get on with a real job.

Q: Where did you take your language?

PENDERGRAST: Well, curiously, I first went through area studies. But because Yugoslavia was not in the Soviet Bloc, the Department in its wisdom and political rigidity insisted that I could not go to the Eastern Europe course. And, it wasn=t Western Europe either, so for bureaucratic reasons beyond my humble comprehension I was sent to the Near East studies course (rationalized I guess my Yugoslavia=s Moslem minority), which was interesting but virtually useless for Yugoslavia. But I did my duty for three weeks and then went on to my Foreign Service Institute language class in the old Arlington Towers building-

Q: In the garage.

PENDERGRAST: -in the garage, a claustrophobic windowless room, in the Serbo-Croatian training program. My wife and I took the course together. We were the only two in that class with the instructor, an old, crusty, Serbian cavalry officer, who was somewhat intimidating, particularly for my wife.

Q: Vladimir Popovic?

PENDERGRAST: Yes, right, Mr. Popovic, known and loved by many generations of Serbo-Croatian students. And there were more than a few occasions when his gruff, chauvinistic ways wore heavily on my wife, who then exited in tears. She deserves a Foreign Service prize for staying with it for six months. Part of the problem was the fact that my wife had no background in any Slavic language before. I had taken Russian both in high school and college and had a foundation on which to build readily Serbo-

Croatian. The language came fairly easily to me not to my wife, who struggled with those Slavic consonant combinations and the Cyrillic alphabet. I became unfairly impatient with her at times. We like to recall now that we probably never came closer to divorce than those six months in Serbo-Croatian language training with Vladimir Popovic.

Q: I took it from Popovic about five years or four years before, and we're talking now in 1959, and I think I got to understand the Serb mentality in that time with him, and I've drawn on it ever since, not so much the language but to understand what you're up against. It's very important today.

PENDERGRAST: Oh, absolutely. He did perfectly exemplify the Serbian cultural character that endures to this day: a defiant, stubborn, even obstinate approach to life blended with extraordinary courage and sense of principle. And we remember his stories about riding on horseback to attack the attacking German tanks. And I could absolutely visualize him and his Serbian calvary troops doing just that. This is the mentality of the Serbs: fearsome, violent, sometimes foolhardy and unrealistic. It was why the Serbs have survived over the centuries as many invaders passed across their land.

Q: When did you get to Belgrade?

PENDERGRAST: I arrived in Belgrade in June, 1966. I went ahead of my wife on this trip because she had some dental work to be done in Chicago before she could go. I was expected out there in June. So I went alone. I flew into Munich and picked up our new Volkswagen, the first vehicle my wife and I ever owned, and then drove down to Belgrade. And this was a culturally interesting experience for a young Midwestern boy who had never been east of Kalamazoo before the age of 18. To arrive alone in the center of Europe and then proceed down into the Balkans was a culturally defining experience. I remember driving down through Austria and arriving the first night in Graz, a provincial Austrian town. Late at night, I ended up in a hotel which had an old, rusty elevator that barely could creep up through this rather seedy hotel environment. Not being able to sleep, stricken by culture shock and jet lag, I got back in the car when it was still dark and just plunged into Yugoslavia, where it was even more of a cultural shock - a cold splash of culture that lives with me to this day. I remember the first night I spent in a so-called "motel" along the Belgrade-Zagreb highway and spent the night listening to the these strange sounds from the night club, the drunken shouts of the exuberant Serbs and their music, the eerie rhythmic folk music of Serbia that signaled a very different world than what I knew in suburban Chicago. I couldn=t sleep again and dazed by the shock of the new culture, I took off early and arrived well before the embassy opened in Belgrade. The Marine on duty didn't know quite what to do with this new USIA junior officer arriving at the doorstep before 7 am in the morning and what do we do with him? Well, I ended up being parked in the American Club and waited until somebody would arrive and take me under their charge.

Q: You were in Belgrade from '66 to when?

PENDERGRAST: Well, I was in Belgrade for only a few months. I expected to have a

full tour of three years. The normal pattern for USIA would be rotational type of training within different sections of USIA for a year and then move into a regular position for two years. But in the curious workings of the Foreign Service, I was detoured. My wife arrived, of course, a few weeks later, and we were both living there at the time, not in temporary housing, but in a hotel, the old, somewhat seedy Hotel Majestic, itself a cultural experience. We were beginning to adapt to life in Belgrade and meet people, both Americans and Yugoslavs. We looked forward to permanent housing. However, it turns out that the consul general in Zagreb, the new consul general, Bob Owen, who had several children of school age, wanted to start a new American school in Zagreb and got support from the Department's overseas school division. He learned that my wife was a teacher by background and experience, and thought that this was a conveniently placed resource he wanted for his school. So in the infinite wisdom of the Foreign Service assignment process, he arranged through USIA in Belgrade and Washington to have me transferred to Zagreb. My wife became in effect the first teacher and principal of the American School of Zagreb. And so in September of 1966, I was transferred up to Zagreb for the rest of my assignment there.

Q: You were there from '66 to-

PENDERGRAST: -to early '69.

Q: Could you describe your impression of Zagreb when you got there in '66?

PENDERGRAST: Zagreb was a beautiful city with a distinctly Central European, Mitteleuropa atmosphere. It had not suffered any serious damage during World War II, unlike Belgrade and many cities in Yugoslavia, and retained a lot of the old European charm. The Austro-Hungarian influence was still very prominent there. It had, of course, as in most communist societies, a certain seediness and lack of "modernity" common throughout Eastern Europe, but there was a charm and sense of history that intrigued me and my wife. We were fortunate to move immediately into housing there in the old Gornji Grad, the old town of Zagreb, an apartment itself closely identified with Croatian nationalism. The apartment had been formerly occupied by Ivan Mestrovic, the famous Croatian émigré sculptor who had left after World War II and eventually died in the United States. He was a strong Croatian nationalist, and his spirit was very much felt in that apartment as well as right next door, which was the Mestrovic museum. And our apartment looked down on the courtyard of the museum, and we felt very much a part of Croatia and of that whole community. Croatians loved to visit our place. It was almost like coming to a historical monument, a political act at a time when Croat nationalism was discouraged and even brutally suppressed.

Q: Mestrovic did large heroic statues of people and things-

PENDERGRAST: He was a student of Rodin and had the same style. We were very taken with it. The apartment, of course, with tall ceilings and no central heating - heated by these old ceramic stoves that had to be rekindled every cold winter morning. And there was a strong case to be made that the apartment, literally, was haunted by the ghost

of Mestrovic's past. He had - I'm not certain of the exact circumstances - either left or divorced his wife. But his wife, we were told, lived on in that apartment long after he had left. In fact, she refused to leave. According to legend, she still occupied that apartment, which after a while we were not prepared to challenge. On at least several occasions that clearly could not be explained, the double doors to our bedroom slammed open in the middle of the night. We were jolted from our sleep and seeing no chance for wind or something else to cause the incident, we began to wonder if we were in fact the apartment=s only occupants. On a couple of other occasions, we also heard someone walking around the apartment on the creaking old wood floor. Maybe there was some natural explanation for it all, but because my wife and I both witnessed these things, it was not our imagination.

Q: How did you mix with the people there and deal with the people?

PENDERGRAST: Well, we had an absolutely wonderful experience getting to know the people of Zagreb and across Croatia as well as Slovenia, at that time part of our consular district. We traveled up there about once every two weeks to do the USIA work there. We developed very good friends in the Zagreb community, primarily in the educational and cultural fields, which is where USIA did a large part of its work. Despite the superstructure of a communist state, there was a remarkable openness to Americans in Croatia - and really throughout most of Yugoslavia. Very rarely would we encounter any type of real overt anti-Americanism or communist ideology, usually among provincial apparatchiks who were insecure and fled to the safety of ideological rigidity.

Q: Did you find an anti-Serbian aura there?

PENDERGRAST: Absolutely. Both in my experience in Zagreb and during my short time in Belgrade, I observed first hand the fierce regional and sectarian feelings which were so powerful, even in the late 1960s, and which, of course, deepened over the years. The Croatians had a deeply rooted sense of grievance and the perception that they were being persecuted by a Serbian-dominated Yugoslav government. Nationalism was just below the surface everywhere in Croatia, even among younger people, who had not experienced the war and the violent conflicts which took place then. Even among the generation which knew only Yugoslavia and the Titoist dream of a united, multi-ethnic nation, Croat nationalism simmered, particularly in the universities, the students, the intellectuals. But even when Tito clinched his iron fist, it was clearly evident in the late 60s that nationalism was not going to die. Many of the young professors we got to know then became part of a Croatian cultural uprising, I believe, in 1972 that was brutally put down by the Yugoslav government. They extinguished this bubble of Croatian nationalism, but anybody who knew Croatia at the time fully understood that nationalism would outlive Tito eventually. It wasn't just Croatian nationalism that was brewing. In the same period were the first major Albanian riots in Kosovo against Serbian rule there. Even in Serbia, Tito had to move against an alleged Serbian nationalist conspiracy led by Rankovic and the people around the Serbian-dominated intelligence services. Tito always seemed to play off one nationality against the other so well, but his main weapon was brute force and the loyalty of the army that was perhaps the only real Yugoslav

institution.

Tito mixed both accommodation and repression. In the early 70s, perhaps recognizing that the nationalist fires were erupting everywhere, he moved toward significantly greater decentralization that granted considerable republic and provincial autonomy. The central role of the party and Tito=s rule did not relax, but the institutions of republican independence were put in place, something that certainly led to the final breakup of the country in the 1990s. But the anti-Serb animosity my wife and I observed in Zagreb was something almost pathological. I came to the conclusion then that a united Yugoslavia would never last. My only surprise is that after the death of Tito in 1980, Yugoslavia held together, even precariously, for another decade. The nationalist feelings were so intense that even some Foreign Service nationals who worked for us, Croatians, refused to speak on the telephone with their Serb counterparts at the embassy in Belgrade. They worked for the same U.S. government, the same programs, but none of that could overcome the mistrust and antagonism which history had created, something that has haunted Yugoslavia certainly from its origins in 1919 until today.

Q: It's interesting, because you were getting this. I spent five years in Belgrade - we overlapped slightly (left in '67) - and we sort of picked up the Serbian view and didn=t really capture the intensity of feelings in Zagreb, and I think in Zagreb, I think we felt that, well, these are country cousins, they don't really understand, and all that. Did you capture this division between the embassy and the consulate general?

PENDERGRAST: Well, I think that... Are you talking about it in the official American community?

Q: Yes, the official American community.

PENDERGRAST: I think, frankly, that there was some distance between the consulate and the embassy on the issue of Yugoslavia with the embassy clearly inclined to emphasize a unified Yugoslavia and did not really appreciate the strong nationalist impulses which we in the consulate observed everyday. I don=t recall any major crises in the relationships of consulate and the embassy, but I know the Americans in the two places had very different perspectives about the country, which is perhaps inevitable.

Q: During that time was Bob Owen the consul general the whole time?

PENDERGRAST: He was the whole time, yes.

Q: Could you talk a little about his background and how he operated?

PENDERGRAST: Well, he was, I think, a congenial, soft-spoken, competent career FSO, but as a very junior officer I didn't really have much to do with him. My wife had more direct contact with him in her American School capacity. He didn=t get actively involved in the USIA programs, but the school was his passion. With my wife as the teacher, it was essentially a one-room classroom with about 15 students, including the consul

general=s children.

Q: Let's talk about your activities. In the first place, did you have a supervisor, an information officer who was ahead of you, and what were you all doing?

PENDERGRAST: Yes, I had two branch public affairs officers during my tenure there, Milos Pitak and later Charles Johnson. Both were from that older generation of USIA officers whose formative career experience was dominated by Germany where USIS had a major role both in the occupation and in the 1950s. I had basically good working relationships with both of them, but as a young Foreign Service officer, I had different contacts, different approaches to things. But overall my experience in Zagreb was good and offered a range of activity and responsibility I probably would not have had if I stayed in Belgrade at the embassy. I learned a great deal, largely from hands-on experience running a variety of programs, from education and cultural exchanges to exhibits and press programs, and I thought it was a very good first assignment for me. I also benefited tremendously from some highly competent local employees and as I saw many times over the years how much the United States benefited from the dedication, talent, and energy of its Foreign Service national employees.

Q: What type of things were you doing?

PENDERGRAST: Well, it ran the full gamut of cultural and educational exchanges, including lectures by visiting Americans, arranging trips by Yugoslav students and faculty members to the United States, organizing exhibits of various kinds - obviously, the non-political activities had greatest potential in that type of political environment, which often meant doing things on the American space program, something with great interest to the Yugoslavs. It was a time - in the mid-60s - that the superiority of the American space program over the Soviets was beginning to surface, which had a lot of powerful political messages to project for us in that part of the world.

We also worked to some degree in the press area distributing various publications - trying wherever possible to stretch the limits of the political reality in Yugoslavia and Croatia. We were of course constantly monitored by the authorities to keep us from moving into sensitive areas, which in the Yugoslav context usually meant anything critical of either communism or the Soviet Union. Indeed, anything remotely related to socialism or any socialist country.

But I had a rewarding and wide-ranging experience there. Perhaps the most exciting was what we were able to do in the area of the performing arts. At the time the U.S. government and the State Department were still significantly committed to the performing arts in the world. The program has declined in both policy and budgetary support in recent years, but my experience in Yugoslavia and in other assignments demonstrated the enormous impact of these programs on the values and attitudes of people, especially in closed societies. We organized, for example, the visit by the Los Angeles Philharmonic Orchestra, and one marveled at the audience sitting spellbound watching this world-famous American orchestra conducted by an Indian immigrant,

Zubin Mehta, and with the featured pianist, an African American, André Watts. The political and cultural messages projected to the audience is something you cannot underestimate.

But it wasn't just big-ticket items. There were other things that we organized on a more modest scale. I remember particularly the visit by a student theater group from Kansas University, very gifted young people from the American Heartland, who put on segments of various plays during this State Department sponsored tour. In watching the audiences, particularly the young Yugoslavs, as they were captivated by the energy and the talent and the vitality of these young Americans - there was a clear message there about the strength and character of a free society. A compelling message not lost in the socialist societies. Cultural diplomacy was absolutely critical in what the United States was doing in those countries during the >60s and into the '70s.

Q: No doubt about it. Were the Soviets doing anything that you noticed there in your type of work?

PENDERGRAST: It was very limited. They had a large cultural center in Belgrade, which I understand was fairly active, but in Zagreb and in Croatia, there as a much lower profile by the Soviets. Part of this, again, may have been reflecting the cultural divergence within Yugoslavia itself. Belgrade and Serbia, of course, had a much stronger attachment to Russia historically and culturally. The Red Army had liberated Belgrade at the end of World War II, and there was, I think, a much stronger association in Belgrade and Serbia with Russia than we found in Zagreb, a region historically connected with Central Europe and, of course, as we know, they also had a very close identity with Germany during World War II itself. There was, I believe, a much stronger anti-Soviet sentiment within Croatia and Slovenia than you found in southern parts of Yugoslavia.

Q: Did the fascist régime that took over in Croatia - was there much talk about that in Zagreb at the time?

PENDERGRAST: It was a very sensitive point of conversation within the Zagreb cultural community. There's no doubt that many of the people in Croatia were both embarrassed by what had happened during World War II but also defensive by stressing the excesses of the Partisans, which they believed prompted a lot of the Croatian Ustashi atrocities. It was a very uncomfortable reality for the Croatians because the Croatian state in World War II was inevitably linked to the Croatian identity and national culture.

One of the things which directly affected us in the consulate on a day-to-day basis was that during the World War II Ustaše period in Croatia, they deliberately manipulated the language to emphasize particular terms that were uniquely Croatian compared to the general Serbo-Croatian that officially predominated in Yugoslavia. So there was a certain terminology that had an Ustaše ring to it to people as they read it. In the consulate, our official translator in USIS was a person sympathetic to this old Ustaše era terminology (not for political reasons but through a strong sense of Croatian separatism), and as a result, if we didn't watch too closely, he would put out translations that had this

terminology, which could be a public relations problem for us in the Yugoslav environment. Of course, what has happened, I believe, is that since Croatia has resumed its independence in the 1990s, a lot of that old Ustaše-era terminology has come back into use. Language always has more political and cultural content than just communicating words and sentences.

The exposure to Slovenia further deepened our awareness of the great diversity of Yugoslavia and, indeed, one could argue, the almost impossible unity of that country. Slovenia, even more than Croatia, was very Western, very Central European in its culture. English was already a very common language there, much more than anywhere else in Yugoslavia. In both the appearance of the people as well as in the towns and cities of Slovenia, there was an unmistakable Western character, which the Slovenes quietly and deliberately cultivated. They were part of Yugoslavia, and they paid appropriate homage to the political reality of Yugoslav unity, but they were a very different than what you would find anywhere else in the country.

Q: Did you have problems with former Croatians who went to the United States, became Americans and then came back and were trying to upset things? I mean, basically promulgate nationalism or-

PENDERGRAST: In terms of people coming back, there was no problem because these anticommunist Croatian émigrés in that period would not risk coming back, but they were active abroad (including in the U.S.) and there was occasional violence against official Yugoslav missions and diplomats. Undoubtedly, there were covert connections between Croatians and the émigrés abroad which promoted Croatian separatism, but I don't think that they were at that point, in the '60s, a major force. I think the primary impulse to Croatian nationalism and separatism still was very indigenous, largely associated with the intellectual and educational community. You did not see it very much in the working class or the rural and peasant communities, where I think the loyalty to the Yugoslav idea remained fairly strong. Life was generally better for these groups compared to their prewar condition. But certainly among the intelligentsia and the more educated, professional class in Croatia, nationalism was a strong force already beginning to build in the '60s and, of course, eventually would gain momentum during the >70s and >80s.

Q: Did Kosovo ring any... Was it a force, or not, or was this pretty much Serbia?

PENDERGRAST: Well, I think the impact on Croatia was that the riots that took place in Kosovo in 1968 against Serbian domination of that province resonated considerably within Croatia. They could at least silently sympathize with Albanian resistance to Serbian domination. As time went along over the years, I have no doubt that there was a dynamic of anti-Serb feeling playing out in different parts of the country: Kosovo, Croatia, parts of Bosnia, Slovenia. Perhaps no organized conspiracy, but the perception of a Serb-dominated Yugoslavia ran deep through the country. Tito was able to contain it through both power and concession, but his successors could not. My judgment is that the Yugoslav ideal had modest potential after World War I, but central government became too closely identified with the Serbian monarchy and nation. The sectarian, cultural, and

regional divergences deepened and then fragmented badly in World War II. Tito was able through brutality and raw power to rebuild the facade of Yugoslavism, but it was an unstable structure constructed on a foundation of dictatorship. Many people - including in the U.S. government - were misled by the illusion and nature of Yugoslav unity. And, even today, we continue to have this typically romantic American notion of a multiethnic, multicultural democracy in the areas of the former Yugoslavia. I am not optimistic. And, it troubles me that we flood treasure and personnel into places like Bosnia and Kosovo in this naive aspiration to create harmony among people totally divided by history, culture, and religion. I am surprised that both the Bush and Clinton Administrations did not listen more to people who had a better sense of the on-the-ground reality in the Balkans. Not only there but elsewhere I=ve watched in the world, including Vietnam, Americans have this chronic, largely well-meaning tendency to try and substitute our own commitment, technology, and power for the deficiencies in the local community, a form of myopic cultural arrogance that historically has always afflicted imperial nations, but often is their main vulnerability.

Q: During this period, starting from the Kennedy time but carrying on, there was a great emphasis on reaching out to young people, particularly at the university level, and here you are. I mean you're the youngest one around, I guess. Were you working at the university?

PENDERGRAST: I did a lot of work with students and other youth groups across Croatia and Slovenia. And it was a very rewarding experience. Because in large part of John Kennedy (who really had an impact across Eastern Europe), but also I think just generally, we exuded to young people a society of openness, energy and dynamism with which they clearly identified with. And one of my most unhappy experiences in Zagreb, but also to some degree inspiring, was the reaction to the assassination of Bobby Kennedy in 1968. His murder evoked all of the feelings that had been experienced in '63; the grief and shock were absolutely overwhelming. I remember that we put a small, black-bordered picture of Bobby Kennedy in the consulate window, and *spontaneously* the local people were putting flowers and candles on the sidewalk to create a shrine to the assassinated senator that flooded into the street. People were stopping and praying at all hours of the day and night. A type of unsanctioned demonstration rarely seen in that part of the world. What encouraged me was that there did not seem to be any backlash feeling against the United States itself or a culture of violence there, although the official communist media liked to play that tune. I think the Croatians for the most part did not really hold American society at fault. They realized that this was the act of a demented individual who did not represent American society and culture, not alter.

Q: How about the Vietnam war? How did that play for you?

PENDERGRAST: Well, Vietnam provided another landmark event in my experience in Zagreb, the first time that I came face to face with a violent form of anti-Americanism, although not really reflective of the people in Zagreb or Yugoslavia generally. In that period, Yugoslavia officially tried to exhibit at least a superficial fraternal attitude toward their comrades in Vietnam, particularly in their media coverage and government

pronouncements. In 1967, they organized an officially sanctioned demonstration against American bombing in North Vietnam, which ended up as planned in front of our consulate. The orchestrated slogans, however, suddenly deteriorated when a handful of hotheads, probably just hooligan kids, decided to launch a stone and firebomb attack on the consulate. For a short time, we feared that the building would be burned or penetrated by the protesters. The situation had simply got out of hand and we cowered in the consulate secure area trying to seek help from the local authorities. Just as the mob began to get into the ground floor, the government responded and the police intervened. But for a young Foreign Service officer never exposed before to such violence and rage, it was a pretty frightening experience.

Q: Did you come across in your contacts at the university debates or arguments on Vietnam?

PENDERGRAST: No, the subject rarely arose in my contacts across Croatia with student or other university groups. You might run into it against an *apparatchik* type at a university, someone who just trying to follow the proper ideological line, but in everyday contacts it rarely came up. Vietnam to me was a very distant, not terribly relevant fact of life, not knowing then that I would end up and experience Vietnam first hand. But at that time it was not something that I really thought about very much other than embracing the conventional position that we were there to defend against a communist threat to that society, but it was not something that I or the Yugoslavs wanted to discuss.

Q: Well, then, we might stop at this point. You left in '69, is that right?

PENDERGRAST: Early 1969.

Q: And I'll just put at the end of the tape, where did you go, so we'll know?

PENDERGRAST: Well, in early '69, I was assigned to Vietnam, preceded by 10 months of Vietnamese language training. I left Yugoslavia earlier than we anticipated because at that time, USIA, as well as other agencies, were rapidly increasing their personnel in Vietnam. I left Yugoslavia with great reluctance. My wife and I had traveled through most parts of the country and were captivated by the extraordinary beauty of the country as well as the spirit and hospitality of its diverse peoples. It is a fascinating country touched often tragically by history and by the complex mix of cultures and religions. I could not think of a more interesting place to start off a Foreign Service career.

And, for a young FSO, I was able to have direct exposure on a number of occasions to one of the giants of world history in the 20th century, Josip Broz Tito. He was a man of extraordinary charisma, self-confidence, and authority, which helps to explain how he held that country together. Just as we were getting ready to leave Zagreb, we were staying at the Hotel Intercontinental on New Years 1969 and we were coming back exhausted from a party around two in morning. But who comes storming through the lobby with his entourage but Tito headed toward another party in the hotel ballroom. I learned he kept going the entire night. He was a leader of incredible vitality and energy.

As well as appetites. His weakness for women and whiskey were well known, but he seemed to survive everybody.

Q: Okay, well, we'll pick this up starting in '69 with your taking Vietnamese training, and we'll pick it up from there.

PENDERGRAST: Very good.

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Q: The 29th of July, 1999, Dell, you started Vietnamese when?

PENDERGRAST: I started my Vietnamese training in early 1969. I believe it was February. There were colleagues of mine who had been assigned to Vietnam, I recall, and actively resisted the assignment and in a couple of cases resigned because they did not want to go to Vietnam. I wasn=t enthusiastic about the posting, but I accepted it. Curiously, when I joined the Foreign Service in 1965, my draft board in Illinois had generously exempted me from military service (which most draft boards in that era did not do for FSOs), but I ended up in Vietnam anyway.

When I started in Vietnamese language training, I had general sympathy for the U.S. position in Vietnam. I had abandoned my family=s Midwestern isolationism inherited from my parents, replaced by a passionate internationalism shaped a great deal by John Kennedy, who inspired so many people in my generation. But I think my Foreign Service experience and sharpened sense of history made me conscious of America=s global responsibilities. The U.S. had been reluctant to enter the two world wars and the results were tragic. We could and should not walk away from Southeast Asia. So I was basically disposed toward the assignment, although obviously with no background at all in Asia or anything to do with Vietnam.

During my ten months of language training, I had extensive area and country studies, which gave me a lot of badly needed education about the region. And, I think my views started to evolve and shift even while still in Washington. It was partly my exposure to the intense antiwar feeling taking place in the United States, which I had not experienced while in Yugoslavia. I had not fully appreciated the depth of opposition that existed in the United States, and that inevitably did have some impact on me. I remember in the fall of 1969 the Moratorium, a major event in the antiwar movement that turned violent in Washington. Even some of my Vietnamese language classmates, who were going to Vietnam, participated in the Moratorium, which was a little bit beyond my reach at that point. I think there was another thing that helped to shape my attitudes towards Vietnam, and that was a deepening concern about a blind, stubborn faith in American technology and power to win the war. I began to question the widely held belief that American military and political power alone could make the difference in the war, a self-deception which afflicted many in the government and the military. My reaction was partly developed by exposure to the swaggering Vietnam hands, civilian and military, who came back and forth through the Vietnam training center at the time. They had a rather

patronizing attitude toward the Vietnamese, which I found disturbing and offensive. Such people seemed to think it was our war and we were going to win it regardless of the Vietnamese, another form of the myopic cultural arrogance which I mentioned earlier. I was by no means a dove or opponent of the war. Its basic strategic goals were sound, but before I even arrived there, I had become nervous about the way and the people implementing our strategy.

Q: How was Vietnamese as a language, as a tonal language? How did you find it?

PENDERGRAST: I had never experienced anything like it, because my language background was entirely in the Slavic family, but actually I seemed to adapt pretty well to it. I never became really fluent, but I managed at the professional level. I never needed an interpreter and was able to travel unescorted around the countryside. The tonal language is major, unfamiliar challenge for any American, but once you master the tones, you really are in control, because the grammar, the structure, tends to be simple, certainly compared to a Slavic language. So as I look back over the languages that I've studied over the many years, Vietnamese was possibly the easiest. But that's maybe because I was still young and able to adapt to languages much better than I could later.

Q: I can't remember, were you married?

PENDERGRAST: Yes, I was. I was married, and my wife initially decided that she would go to Bangkok and spend the time there because, of course, they were not allowing families into Vietnam during that period. In the end, she became pregnant with our first child and decided to stay with her mother in Chicago. In retrospect, it was a good decision, because the home environment was better for her in the pregnancy and then for the birth of our son. And it worked out, I think, pretty well. I=m glad that later she was able to come and visit me in Vietnam for a couple of weeks to get a taste of my experience there.

Q: Did you have any problem with your wife? This is a question I ask of people because often the wives were subjected more... I mean, you had your work to do, you knew what you were going to do and you were a government officer and all, but the wives were out kind of in... I'm talking about in the American public, and they were getting an awful lot more pressure. I know my wife did.

PENDERGRAST: You mean during the Vietnam period.

Q: Yes, during the Vietnam thing. My wife was at a university while I was in Vietnam, and I came back and I found it wasn't very easy.
PENDERGRAST: No, she had no problem being identified with someone working in Vietnam. She lived in a conservative North Shore suburb of Chicago. I don't think there was any strong anti-war feeling there. In fact, her main complaint, I recall, was the paucity of information about Vietnam and the lack of interest among the people she knew in that area. She read the *Chicago Tribune* and other local papers, but, remarkably, in the middle of the war, the information was spotty. She was getting letters from me almost

daily from Vietnam and her curiosity was stimulated, but she could not get much satisfaction in the local media.

Q: I remember on my way out trying to find something on what was happening in Vietnam, and I was in Houston, and there was, you know, a paragraph. The papers, when you get beyond sort of The Washington Post, The New York Times*, maybe* The Los Angeles Times*, you're in another world.*

PENDERGRAST: You're absolutely right, and she really did feel being in a sort of information vacuum, but she was distracted by her first pregnancy, and when my son was born while I was in Vietnam, and she was quite fully occupied.

Q: Well, you then got to Vietnam in 1970, is that right? When?

PENDERGRAST: In January of 1970, and I was assigned by USIA in Saigon to be an advisor, what they called a psychological operations advisor to the Vietnamese government, in a province northwest of Saigon called Tay Ninh, approximately 60 to 70 miles northwest of the capital city. It had been in the '60s a very prominent battleground between the communists and the South Vietnamese government, the site of the infamous War Zone C, which was a vast stretch of largely uninhabited jungle that had become a major base for the communist forces. I was based in the province capital with the province advisory team and worked with the Vietnamese information service located in Tay Ninh.
Q: You were in Tay Ninh from January of '70 to when?

PENDERGRAST: January 1970 until I left Vietnam in the fall of 1971.

Q: Could you talk about your job and maybe some of the incidents and your experiences?

PENDERGRAST: I was the advisor to the Vietnamese information service assisting them in the propaganda effort supporting the war. The situation in Tay Ninh was complicated because that province is the center of the Cao Dai religion, the largest indigenous Vietnamese religion. It is - at least at the time - a religion that numbered, I guess, three to four million people, primarily in Tay Ninh and along the central coast of Vietnam. It's an extraordinary, quintessentially Vietnamese religion which is eclectic and the elements of different faiths, Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, Confucianism, and animism. And it also tends to be very hierarchical and authoritarian, organized along the lines of the Roman Catholic Church, with a pope, cardinals and bishops, and at that time they had a very powerful hold over Tay Ninh. The province government and military structure was essentially a Cao Dai structure. And so what we were working with was not just the Vietnamese government representative, but indeed with the Cao Dai, which rippled the whole fabric of the provincial system. In many ways, of course, that was a great advantage, because the Cao Dai were fiercely anticommunist. Their loyalty to Saigon over the years had been mixed, but at that time in the early >70s they pretty well accommodated to the national government, which allowed them a fair degree of autonomy in Tay Ninh.

What my job entailed was working with my counterpart, the head of the Vietnamese information service, who was of course a well-connected Cao Dai figure, in a variety of information and cultural activities ranging from publications and cultural events and entertainment staged in villages to promote government themes as well as small village libraries and information centers across the province. Increasingly, I began to feel it was rather patronizing to believe that somehow we Americans could tell the Vietnamese how to communicate with their own people. I was a little uncomfortable with that, but my main value, I suppose, was helping in contacts with regional and national headquarters to get needed resources for the Information Service. But at times I did begin to feel a little like a third wheel in that environment, even though I spoke Vietnamese and, indeed, was the only civilian Vietnamese speaker in the province - and got along very well with the Vietnamese - but I was still the outsider.

Q: Well, sometimes these jobs, the Vietnamese experience talking to other people is that often they'd say Uh-huh, but use you as a source equivalent to a supply officer.

PENDERGRAST: There was an element of that and was able to help, I think, in some way to support the Vietnamese Information Service chief, an educated, soft-spoken, pleasant gentleman. We got along well together and he was most gracious in his hospitality to my wife when she visited over the Christmas/New Years period in 1970. But I always had this sense that he had been fighting this propaganda war for 20 years, and who am I, a relatively young Foreign Service officer coming to tell him how to do it?

Q: Was there a difference between the... Did you run across a difference between the Cao Dai and the government of South Vietnam's approach to information they were putting out?

PENDERGRAST: No, at that time, as I mentioned, there was relative harmony between the Cao Dai and the government of Vietnam. They shared parallel interests in resisting the communists, their common enemy, and they enjoyed considerable autonomy from Saigon in terms of running the provincial administration. It was in essence a Cao Dai government, although few would openly say it, but from the province chief on down, they were all Cao Dai. It's interesting, even the regional military force of Tay Ninh, of course a separate military unit, not in the ARVN (Armée de la République du Viêt-Nam (Army of the Republic of Vietnam - i.e., South Vietnamese Army), had uniforms that carried the Cao Dai colors.

The Cao Dai historically have been inconsistent in their loyalties. At one time they had been very anti-government, and back in the '50s were one of the sects actively and even violently opposed to President Diem. Later on, in the '60s, they began to adapt and work with the government in Saigon, which had enough problems with the Viet Cong and did not want to face the Cao Dai as well.

Q: Did you find yourself in any problem with your Saigon JUSPAO, I guess it was, headquarters, in that here you were dealing in a province where the game was somewhat

different. I mean, this was not straight GVN, Government of Vietnam, work. I mean you were working more with a church. Did you have trouble sort of getting that across?

PENDERGRAST: No, I didn't. The people from Saigon were very interested in the Cao Dai. We'd get periodic visits from the Saigon warriors, as they were called, and they always wanted to visit the Cao Dai temple, which was, and remains today, in fact, one of the great tourist Meccas of Vietnam. The Cao Dai temple is an elaborate structure, which looks like something that Disney might have created with its bewildering display of dragons. The camera-toting tourists from Saigon loved it. A large part of my job as my tour evolved really shifted more and more away from the JUSPAO information activities into a mostly political reporting function. My province senior advisor for most of the tour was a senior career FSO, Parker Wyman, and he did not speak Vietnamese. He relied on me to maintain contact with Cao Dai political activists and to develop reporting to the embassy in Saigon. So a great deal of my assignment in Tay Ninh turned out to be essentially a political reporting role, which I found both interesting and challenging, particularly because the so-called propaganda advisory role, I believed, had its limits.

Q: Was there any Catholic or Buddhist influence, and how did the Cao Dai interact with these?

PENDERGRAST: There was a very small population of Catholic and Buddhist residents in Tay Ninh. They usually were confined to one or two villages which had their own form of autonomy within this largely autonomous province. They were pretty much ignored by the Cao Dai, a relationship of mutual tolerance and indifference for those most part.

Q: What about the other side. I mean how effective was this Cao Dai government? I mean you had War Zone Z in the middle of the jungle and all this. I mean, what was the other side doing?

PENDERGRAST: Well, in the spring of 1970 shortly after I arrived in Tay Ninh, we had what was euphemistically called the Cambodian "incursion," the major military operation by South Vietnamese and American forces moving into the so-called base areas in Cambodia. Tay Ninh was the principal launching pad for that operation. It was fascinating to witness this huge avalanche of American tanks and other vehicles as they went across Tay Ninh into Cambodia, at the time the largest military operation since the Korean War. I did, in fact, briefly accompany some U.S. Army public affairs people just across the border into Cambodia, but most of the time I was there watching this enormous military operation and helping with the flood of hapless Cambodian refugees created by the offensive.

Although failing in its objective to find the Viet Cong headquarters, the Cambodian operation, however, did have success in pushing back the communists, dispersing them, undermining their capability to penetrate the populated areas in Tay Ninh, where they had actually been able to operate in preceding years. As a result of this Cambodian invasion, most of my tour was a period of relative peace and security in Tay Ninh. The communists

were for the most part disorganized, weakened, in many cases simply absent. I could by myself, during daytime hours, travel unescorted virtually anywhere in the populated part of Tay Ninh. At night I wouldn't do it, but in the daytime it was not a problem. War Zone C, the uninhabited area in the northern part of the province, was still out of bounds. But I was fortunate to have the opportunity to travel freely and get to know people in rural villages and hamlets where Americans would not have gone without military escort two or three years earlier.

Q: How did you find the American military there? I imagine you would find yourself more or less in a role between the military, speaking Vietnamese and all, and maybe keeping relations and things in better form than they might be. Did you find yourself in that?

PENDERGRAST: I had contact both with the military advisory team with which I worked on a day-to-day basis, but also with the regular military units that were still in Tay Ninh when I arrived, the First Cavalry and 25th Divisions, but they left the province during my tour. I think, in general, that the advisory people who worked closely with the Vietnamese were much more sensitive, more aware of the fact that this was not just a World War II-type conflict, but in fact a complicated political war. The regular combat units, I believe, were afflicted more with the fixation that this was another conventional World War II operation and we would just overwhelm the enemy with our technology and power. This was, in my judgment, the great mistake of Vietnam; we were just re-fighting the last war, trying to do what we did in Europe and in Korea, and never really understood that this was a very different environment and a very [different] type of war. In many ways, the tragedy was compounded by turning the South Vietnamese army itself into an American-style, World War II-type organization, heavily dependent on logistics and supporting firepower- all of which made both ourselves and the South Vietnamese less capable of dealing with the principally political challenge that we faced.

Q: Were there any major developments, incidents, or something during the period you were there until you left in '71?

PENDERGRAST: Well, the major event, of course, was the Cambodian invasion that not only resulted in, at least, the temporary easing of the security threat, a brief respite that we enjoyed, but also generated an enormous flow of refugees from Cambodia into the province that we had to deal with as well. While I was there, the process of Vietnamization was the main reality in a war-torn part of Vietnam, where Americans had been fighting in great numbers for five years, and suddenly they were gone. But remarkably for a time, at least, there was no sudden decline in the security, mainly because the Cambodian invasion had severely damaged the Vietnamese communist infrastructure and their support from across the border.

Q: How were the Cambodians treated by the Cao Dai and-

PENDERGRAST: Generally, the Cambodians were not viewed with great respect or dignity by the Vietnamese, in fact, looked down upon by the Vietnamese, whether Cao

Dai or others. Particularly when dealing with the refugees, it was not the Vietnamese government but the American government that really was most committed to helping these people. The Vietnamese authorities were at best indifferent. A vast cultural and social chasm separated the Vietnamese and the Cambodians.

Q: Were there Montagnards in the area?

PENDERGRAST: No, there were no major minorities at all because it was so heavily Cao Dai in the province.

Q: What was your impression of going back to Saigon and seeing the folks at the top and all that?

PENDERGRAST: It was in many ways a surrealistic experience to visit Saigon, as I did occasionally, because there the American military and civilian presence remained pervasive despite the rapidly dropping levels of U.S. combat troops. Vietnamization certainly didn't take hold there. And, frankly, I was somewhat troubled to see the Americans, many had been there for years, living in the lap of luxury as a result of this war. Saigon was always (and remains today) a dynamic, entrepreneurial city. I left Vietnam with enormous respect for the Vietnamese as a people. They are intelligent, industrious people. They make the best of what they can. But at that time they were simply taking advantage of the fact that you had a lot of Americans throwing around a lot of money. The problem was that in the process they lost track of their own fate and their own destiny. I remember specifically several times Vietnamese telling me in unguarded moments over a few beers at night, that they really believed it was ***our*** war, the American war, and they were just sort of bystanders or minor players in these events. I think that problem persisted right up to April of 1975, the belief among the Vietnamese that the Americans never really would walk away from their war. It was certainly true in 1970 and probably the same in those last days in 1975.

Q: Well, getting this experience under your belt, whither - 1971, what were you thinking about, what did you want to do, and what did you do?

PENDERGRAST: Well, I didn=t have any real strong preference or expectation about any particular assignment or job. My tour in Vietnam was shortened abruptly by a few months. I was back in Chicago visiting my wife and expecting to go back to Vietnam for my last months. Literally on the day before I was to get on the plane in Chicago, I received a call from Washington telling me that as part of the draw-down in the American presence in Vietnam, my position was eliminated and I was not to return. Maybe they were just trying to save travel funds since I already was back in the States. As a result, my colleagues had to pack me up there and return my belongings, and I went back to Washington. In a sense, it was a somewhat anticlimactic way to end a tour and particularly disappointing not to say goodbye to my Vietnamese colleagues and friends. I knew a large number of people in Tay Ninh and was disappointed it would happen that way, but I had a new son and my wife, and it was good to be reunited with them. But it still was not a good way to come to closure with such an experience. Maybe it finally did come to closure just last year when my son, who had been born while I was in Vietnam,

went to Vietnam himself as part of a graduate business school project and spent three weeks in Vietnam, mostly in Saigon and Hanoi. He took one day to visit Tay Ninh because he knew I had been there. He saw the Cao Dai temple and the city of Tay Ninh, tried to look for some landmarks I had told him about - never found them - but, I guess everything comes full circle and I=m glad that he could help to bring some closure for me. I=d like to visit Tay Ninh myself someday.

Q: Well, then, what was in store for you? They shortened your tour, and you were in Chicago with a wife and new son. Whither?

PENDERGRAST: Then I returned to Washington in the fall of 1971. I was assigned to the European Office of USIA as the Yugoslav Desk officer, building upon my experience before Vietnam, and also had responsibility for Bulgaria and Albania, but our activities in those countries were not significant. I mostly worked on Yugoslavia, one of USIA=s largest programs in the world.

Q: This was '7-

PENDERGRAST: 1971 and 19'72. I spent only one year in that position, although it was a productive period, because I worked closely with the then USIS PAO in Belgrade, Pic Littell, in actively expanding the regional reach of our USIA programs and operations in Yugoslavia. At that time, of course, we, like the State Department, had posts only in Belgrade and Zagreb. Based on my personal experience in Yugoslavia, I believed that we really needed to move toward a more decentralized operation because of the increasing role the republics were going to play in the country. There was some resistance in the Department and elsewhere in the government, not an easy thing for someone relatively junior to deal with, but I worked different parts of the government and found some allies, with strong leadership from both USIA management and Pic Littell in Belgrade, we were able to establish new USIS - not State Department; just USIS at that point - operations in Sarajevo, Ljubljana, and Skopje. Later on we added one in Titograd as well. It was the first time that the U.S. government had reached out officially to the three republics of Slovenia, Bosnia, and Macedonia. We were well ahead of the entire U.S. government on this issue. Curiously, the first director of the USIS program in Sarajevo, whom I helped to recruit and select, was a bright, young USIA officer, Vic Jackovich, who later would become the first U.S. ambassador to Bosnia.

Q: How did these new posts - let's take Skopje, for example - I mean, how was it set up and what were you doing?

PENDERGRAST: They were small, modest information and library centers for a variety of cultural, educational, and media programs. There was no consular or other official function at all. This was actually part of the problem that we had to address in terms of negotiating, not just with the Yugoslavs, but also within the U.S. government because they were not going to be diplomatic posts and the people there would not have formal diplomatic status. In a communist country, this caused some security-conscious people a great deal of concern, assigning people without diplomatic protection to these remote

republics in Yugoslavia. Trying to work out the modalities of official Americans in non-official positions was not very easy. Ultimately, we found a way of doing it where they had both diplomatic passports and regular passports and they were able to play use both passports depending on the occasion. It worked out, but it was not an easy thing to accomplish. But I'm glad we did it, because it was important for the United States to have this presence as Yugoslavia moved down the road toward decentralization and eventual unraveling.
Q: I would have thought that Slovenia, Ljubljana, you'd get much more of a response than you would in Skopje in those days, or maybe I'm wrong.

PENDERGRAST: No, because in many ways the Macedonians were thrilled that the U.S. government was giving them this recognition and unlike, Slovenia, which had proximity to the West, especially Austria and Italy, Macedonia was a very isolated republic and welcomed this new point of contact with the outside world. They were delighted to have a Macedonian-speaking USIA officer there. I think we really did accomplish a good deal by establishing these republic centers, a very rewarding part of my one year there in Washington.

Q: Obviously we're speaking from 1999, when we've just gone through a military exercise in Kosovo. Were we thinking, when we were in Macedonia, which has a fairly large I guess we'd call it today an Albanian population - were we thinking about them at the time?

PENDERGRAST: I don=t think at that time the Albanian minority in Macedonia was something on our radar screen. The Albanians there were not that numerous in those days. That, of course, was not the case in Kosovo, where you had had violent demonstrations by Albanians back in 1968.

Q: Were you getting any reflections from Zagreb, because as I recall was it '71 where Croatian nationalism sort of spilled out and flags were flown at a concert and there were some demonstrations and Tito went bonkers?

PENDERGRAST: Yes, there was a major Yugoslav crackdown on Croatian nationalism in the early 1970s. It may have been a principal reason that Tito moved toward his own political decentralization in Yugoslavia during the 1970s, a significant power devolution to the republics. No doubt about it, in my view, he clearly feared nationalism, which three decades of Yugoslavia had not eroded. Wherever nationalism surfaced, whether in Kosovo or Croatia or even in Serbia, he responded vigorously, but I think that he was trying to have it both ways through repression and concession, and that's one reason he did move to decentralization.

Q: While you were on the Desk, were we playing close attention in trying to do what we could to keep the Brotherhood and Unity theme going as far as Yugoslavia was concerned?

PENDERGRAST: I don=t think that there was really that much that the United States

could do to strengthen unity in Yugoslavia. Our official policy of course remained one of support for a united Yugoslavia, a strategic buffer between the West and the Soviet Bloc. We welcomed an independent Yugoslavia and associated unity with independence. But I think that defensible strategic policy was based on wishful thinking more than reality. The superficial unity of Yugoslavia was fragile, particularly after the Stalinist threat in the 1940s and 1950s dissipated. The national divisions in Yugoslavia do not necessarily go back four or five hundred years, as some would argue but to the period of Ottoman rule in the 19th century and its gradual decline, which allowed different South Slav nationalities to follow different paths. Before World War II, the country was held together by the power of the Serbian monarchy, and then after World War II by the power of a communist dictator. But by the late 1960s, you could clearly sense that Yugoslavia as an authentic national unity was not taking hold. It was not something that was going to endure.

Q: Of course, too, we have to remember the time. You had the Soviet Union sitting there, and I always felt that our real policy was not particularly Yugoslavia, but if Yugoslavia got soft and started to split, it meant the Soviets would get involved - as, hell, they have just in the past couple of weeks in Kosovo. And so that was sort of a pressure that was keeping things together, and that's how we were viewing it.
PENDERGRAST: I think that's certainly a large part of it, particularly a sense that the Serbs, with their more pronounced Slavophile tendencies, would be more receptive to the Russians. It was certainly less true in other parts of Yugoslavia, especially Croatia and Slovenia, much more Western, Catholic, and a balancing force inside the Yugoslav federation. But the nationalist centrifugal forces were very strong in the late '60s and early '70s, and particularly with the end of the Cold War, the strategic impulse for a united, nonaligned Yugoslavia completely disappeared.

Q: Well, then, in '72 you finished this year on the Desk. What then?

PENDERGRAST: Well, my Foreign Service career, in its peripatetic style, involved then a year up at the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, for what they called at that time, Mid-Career Training. It basically was a year of study at the Fletcher school, primarily in Soviet area studies, which suddenly had become my specialty, I guess, and I profited from some very engaging professors there and the entirely stimulating intellectual environment there, especially the young people who had gone through the '60s and early '70s, people that I had not the opportunity to know well because of my overseas assignments. I think that I understood them and I understood where our own country was going a lot better after that year.

Q: Talking about this relationship with these students - these are creatures of the Vietnam... I mean, we still were involved in Vietnam, but it was the endgame.

PENDERGRAST: Well, it was, because when I was there, there was the Christmas bombing of Hanoi and then the peace agreement in '73, the formal end of America=s involvement in the war.

Q: How did you find the attitude of the people you were working with, particularly the students and also the faculty, toward somebody who'd both served in a communist country and in Vietnam?

PENDERGRAST: I sensed there was authentic curiosity and respect for what I had done. I didn't detect any hostility at all. I think the Fletcher School tended to be a fairly conservative institution academically and politically. I was comfortable there and enjoyed the contacts I had both with the faculty and the students.

Q: What about the attitude that you were getting? I'm not going to say attitude, but as you were pursuing your studies, were you working on the Soviet Union itself?

PENDERGRAST: That was the assignment that I had, or what I had proposed to do, to work on Soviet and East European studies, and I had a number of courses and seminars dealing with that, but I also did other work in the national security area as well as diplomatic history. I did not - because I'd already had a master's degree - I really didn=t feel strongly committed to a master's program, which would have put me into a fixed curriculum. So I was able to pick and choose, and I enjoyed the experience there. I think the experience helped a great deal in organizing and developing my ideas about Eastern Europe.

Q: It was to be 15 years later, a little more than that, that the Soviet Union and the Eastern Bloc were to fall apart. From what you were sampling in the academic cafeteria, were you picking up any hints about the greater Soviet system and its weaknesses and problems?

PENDERGRAST: I don=t think there was at that time in academe or government any strong sense about the weakness of the Soviet system or the Soviet Union. This was, of course, when we were moving into the era of superpower détente, working actively to develop a strategic relationship with the Soviet Union to forestall nuclear war. The idea that the Soviet Union was this great superpower essential to the peace of the world seemed to be the dominant mood, not only at Fletcher but I think elsewhere in the country.

Q: Well, of course, Henry Kissinger and Richard Nixon were at their peak.

PENDERGRAST: That's right, and that was a period when there was this sense that the Soviet Union was the indispensable superpower partner we had to work with. I think that my instinct for Eastern Europe and the flaws in the Soviet system would only come later, in my next assignment, where did begin to think about the nature and underlying weakness of communism.

Q: Well, then, you come to your next assignment. What was it?

PENDERGRAST: I was assigned after my year at Fletcher to Polish language training in Washington and moved back again to the nation's capital, by then close to having our

second son, who arrived literally within a few weeks after returning to Washington for language training. It was a heavy burden on Tula, my wife, moving twice in less than a year and then coping with a new baby. I was fully occupied, of course, during 10 months at FSI in Polish language training, but the Polish came to me pretty easily given my experience with Serbo-Croatian from Yugoslavia and with Russian in my school years. Each Slavic language has distinctive features, but they share a lot of common structure and similar vocabulary.

Q: What were you getting from your language teachers about Poland and from your reading? What were you expecting out of Poland?

PENDERGRAST: The instructors were undeniably from the old Poland, the anti-communist Poland, with predictably no sympathy for the communist government. But as I talked and read about Poland, it became quickly evident that the country was superficially communist with a rich, resilient national character that defied the relatively short-lived communist state. Poland was a long way from the usual stereotype of a faceless communist bureaucracy or authoritarian state, a conclusion reinforced in my contacts with the many Poles I met during language training. Curiously, I had not had much contact previously with Polish-Americans, although they have a large presence in Chicago.

Q: It's the second largest Polish city in the world, after Warsaw.

PENDERGRAST: After Warsaw, yes. I think it remains true today, although many Poles in Chicago have moved to the suburbs. My family moved to Poland in the summer of 1974.

Q: And you were there from when to when?

PENDERGRAST: I was in Poland from the summer of '74 to the summer of '77, three years.

Q: Where did you go?

PENDERGRAST: I was assigned to Warsaw as the USIA information officer. Press attaché was the working title we used. Poland was, as I think back over 30-some years, probably the most rewarding and engaging Foreign Service tour that I had in my whole career. I think partly because I became increasingly aware, as I hinted moments ago, that we were indeed on the cusp of history, that we were beginning to see the slow but detectable unraveling of communism. And of course if anywhere in Eastern Europe, it would take place in Poland, the largest, the most resistant, country of the whole Soviet Bloc. While there we witnessed the beginning vibrations of the disintegration of communism that would take another 15 years, but it was clear it was going to happen - at least to me, and I think to others as well in the embassy. In 1975 there were violent outbreaks in the Warsaw area against an increase in food prices. And remarkably, the communist government backed down and withdrew the food price increases, which only

deepened the spirit of resistance and sense of empowerment among the Polish people. But most significant at that time - and this is really where the process of communism=s demise began - was that you had for the first time the collaboration of workers and intellectuals, two forces in Polish society which historically had been usually separate but for the first time united in what was called the "movement for the defense of the workers." That movement evolved ultimately into Solidarity later in the 1970s. Walesa wasn't part of it at that time, but some of the figures that knew, like Jacek Kuron and Adam Michnik, were people who eventually became major figures in Solidarity and ultimately in the post-communist régime that came to power in 1989. But all of that really started back in the mid-1970s. That was the real watershed in modern Polish history and, indeed, for the rest of Eastern Europe, too.

Q: When you arrived in '74, what were you getting from your ambassador - who was he? - and from the embassy about whither things were going, and then-

PENDERGRAST: Well, to be very honest, I think that something that troubled me a little bit about the embassy, something that somewhat divided the embassy, the tendency toward a clientitis-type relationship with the communist regime, the government of Edward Gierek, who came to power perceived as a "reform" communist who would move Poland and Poland's economy towards the West, which the U.S. and the embassy wanted to support. My impression is, however, that others in the embassy were more inclined to support and identify with the dissident and anti-communist forces beginning to gather force in the country, which in many ways threatened the Gierek regime and jeopardized their economic opening to the West. This is something that often has unsettled me about the systemic differences between public and traditional diplomacy. The public diplomacy we usually practiced at USIA has always focused on the long term, on what lies down the road, the ultimate outcome we're trying to accomplish and encourage. Too often, in my judgment, traditional diplomacy is fixated on the immediate needs and health of the relationship with the ruling regime. The management of that relationship becomes paramount and sometimes, perhaps not always, overshadows long-term goals and values. That, very frankly, is something that concerns me a great deal about USIA's integration into the State Department. I fear that the dominant priorities and impulses of traditional diplomacy - the management of today's relationship with a particular government - will usually prevail at the expense of what we as a nation and a society really should be promoting. My State colleagues may view such sentiment as overly idealistic or unrealistic, but I sincerely think that clientitis is the most serious, endemic problem I=ve seen over the years in the Foreign Service.

Q: Was there concern at the time, at the embassy, that if the Poles go too far... I mean, Poland, more than anything else, was sitting astride the Soviet main supply lines, where its troops were in East Germany, and if the fighting was going on, the Poles had to be quiet as far as the Soviet military was concerned.

PENDERGRAST: I think you're absolutely right. There was certainly this sense both in the embassy and in Washington about the emotional, adventurous Poles pushing too far, about disrupting the equilibrium too much, that would arouse the Soviets. For an

example, a constant irritant between the embassy and the Radio Free Europe in Munich was perceived bombastic language emanating from the Polish service of Radio Free Europe. It was never quite put so bluntly, but that was exactly what divided the exiles in Munich and the diplomats in Warsaw. I found myself personally in the middle, not necessarily adhering to either side. There probably was clientitis on one side and extremism on the other, which both made me uncomfortable. But the bottom line was that we saw the early impulses of communism=s fatal decline in the mid-'70s. And, it was, I thought, a perfect example of public diplomacy=s success, the triumph of the long-term cultural and educational and information approach that was having, over a period of time in a steady, deliberate way - a profound impact on these societies. And a lot of it was just personal contact by the embassy=s Polish-speaking officers, who circulated freely and actively in cultural and intellectual circles.

I remember getting to know at that time a very unassuming, modest, soft-spoken gentleman who was editor of an obscure Catholic journal that was on the edge of dissidence. I never imagined at the time that my acquaintance would become the first non-communist prime minister of Poland, Tadeusz Mazowiecki. It was just amazing. But he was the type of people that we did get to know and tried to work with. I think our main accomplishment, however, was just simply conveying to such people America=s interest and sympathy through our regular contacts with them. They were not alone or ignored. We tried to get Mazowiecki an International Visitors grant to visit the United States, but he could not a passport despite our intervention. But we did get a lot of people out on such exchange programs, and I think we worked the edges of the society quite effectively without belligerence or arousing the Polish government too much in getting the American message to the Polish people - although it was admittedly a very receptive audience. I=ve always thought that in my experience, Poland was easily the most the most pro-American country in the world-

Q: I interviewed somebody - I think he was your predecessor - who said he thought there probably were about three dedicated communists in Poland when he was there.

PENDERGRAST: That probably is stretching a little bit. Actually, I'm not even sure about those three. But still there was certainly the so-called communist elite of Poland whose exclusive motive was power, their privileges, just keeping control. And, sometimes these elites misrepresented themselves to us. I remember a wonderful example, a Polish journalist I got to know very well, who was quite open in professing anti-régime views, trying to make himself a sort of dissident, although he seemed to enjoy a fairly comfortable life in the communist elite. Then, in 1980 immediately after the martial law régime took power, I turned on my television set in the States, and there was my former friend of mine, Wieslaw Gornicki, who turned out in a military uniform and was *the* spokesman for the military régime. He was obviously someone who made his choice and sided against the democratic forces in Poland, but it amused me remembering his rhetoric from the time when I was there. A fascinating, often unpredictable country and people.

Q: Well, what about the Polish press? I mean, as information officer, this is one of your

main targets, wasn't it?

PENDERGRAST: Obviously, the Polish press was controlled by the Communist Party, either directly or indirectly. I think one of the things that we tried to do was to identify and work with those journalists who had a certain degree of independence, who were able to express views that slightly bent the party line, a nuance away from the official position. We couldn=t do anything in a covert way that would endanger them, but we developed good relations with them, for example, the highly respected weekly *Polityka*, which was an "official" publication, but featured a number of journalists who were independent, thoughtful and did some interesting, even provocative things, even in the columns of a Communist Party newspaper. There was also a truly independent publication, which was based in Krakow, *Tygodnik Powszechny*, a Catholic newspaper edited by the irrepressible Jerzy Turowicz, its long-time editor and a persistent sore in the side of the régime. But he was an extraordinary, courageous man, one of the most fascinating I knew while in Poland. He really exemplified the courage, integrity, and spirit of Poland, I think. His publication was constantly pushing the edges of legitimacy and official acceptance with predictable conflicts with government censors.

So although not an open press where we could place articles, like we would in many countries of the world, the Polish media allowed us to work the margins, and I think with some effectiveness, because there were some enormously intelligent journalists who perhaps had a Party card but they were not communists but were intellectuals and professionals who did their best in that type of political environment.

Q: What about dealing with sort of the government spokespeople? Were these pretty much apparatchiks, or were they sort of going through the motions or were they true believers, or how did you find that?

PENDERGRAST: Most of them did, on the surface at least, echo the Party line and rarely deviated in official contacts. But when you got to know them better and got them away from their offices, it usually began to break down. I remember particularly one night being entertained by a group of people, most of whom worked for various government institutions in Poland, and as the evening wore on and the vodka flowed and the spirits relaxed, suddenly everybody was in a circle and, fueled by the lubricants of the night, started to sing. And what were they singing? Not Polish folk melodies. They were singing old czarist songs - the songs of old pre-revolutionary Russia, which I was told later, was a deliberate act of rebellion against the Soviets. But generally in Polish society, there was mostly what we called "radish communists," red on the outside and white underneath. No one, I think, really took ideology very seriously.

Q: How about were you able, if nothing else but for your own amusement, to twit your official contacts about their wonderful relationship they had with their Soviet brothers and all that?

PENDERGRAST: Oh, this was always something clearly in the background of your conversations and the bantering. What does the Big Brother think of this? That was a

common refrain with raised eyebrows and looks of disdain. But you had to careful and discreet in touching that subject because even the Polish communists were sensitive about it. They did not like to think that they really were simply an extension of the Soviet government. I remember in 1976, during the U.S. presidential election, and there was the famous gaffe by- (end of tape)

-Gerald Ford in his campaign debate with Jimmy Carter. Ford made the somewhat astounding claim, perhaps just a collapse of syntax, that the Polish people are not dominated by the Soviet Union, and it was played internationally as a great disaster in his campaign. What was curious, I found, is that most Poles seemed to get it much differently, that they - at least most of the people I spoke with - saw that statement as a recognition by President Ford that the Polish people were not spiritually or culturally dominated by the Soviets, that they retained their sense of dignity and identity despite Soviet rule. And so the reaction in Poland, I believe, was much less scandalized or shocked than you found in the United States or elsewhere in the world. But as I saw repeatedly during my three years in Poland, these were people who over the centuries were so tough and courageous and resilient. They had been basically a parade ground for invaders for many years and somehow always survived. The Polish national anthem, "Poland still survives," says it all, really, about the Polish people.

Q: I would have thought, although you weren't on the cultural side, obviously you'd be involved, that in a way the culture was almost pre-sold, wasn=t it as American culture?

PENDERGRAST: Yes, it was. I worked on the cultural side as well, because there was always an information or media element in what we did with the major cultural events there during that time. One was quite extraordinary in its daring content: a U.S. Bicentennial exhibition in 1976, a major museum-size exhibition called the world of Franklin and Jefferson. In that exhibit we were able, remarkably, to incorporate the words and the wisdom and the beliefs of Franklin and Jefferson, in writing, and it was amazing the Polish government allowed it to happen. I think partly it was that they were so proud and honored to be participants in an official American Bicentennial celebration and trying to censor anything like that would have jeopardized their international reputation. But the exhibit with its unambiguous affirmation of democracy and freedom had a great deal of impact with Polish audiences. Anything American, of course, had a great deal of appeal in Poland. But in their economic situation, they couldn't afford American culture, particularly major symphony orchestras or other top-quality events of that kind, so we did fill a vacuum. There was, however, an insatiable interest and curiosity about American culture, in fact everything American. In part, I suspect, such interest was another form of indirect challenge or resistance to the communist regime.

Q: Did the Polish-American element play much of a part in what you all were doing.

PENDERGRAST: Oh, yes, it was certainly part of it, because the Polish-Americans were very active in their educational and cultural outreach to Poland. There was a great deal of movement back and forth. The fact that virtually every Pole had a cousin in Buffalo or Chicago was another powerful link between the two countries, which I think created a

real dilemma for the communist rulers.

Q: You were there at least - were you there at the endgame of the Watergate and Nixon resignation?

PENDERGRAST: Yes, actually we arrived a month or so before Nixon=s resignation. I think it baffled most Poles, like it did people in many parts of the world.

Q: It really did.

PENDERGRAST: I think that no one really could figure out what was happening, what these Americans were doing to each other. They could not understand how the most powerful chief of state in the world could suddenly be deposed so easily, in fact would himself decide to resign. Among some Poles - and especially those in one way or another connected with the régime - the uproar over Watergate was seen as part of an anti-détente conspiracy by people within the United States who wanted to revive the Cold War and reverse the direction that Nixon and Kissinger were taking in their relationships with the Soviet Union and the Soviet Bloc. This is a theory we did hear fairly commonly during that time, including in the media. But that was the only reaction. I think for the most part the Poles were, like the rest of the world, more confused and stunned by it than anything else.

Q: Now a theme that I'm going to start hitting more as I do these interviews, I think, now because it seems to be more prevalent, and that is these, as you were mentioning, conspiracy theories. Whereas I think most Americans think, particularly the way we act and sort of the unplanned lurching or what happens at a particular time, did you find that the Poles sort of thought that somewhere deep down in the American apparatus people were plotting exactly what to do, and that we were more in charge than I think most Americans feel?

PENDERGRAST: Do you mean in terms of Watergate, or-

Q: No, I mean just in general.

PENDERGRAST: Well, I think that generally speaking, in my experience in Eastern Europe, you find a much stronger inclination there to see conspiracies working behind the scenes. There's no doubt about it. It is perhaps a result of their own experience dominated by a great deal of clandestine and shadowy movements struggling against each other. That has been often a major element in their own survival against powerful occupiers, whether the Germans, Russians, Turks, or others. The open, transparent, direct style of political engagement was pretty hard to understand for most Poles and other East Europeans. And of course this was particularly interesting in Poland because the Poles probably knew, understood, and liked Americans better than anybody else, given all of the family connections - and there was a fair amount of travel back and forth, even during that period - but they still didn't get it. I don=t think they fully appreciated the way we are, particularly in the values and ideals that drive our system and that really, in the end,

caused the downfall of the Nixon Administration. But this was probably also true in Western Europe, too; they just couldn't understand what Nixon did would offend people or challenge the system.

Q: Yes, well, were you getting sort of the thought of - something would happen, and they'd sort of wink at your or tap their finger to their nose and say, "Well, we understand," with the assumption that the CIA was behind whatever the hell it was?

PENDERGRAST: Certainly among some Poles, particularly those connected with the communist government, there was a strong belief that the CIA and other people who had an investment in the Cold War orchestrated this anti-détente conspiracy. I don=t think necessarily that that was the dominant perception in Poland, but it certainly was there.

Q: What about dealing with the Catholic Church? How did you find that in your time there?

PENDERGRAST: The Catholic Church in Poland was undeniably the most powerful symbol of resistance to the communist régime, a very bitter and difficult conflict that had gone on from the 1940s onward. The Church was a place where people could find a way to express opposition to communism and the Soviet Union. The churches were packed with young people, older people. But it was clear that the devotion was not really religious piety for most people. It was nationalism; the Church was the reservoir of Polish nationhood during the period of communist rule. It was, in effect, a strong political act when people went to church every Sunday. The Church=s religious and social influence was much less pronounced. For example, the dominant form of birth control in Poland was abortion. It was very common, because other forms of birth control were simply not available or too expensive. So abortion was the customary way of controlling birth in Poland, a Catholic country - not only a Catholic country but a Catholic country with a very *conservative* church hierarchy. But everybody still went to church every Sunday, indeed, on any given Sunday, not just holidays, you could barely get inside a church.

The Church exercised a powerful political force in Poland both in the >70s and then through the martial period and finally with the collapse of the communist regime. And, that historical fact was closely linked to one single Church figure, whom I was privileged to meet when he was still the bishop of Krakow, Karol Wojtyla, a charismatic individual who after he became Pope was an extraordinary lightning rod for nationalist feeling and pride across Poland. Some argue these days that, in fact, John Paul II was the main force behind the collapse of communism throughout the region and a strong case can be made for that view. He was a commanding advocate of human freedom and human dignity that resonated loudly in the tired, decaying communist societies.

We did have a fair amount of contact with the priests in Poland. Very often we would provide them with films and magazines and do what we could to help them, but of course they had their own church-related sources as well.

Q: How about students? What was our contact working with the Polish students?

PENDERGRAST: We had a fairly well-developed Fulbright exchange program and generated a number of other initiatives which involved students. We tried as much as we could - and very often the Polish régime was not happy with this focus on the students - but we would organize sometime film showings; we would distribute publications; I went and lectured a number of times on non-political subjects in Polish universities and high schools. The Polish students were always friendly toward the United States and intensely curious about us. You could see in those faces that this was a country whose future did not accept communism indefinitely. It gave you real hope and inspiration.

Q: What were you gathering about how they felt about Germany?

PENDERGRAST: Well, Germany was-

Q: I mean we're really talking about Germans.

PENDERGRAST: Germany was, of course, a very different factor in their lives, both positive and negative. The Poles had enormous respect for the Germans, particularly their technology, economic power, even cultural achievements and what they had accomplished over the centuries; but there was also a strong antipathy toward the Germans based, of course, largely on the World War II experience. So it was in essence a love-hate relationship between the Poles and the Germans, with most of the emphasis on the hate. I don't think they cared for them very much in a personal sense either. They respected them, but they did not really like them and certainly were outraged by what the Germans did in Poland in the war. One-fifth of Poland=s population died in World War II, mostly Jews, but also many, many non-Jewish Poles. And the régime really played on the anti-German theme to legitimize the close ties with the Soviets as a protection against so-called German revanchism. It was not easy to be a German diplomat in Poland, I have to admit.

Q: How about American movies? Did they get-

PENDERGRAST: They got American movies but usually months or even years after release in the States, mainly for economic reasons. One of the things we used to do was acquire newly released films from the Motion Picture Association of America and organize special representational showings. It was always a great drawing card because the American film was, as elsewhere around the world, a magnetic cultural force.

Q: Was there within Poland at that time a certain Poles for . . . a Polish for Poland. . . . I'm thinking about France, where there's a real antipathy among the intellectual class about too much American influence.

PENDERGRAST: In Poland?

Q: In Poland - was there any of that?

PENDERGRAST: No, to the contrary. We could never come close to satisfying the appetite for American culture. If anything, the Polish government, pleading poverty, usually tried to hold back and limit American cultural imports, but there was an intense curiosity and fascination with American culture, among students, intellectuals, professionals, all educated groups in the country.

Q: Who was our ambassador at the time you were there?

PENDERGRAST: Dick Davies. He was the ambassador during that time, and the DCM was John Davis, who of course later on went back as chief of mission.

Q: And PAO?

PENDERGRAST: Two PAOs. One was Leonard Baldyga and then Jim Bradshaw.

Q: Did you find that you were getting... How did you work with both the ambassador, DCM, and with the PAO?

PENDERGRAST: Well, I had basically good relationships with all of them. Frankly, I thought the DCM, John Davis was much closer to the reality of the unraveling communism. He was very closely connected with many of the dissidents and intellectuals who were clearly moving in that direction. The ambassador, I think, was more occupied with managing the relationship with the Gierek regime, particularly because we were looking to expand our commercial access in the country.

Q: Maybe you have to play both sides?

PENDERGRAST: Well, in some ways I guess you do. Certainly, the U.S. had a responsibility to deal with both official Poland and with the rapidly building anti-communist forces in the country. Our PAO, Len Baldyga, was a Polish American close to the Polish-American community in the U.S. and also with a vast circle of independent Poles. He was very, very effective.

Q: Well, then, were there any major incidents or situation during this '74-77 period that you can think of?

PENDERGRAST: The most significant events, in terms of the political impact, was the series of riots in 1975 against the food price increases. I got involved mainly in support for the American press as they flocked to cover this news event that stood in the world=s spotlight. I remember one incident when John Dancy, then a European correspondent for NBC Television, came to report on the riots for several days with a visa and approval from the Foreign Ministry. There were no real problems during his stay. He gathered material using a locally hired film crew working for him, and he had it all in his carry-on bag as he went to board his plane for Frankfurt. He asked me if I would escort him to the airport. I was extremely busy at that time with all that was going on with the press and other things, but I agreed to do it. He just had some sort of a premonition. So we went out

to the Warsaw Airport and I took him to the passport inspection area where we said our good-byes. He went off into the customs area, which was still visible, and suddenly, it was apparent that he was having some trouble, because of a burly Polish border guard questioning him and pointing at his bag, in an animated, disagreeable manner. And I didn't know quite what to do at that time, but I finally said, I've got to get in there. With probably a greater sense of authority than I should have exercised, I waved my diplomatic card in front of the passport guy and barged into the customs area - everybody standing there looking at me in amazement, Well, who is this guy? The Polish border guard obviously wanted to inspect the canvas bag with all of the notes and the videotapes which Dancy carried. Mustering every bit of arrogance I could, I took on this border guard and told him that this is a representative of a major world television network here on a visa from the Foreign Ministry, and if they didn't let him pass, there was going to be big problems with higher authorities, the always ultimate appeal in a communist country. Well, there was a long, stony silence for a while, and finally the border guard realized that maybe this was more trouble than it was worth for him, so he shrugged, and Dancy went off to his Lufthansa flight. He came close to losing his videotapes and not being able to tell his story very effectively about what was happening in Poland. So a small, modest contribution on my part.

Q: Well, I was going to put here at the end - I think this is a good place to stop - when you left Poland in 1977, and I'll just put at the end, where did you go?

PENDERGRAST: I went back to Washington, and I returned to the European Office of USIA, where I became the director of policy in that office.

Q: Okay, we'll pick it up then, 1977.

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Q: Today is the 6th of August, 1999. Dell, you were with policy at USIA from '77 to when?

PENDERGRAST: Until 1980.

Q: Can you talk a little about the policy side of USIA at that time? What sort of things would one tackle, and how did it translate into actual policy?

PENDERGRAST: My responsibility as to ensure that the USIA posts in Europe were adequately informed about and acting upon policy as determined by the U.S. government, by the President, and the Department of State. So a lot of my work involved close coordination with other government agencies, particularly the NSC and the State Department to define policy and how it would be translated for USIA and how specifically USIS posts in Europe would assist in promoting and supporting a particular policy. So I did a great deal of liaison with the various other agencies in government as well as, of course, obviously, with the USIA posts across Europe, both east and west.

Q: Who was the head of USIA at this point?

PENDERGRAST: During that period the director was John Reinhardt, in fact the first and only career Foreign Service officer who ever headed up USIA, a quite interesting development that I think most people in the Agency certainly welcomed. His leadership reflected, of course, the Administration of Jimmy Carter; which was generally reacting against the *Realpolitik* and the strategic priorities of in the Kissinger-Nixon era. The Carter era was focused heavily on reaching beyond traditional strategic relationships to deal with the Third World in particular - Latin America, Africa, and so on.

John Reinhardt also reflected this basic Third World bias, but he had a strong view that Europe had occupied too central a place in USIA operations and resource allocations in the past. He had never served in Europe himself and did not fully appreciate, I think, the importance of what USIA did in that part of the world. He seemed to think that these nations were close allies with already close cultural and media ties to the United States. USIA really wasn=t needed or could not have the same impact that it did in the Third World. And so in that time, there were some strong built-in tensions inside USIA, especially involving my office, the European Office, waging essentially a bureaucratic guerilla war against those, including the Director himself, who felt that too many resources went into Europe. I don=t think the struggle ever was resolved one way or another, although by the end of the Carter Administration, there probably was better appreciation of Europe and our important relationships there.

Q: In arguing, how did you, at that time, to the best you could, meet the charge that after all, these people are with us, they're educated people and all, they can get their own information about the United States in Europe, and isn't it much better to make the Africans more aware of what we're doing, or something like that?

PENDERGRAST: Well, one tactical approach we made, and I was one of the two principal authors, was what we called the "successor generation" in Europe. This was something that actually had originated with our PAO in Germany at the time, but I developed a paper that had wide circulation around the government - indeed, later outside the government - which spelled out the analysis that we were dealing with an entirely new generation of Europeans, whose values and attitudes were not shaped by World War II or by the immediate postwar relationship with the United States. The appreciation for the Marshall Plan and NATO had faded, and young people still in the universities as well as coming into government at that time had a more detached, less sympathetic attitude toward the United States, partly influenced by Vietnam War. References to Athe war@ for this generation evoked images of Vietnam, mostly negative, rather than of World War II. And their prejudices and attitudes reflected that mindset. And so we put onto the front burner of the bureaucratic stove this successor generation concept and it had a great deal of resonance within the government and outside the government. We became actively deeply involved with the Atlantic Council of the United States, which was very interested in the idea of the successor generation, which we had formulated. There were a number of conferences and a major Atlantic Council paper, which I helped to draft, was distributed. I think our efforts did have an impact, inside USIA and elsewhere in

effectively highlighting the fact that we did have a stake in Europe, that it was a new Europe, one that had changed demographically as well as in other ways, and the United States - in particular USIA - had a very strong interest in trying to communicate with this new generation of Europe.

Q: In your studies and all, did you find - we're really talking about Western Europe at this point - that there was much in the way of appreciation of the history of the United States, how we worked, because I know when I sampled what's happening in Europe from time to time, I find there are very few courses in American history or American literature or culture per se*? Most of the people seem to get what they know about the United States from either seeing GI's on the street or TV or Hollywood.*

PENDERGRAST: Exactly, and I think that was a major theme in our analysis: that American popular culture and the popular media images of the Vietnam War had shaped an entire generation in Europe in their attitudes toward us. One of the things that we've done over the years, starting during the '70s, is to emphasize American studies in European schools, both secondary and higher education. One of the things that we found at that time was that American studies, so-called, was really nothing more than literature. Now of course, there's nothing wrong with literature, and Europeans really appreciated the Hemingways and Steinbecks, but it was just a small, incomplete window to American culture and society. The Europeans did not have a real understanding for the political, social, and economic complexity of the United States, and it was one reason why we tried hard to push American studies. I think we still have a long way to go there. Based on my own experience in Europe over the years, one sees people clearly mirroring cartoon-like perceptions and attitudes about the United States more than any serious informed analysis - even in our closest allies, and that would include Canada, where, of course, I later served as well. Americans are, in many ways, ethnocentric. We like to think that the rest of the world knows us, understands us and likes us, but the fact is that it's superficial at best.

Q: And also, I think on the other side - I'm not sure what's happening today, but when I graduated from college and really through the whole system, I got a good solid dose at least of European history - I mean a really solid dose of European history - and I think most educated Americans did. I don't think most educated Europeans get even a moderate dose of American history.

PENDERGRAST: No, certainly we found in our work in the '70s in the European office of USIA, very limited, superficial treatment of U.S. history in European classrooms, and I don't think it's changed much in the decades since. It's hard to explain exactly why. Part of it, I suspect, is the lack of teachers with the experience. the training and the background. I think also there is a certain ideological bias among teachers in the secondary and higher education institutions, a left-wing perspective instinctively critical of American society and preferring to stress the negative features and problems in our country. We started to see this problem in the 1970s as the older generation, the World War II generation, started to fade away and was replaced by this new generation, the successor generation. In the last 20 years, the Atlantic Alliance has not collapsed, but there is greater ambivalence and reserve among Europeans. They no longer applaud or

salute U.S. leadership and may be often openly critical in a way that was rare in the 40s and 50s. In a way, of course, it is the inevitable maturity of the U.S.-European relationship and the emergence of a new, more self-confident generation of European leadership that does feel dependent anymore on the United States.

Q: Well, what does one do about this generational thing - I mean, not now, but at that time? You can point out the problem, but what was the - I won't say solution, but maybe a remedy?

PENDERGRAST: We were at that time fighting a difficult rear-guard action against a determined effort to cut back the USIA resources in Europe, whether it was educational exchange, cultural programs, information programs, or most significantly, USIS personnel, and that reduction did continue to take place, but not as drastically as we feared at one point. Clearly, we wanted to deal with the successor generation by emphasizing more programs centered on young people, and this included educational exchanges as well as programs conducted at American cultural centers, including the network of the Amerika Häuser in Germany, but we never could escape the resource pinch.

Q: Again going back to leadership, I've talked to some people who during this time worked with John Reinhardt, and as a person they respected him but not very much as a leader. How did you feel about that?

PENDERGRAST: He was a person that we all respected as a career officer with a superb record, who also served as an ambassador. On a one-to-one basis, he was a very congenial, pleasant person. His problem of leadership was that he tended to be distant and remote - maybe it was shyness. It was difficult for him to articulate and communicate his leadership to the rest of the agency. And, as I suggested earlier, he did have a certain bias against Europe and against the European programs, which caused some unhappiness in our office.

Q: Did the European Bureau in which you were dealing include the Soviet Union?

PENDERGRAST: Yes, it did. The European Office went, as we said, from Vancouver to Vladivostok, most of the world=s time zones, a sprawling area that included not only the Soviet Bloc but the Mediterranean countries, including Turkey and Greece. So I had to stay engaged, not only with Western European issues but of course I was involved at that time with the Eastern European world, which had become essentially my professional specialty. Most significant then, during that time, was the death of Tito in 1980. There was in Yugoslavia an immediate attempt to bolster the country=s unity in the crisis and to hold things together through a new collective leadership, but at that time, I still did not have great hopes for Yugoslav unity, which later did unravel. I guess we were only surprised that it lasted a decade, but I think it was crumbling under the surface the whole time.

Q: Well, of course, probably the gel was the fact that if it started to fall apart, you had

the Soviet Union, which would be ready to fish in troubled waters. And I think we felt this, and I imagined the general Yugoslav citizen felt this, too.

PENDERGRAST: I think there was that element and when the USSR weakened and collapsed, the cement of the Soviet threat disappeared. I think it was also, at that time, a great deal of uncertainty about what would happen if Yugoslavia came apart, and would the Serbs or the Croats take advantage of it and try to annex territory elsewhere in Yugoslavia. They were all basically looking nervously at each other and worried about what would happen if it fell apart. For a limited time, I guess they shared a vested interest in holding it together, which they managed to do, but of course it finally did fall apart in the early 90s.

Q: Well, as an Eastern European, dealing-with-the-communists hand and all, what was our impression, what were we doing during this - this is the Carter Administration - and we'll go up to December of 1979, because that's obviously a real change? But up until that time, Carter had the idea that you could deal with the Soviets, and he was trying to break the mold and have a different approach. How did that translate into what you all were doing?

PENDERGRAST: There was a continued effort to use the persisting climate of détente to expand exchanges and our programs in the Soviet Union and other East European countries. Once again, we were caught in the general resource decline that USIA experienced. We probably did not do as much as we could in the circumstances. It was, of course, as you suggested, dramatically changed after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan when détente basically came off the tracks and in the Soviet Union, we virtually closed down our operations and called off our participation in the Olympics, along with other measures taken against Moscow, including suspension of exchange activities. And we were back in the Cold War freezer again.

Q: As you looked at Eastern Europe during this, prior to the Afghan invasion, how did we look upon the receptivity of what we were doing and the difference between Poland, East Germany, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Bulgaria, and those?

PENDERGRAST: Our programs in Eastern Europe varied dramatically because each country, historically, politically, and culturally, was very different. We could do a great deal in a country like Poland or Hungary, but we were severely restricted in Czechoslovakia or East Germany or Bulgaria. We were constantly trying to push the envelope, to expand our activities in those countries, but it was still difficult, despite the détente in East-West relations. I think the Hungarians and the Poles had more confidence to pursue these exchanges with us. There was also in both countries a much stronger democratic movement and impulse that helped to open up doors for us.

Q: In France, I would think, at least from the officials there, they would not look with pleasure upon our trying to introduce too much about the United States.

PENDERGRAST: I don't think that bureaucratically or politically we encountered any

strong resistance to what we did in France. The French government has always had an almost arrogant self-confidence about their culture and their society that they feel forced to restrict official U.S. activities. They have a more anxious and critical attitude toward American popular culture, which they do see as a powerful, real threat. But I don't think that they worried about the Fulbright Program in France or anything else that USIA administered in the country.

Q: When the Soviets invaded Afghanistan, December, 1979, was there a perceptible shifting of gears within the European Bureau?

PENDERGRAST: Absolutely, we essentially closed down our exchange program with the Soviet Union, which was quite large by that time. We did not close down in other parts of the Soviet Bloc, because we followed the policy of "differentiation," treating each of the communist countries on their own merits and not as a single entity. We tried to keep our programs going elsewhere, although clearly the Afghanistan episode had an impact everywhere. And of course, eventually in Poland, and this of course happened after I left Washington, but there was the crackdown on Solidarity and imposition of martial law in 1981, which totally closed down our programs there.

Q: The European Bureau, Europe being the source of major immigration to the United States, did that translate itself - the German-Americans, the Irish-Americans, the Ukrainian-Americans and what have you - did that translate itself into anything you were doing, or was that-

PENDERGRAST: No, I think that if you're dealing with Western Europe, the traditional European nationalities, the Germans, the Irish, the Italians, the Scandinavians, who came to this country mostly in the 19th century, if not before, that they have pretty much assimilated and do not exercise on the U.S. government any united or identified influence. But the East Europeans, more recent immigrants to the country, remain pretty well organized and had an impact on U.S. government policies, including our programs. The Polish-Americans are a large, powerful political force in the United States, and of course a strongly anticommunist force, which we had to take into account. Our programs had to clearly demonstrate outreach to the Polish people and not to the Polish regime. There was strong support for our programs among the Polish-Americans provided we did not suggest any capitulation or weakness in dealing with the Warsaw government.

Q: Well, then, by 1980, where did you go?

PENDERGRAST: Well, I went off first to language training in French, to take on for the first time a Romance language after all the years with Vietnamese and Slavic languages, and then in the summer of 1981, I went to Brussels, Belgium, to become the head of the USIA office at the U.S. mission to the European Community, the predecessor to the European Union, the massive bureaucracy that runs the European organizations there. It was, I think, a logical step from my previous job, because it kept me engaged with the new and evolving relationship between the United States and its principal allies in Europe. Our experience with the European Community demonstrated that the dynamic of

transatlantic relations had definitely changed - permanently - into a complex mix of cooperation and competition and tension and affinity. We were not quite equals, certainly in a military sense, but economically and politically there was a greater sense of partnership than had been true before. The old patron-beneficiary relationship really was dead. So it required a lot of creative diplomacy for the United States and for Europe to manage the relationship and work out their differences. It was not easy. It was a time, of course, when the Reagan Administration had arrived in Washington reasserting confidence in American power and American preeminence in the world. It was not easy to deal with Europe from a Washington perspective, but it was something that we had to do, and there were day-to-day problems, such as all sorts of commercial disputes over steel and pasta and wine and something called corn gluten that probably no one will ever want to hear much about because you feed it to pigs, but the bottom line is that these were major explosive, complicated issues. There was a major dispute over the famous European gas pipeline to the Soviet Union, which the U.S. adamantly opposed in the post-Afghanistan period, but the controversy aptly showed how the two sides of the Atlantic were indeed beginning to look quite differently at the world.

And all of this imposed a great deal of work on what our Mission was doing in Brussels, particularly dealing with the European media in Brussels, a very sophisticated, savvy press corps that knew these issues and knew everything about how the United States and Europe viewed those issues. It was very hard to conduct private diplomacy because, in the end, everything was public there; everybody was leaking all over the place, especially in the European Community bureaucracy. It was a challenge to keep up and try to deal with it. Our big advantage and, indeed, the joy in working those four years in Brussels was our extraordinary chief of mission, Ambassador George Vest, probably the most impressive career officer I've known in my 30-plus years in the Foreign Service, a person of flawless professionalism with a keen knowledge and understanding of the transatlantic relationship - he had been an assistant secretary for Europe - from his many years of experience in Europe. He knew Europe like the back of his hand. But even more important, he was a genuine, warm, sincere human being. People instantly relaxed with him and it was a real asset in dealing with the sometimes difficult Eurocrats or journalists we encountered at the Mission. I don=t think postwar America has had a finer Europeanist than George Vest and I know that puts him above some pretty distinguished company.

Q: I had a long interview with George and have the highest regard for him, as does everybody who's dealt with him. Well, in a way, I would think that the USIA basically, I take it, was mainly press functions, what you were doing, because you were dealing in a capital with bureaucrats who were assigned to a place, and so it's not a country type thing.

PENDERGRAST: Well, you're right, and this is in fact one of the things I tried to do in my four years, to move the traditional media-oriented operation of USIA at USEC Brussels into a more proactive, goal-centered institution featuring exchange activities with Europe. It wasn't easy because people in Washington and in the capitals around Europe - the USIA people - mumbled, "What are you doing talking about a Fulbright

Program with Europe? Why have exchange programs with Europe when we have programs in each country?" But I think that it was important to do this and affirm the fact that the United States was comfortable and realistic with Europe and the emergence of unified European institutions. We were indeed one of the principal architects of European unity. Through the Marshall Plan and other initiatives, we had deliberately fostered the type of cooperation that resulted in the Treaty of Rome and the European Community.

Q: It's been the cornerstone of our policy for the last 50 years.

PENDERGRAST: And we felt particularly - and here it gets back to the successor generation - we recognized that young Europeans considered themselves European as much as they did German, Italian, or French. It was important, I concluded, to adapt our programs to this new European generation. And, so I initiated a number of programs along these lines, including the Fulbright Program, to the European Community. One specific exchange was that we launched an internship exchange where European and American interns on both sides of the Atlantic would exchange positions.

Q: When you say interns, what do you mean?

PENDERGRAST: The European Commission had an internship program and we arranged to have many of these young people spend a period of time in the States, primarily visiting federal and state government offices, to get a solid, substantive American exposure. A number of Americans also came over and worked an entire year as interns at the European Commission. We also developed a speakers program bringing over U.S. specialists of all kinds to address seminars and other forums before audiences of European Community officials. There was also the College of Europe, a celebrated academic institution connected with the European Community and located in Bruges, Belgium. We were actively involved in a variety of programs there, too. The whole purpose was, indeed, to develop a series of exchange initiatives aimed at Europe and the emerging European institutions rather than only through individual countries. Obviously we never had the size of a program comparable to USIS in France or Germany or Italy. It was modest, but I think an important step, particularly with the benefit now of having seen the further evolution toward European unity.

A second area emphasized during my four years was to try and see the U.S. relationship with Europe as being not compartmentalized - security here and economic here - that we worked on having Europeans and Americans thoughtfully examine how the economics and the security dimensions interacted and were dependent on each other. I did this in close collaboration with my colleagues out at the U.S. mission to NATO, which was right across town but for years might as well have been a continent away. There was little interaction between USIS operations at the U.S. mission to the EC and the U.S. mission to NATO. But I think we made some progress there. We had several major conferences which brought security and economic specialists together to look at these problems in a broader, more open-ended way. And, we profited at the time in having strong support from George Vest and on the NATO side from Ambassador David Abshire. Both had forward-looking, unbureaucratic perspectives on U.S.-Atlantic relations. And, the same

could be said by our PAO at USNATO, Stan Burnett, a USIA colleague whom I respected a great deal. He was also actively engaged in this new effort to bring together and address the security and the economic dimensions in the same context.

Q: You arrived there when, in early '81 or so?

PENDERGRAST: Yes.

Q: I would have thought that one of your prime tasks to begin with would be the selling of President Reagan, because President Reagan was considered. . . . I mean, people had seen him as not a . . . sort of a class B movie actor, and he had the reputation of being kind of a cowboy and a rather unpredictable person, and I would have thought that it might not have been spelled out but this was the task. They say, you know, this is a-
PENDERGRAST: I don=t think we ever had any instruction or guidance to "sell" Ronald Reagan. I think he did it quite adequately by himself. He was a splendid communicator and his natural charm and affability and sincerity did come across to the Europeans. There may have been initially some skepticism about this movie actor turned President, but that bias did not endure long. By 1981, the Europeans had become distressed by what they viewed as a certain paralysis of American leadership, a result largely of Iranian hostage crisis, the perceived erosion of American power in the world, and the perception that Jimmy Carter was regarded as a lightweight in terms of leadership. Ronald Reagan, whatever one may think of his policies, exuded a confidence and sense of purpose that impressed Europeans as well as Americans.

There were a number of issues that did, of course, strain U.S.-European relations, a product of the differing perspectives and priorities on the two sides of the Atlantic. One, of course, the most serious perhaps in that period, was the proposed European gas pipeline into the Soviet Union, which the Reagan Administration saw as a violation of the embargo with the Soviet Union after Afghanistan. And there was clearly tension in terms of the policy toward the Soviet Union, but I don't think it was ever reduced to a personalized criticism of Ronald Reagan. It was more an attitudinal divergence between Europe and the United States more than a personal one.

Q: Did the European Parliament in Strasbourg exist at this time?

PENDERGRAST: Yes, it did, and it was part of our portfolio. We did a limited amount of exchange work with the European Parliament and the U.S. Congress. I went down to Strasbourg several times a year, but there was not a great amount of effort, because the European Parliament at that time had still not yet developed into a very active legislative forum and was in session only for relatively brief periods.

Q: What was your impression, as the European Union was forming? It seems to me in 1999 that, while in the long run it's "a good thing," it seems to be too much bureaucracy and it seems to exist to put a lot of controls in the economy and all that.

PENDERGRAST: There's no doubt that the European Commission, the executive arm of

the European Community and now the European Union, was a large, heavily bureaucratized institution. A major philosophical divide between Europe and the United States has been the European readiness to accept a larger government role in society, whether in terms of regulation or a more proactive force in employment and welfare programs. The United States, by virtue of its history and its tradition, has been less comfortable with the idea of big government. And I think that this is really at the heart of many differences we've had over the years with Europe, and particularly the European Community. Agriculture is an apt case, because they have what they call the Common Agricultural Policy - enormous subsidies that maintain European farmers far in excess of even the relatively modest subsidies that we give our own farmers. And this was a critical issue because American farmers had to compete with these heavily subsidized, largely inefficient European farmers - who work mostly small plots of land rather than the large-scale farming in the States. But Europe was and remains absolutely trapped by the entrenched social policy of wanting to support its own agriculture at any cost. It often amazed me that European consumers accepted artificially inflated food prices so readily, but that explains the basic philosophical and psychological differences involved.

Q: Were there any issues that particularly grabbed you - you mentioned the pipeline - and other ones that caused real problems?

PENDERGRAST: The pipeline issue was undoubtedly the most dramatic which involved a great deal of tension and time during that period and, as indicated, reflected a basic divergence of approach to the Soviet Union. There were also a series of commercial disputes that took place. One major issue was the fact that the American dollar was so heavily valued and tended to distort the economic relationship. It hurt U.S. exports, which only exacerbated the European-U.S. trade relationship. Our trade deficits soared higher and higher, which intensified the pressures in the United States against the alleged European infractions in the trade area. And this came down on a day-to-day basis with some real knotty problems involving the United States and the European Community.

Q: What was your method of operation? I mean how did you go about on a daily basis? What did you do?

PENDERGRAST: I mentioned the various non-media activities that we tried to develop with various European institutions, and that was operationally something we tried to do differently than had been done before in that office. But there was a steady flow of policy and commercial issues taking place on a day-to-day basis, which emphasized the media relations of our work. Early in any working day, we had to have close coordination with other elements of the U.S. mission, including the ambassador, to identify the most pressing problem, the approach we wanted to take, and then in phone calls and personal meetings or press briefings, tried to get out our position to the European media, the press community that specialized in European affairs. It was a difficult, knowledgeable audience to deal with, a real challenge. We worked on it very hard. We also coordinated closely with our USIS missions elsewhere in Europe, in other countries, and tried to work with them in terms of mobilizing support for the U.S. position on a particular trade issue.

Q: Did you get involved in the missile situations where the Soviets put in the SS-20 and we were putting in Pershings and all, or was that more on a country-to-country basis?

PENDERGRAST: That was primarily addressed on a country-to-country basis and, of course, through NATO. It wasn=t something directly involved in the U.S. relationship with the EC. But the public debate about the medium-range missiles was also the background in Brussels for an eruption of a major terrorist threat from extreme left-wing elements adamantly opposed to Pershing missile deployment. I remember on a number of nights being abruptly awakened by large explosions that shattered windows across Brussels, and they were aimed at American official targets. Fortunately, it didn=t happen at our mission or any of our homes. One American company, I think, was also bombed. No one was hurt because the bombings took place in the middle of the night, but we were naturally edge for some weeks in Brussels.

Q: Were they identified? I mean, were these part of the Red Brigades or-

PENDERGRAST: There was part of this European-wide-

Q: Bader-Meinhof-

PENDERGRAST: Bader-Meinhof, Red Flag - they came with various titles and identities that crossed national lines, but it was clearly an extreme left-wing phenomenon hostile to NATO and the United States.

Q: What was your impression of the European press that you dealt with? I mean, was it professional? Was it ideological? Or all of the above?

PENDERGRAST: No, my experience was dealing with the Brussels press corps - he Europeans representing newspapers and media institutions from elsewhere in Europe - that these people were almost universally professional, bright, not really signaling any ideological bias. I was never conscious of any anti-Americanism, at least in this particular media community. Now obviously in the European national capitals, the media often did have an anti-American bias-

Q: L'Humanité *and that sort of thing.*

PENDERGRAST: The people that I dealt with on a day-to-day basis in Brussels - and these were from essentially the mainstream press of Europe, *The Financial Times*, *Le Figaro*, *Frankfurter Allgemeine* - these people there were first-class journalists, and I enjoyed and was challenged working with them. These people knew their business and the issues. One of great tasks was just being on top of the technical details in these trade issues. The intricacies of a steel dispute between the United States and Europe normally would not engage my interest and certainly in many ways went beyond my competence, but I had to force myself to deal with those issues because as the spokesperson for the mission, it was my responsibility to address and respond to questions from people who knew what they were talking about. But I basically felt pretty good about the journalist

community in Brussels.

Q: Well, then, in 1984 you moved on?

PENDERGRAST: 1985. I was there four years, from '81 to '85, and then returned to Washington, where I spent a delightful year in the State Department Senior Seminar, a rewarding experience, mainly from the standpoint of getting acquainted, almost for the first time, with my own country, because I had spent so many years away from the United States or working in Washington. A major priority for the Senior Seminar was travel and study related to what was going on in the United States. I really profited from that opportunity.

Q: What particularly struck you about the United States from this experience?

PENDERGRAST: Based on the Seminar travel to every region of the United States, I came away more enthusiastic and more confident than ever before about the strength and vitality of our country. Visiting cities from Atlanta or San Antonio or Seattle or Detroit - I was impressed by the quality and work of local community organizations and community leaders, which I don=t think is found anywhere else in the world. I really believe we underestimate the vitality and energy of our local political institutions and the various community groups in the local orbit. It was very encouraging, even inspiring. I think a second impression, clearly evident in the mid 1980s, was that the United States was moving aggressively into the new technologies, into the new information world, and that our industries and communities were adapting and changing much more rapidly than they were in Europe - a process that of course accelerated going into the '90s. We were on the cutting edge of this third industrial revolution. So I came away from the year invigorated and enthusiastic about what was ahead for the United States, because we had such tremendous resources to build upon, both economically and politically. I think another impression was the major impact of immigration on the United States. Europe, at that time, and in later years, has always seemed to resist immigration. They somehow are not comfortable with the idea of different peoples and cultures coming into their society. The United States generally has been more receptive, and certainly in the last 20 years, starting in the '70s and moving into the '90s, we have welcomed from Asia and Latin America in particular an enormous number of people who have enriched our society. And, that reality was also evident in the mid-80s, a society that was more dynamic, more flexible, more accommodating to both technical and social change. It was the foundation for the spectacular growth we have seen in the 1990s.

Q: 1986, whither?

PENDERGRAST: In 1986 I was in Washington and went back into USIA to the European Office, the same one where I'd worked before. This time I became the deputy director of Europe, but in the division of responsibility there, I was in charge of USIA operations in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. And coming into that job in 1986, it was both fortuitous and fascinating because we were at that moment beginning to enter the Gorbachev period of *Glasnost* and *Perestroika*, which had enormous impact upon not

only the Soviet Union but also upon Eastern Europe. No one in 1986, specialist or not, really predicted everything that would unfold just three or four years later. But I did see that this was a promising opportunity for the United States and USIA. As Gorbachev clearly signaled readiness for communist societies to open up, adapt and reform, something we had never witnessed on such scale before in the communist world. And, it gave USIA an opening to expand our access and our activities in that part of the world. And so, starting in 1986, I made a concerted effort as manager to get the resources and the programs that would seek to reinforce the trends and possibilities for reform in the region. Perhaps, my success was mixed, but I think that we - that is, USIA - were at the cutting edge in the government in responding to the Gorbachev era.

I think what happened in 1989, the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of communism was certainly attributable to many factors, mostly internal dynamics, but I do honestly believe from experience in that part of the world for 30 years or more, that what the U.S. government and particularly USIA did in terms of information, educational, and cultural programs was a major factor in the process of democratic change and reform. There's no doubt that the ideas, the programs, the contacts - everything that we did over a long-term period - had a cumulative effect in supporting the forces of change that brought down communism. It is probably an underestimated, largely neglected story in the Cold War, which historians might study in the future. But I feel a real sense of reward and satisfaction having been involved in the whole process.

Q: '86 to '90.

PENDERGRAST: '86 to '90, and it was exactly when everything was happening, sparked by the emergence of Solidarity power in Poland, and it was exciting to see how the old apparatchiks of communism simply could not hold back the flood of history, even in places like Bulgaria and East Germany. Their time had come and gone. Of course, Gorbachev was crucial because his *Glasnost* and *Perestroika* offered legitimacy to the forces of reform in Eastern Europe. I think Gorbachev himself never wanted or anticipated that the USSR and its allies would unravel. He really wanted to strengthen and modernize communism and make it more competitive in a rapidly changing world. But he underestimated both the internal decay of communism and the powerful, suppressed nationalist and democratic impulses inside Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. Once Gorbachev pushed the stone down the hill, it gained momentum and could not be stopped.

Although certainly a rewarding time in my career, it was also to some degree frustrating to witness some degree of bureaucratic resistance to the pleas I was making, to get the money and the programs which the opportunity required. We had modest success, but not everybody was convinced. Large bureaucracies change slowly, and my only regret is that we did not move quite as quickly and aggressively in response to the opening which Gorbachev handed us.

Curiously, I must admit, the principal support that we had for major initiatives was not among the career people - either USIA or State - but in the White House, in the NSC. I

think President Bush and people around him very much did see the opportunity and we were very responsive. I got a great deal of support from Condoleeza Rice at the NSC, among others, who sensed we were on the verge of something really big.

Q: When you're saying support, I mean, what are we talking about?

PENDERGRAST: Well, I'm talking basically about money and programs.

Q: Let's talk about programs. In other words, what were we doing?

PENDERGRAST: Well, for example, one initiative that never would have happened if left to the foreign affairs bureaucracy, was the 1000/1000 program, a new initiative that announced by President Bush to exchange one thousand U.S. high school students with one thousand Russians and the numbers eventually far exceeded that level. Within the USIA bureaucracy there was great resistance, because everyone fears that their own program or budget will have to pay for something new. But the White House wanted it, perhaps with some political motivation as well, but this and some other initiatives never would have happened without White House support.

Q: Let's talk on that. Putting a thousand Russians or Soviets into the United States, where were they going? I mean, this is quite a job.

PENDERGRAST: Well, certainly there were major administrative problems, but in the United States, the infrastructure was there because international exchange is well established at the community level across the country. We had the educational exchange organizations with the experience to run these programs at the grassroots level and a strong tradition of volunteerism, which is unique to the United States. It was not an insurmountable problem. The main hurdle was finding the resources within the U.S. government, which we did.

There were other initiatives that we also put forward, and with, again, White House support, we were able to get many done. I'd think we could have done more, but we were on the whole reasonably successful. Once the Berlin Wall came down and the communist dominoes started to fall, programs in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union became the bureaucratic bandwagon everyone wanted to board. It became the new flavor of the month, but it wasn=t that way back in the 1980s.

Q: But what about our response - exchanges, but what other things? Just increasing what we were doing - publications, things like this - or were we finding sort of new opportunities?

PENDERGRAST: During those last years, it was to a large degree trying to basically expand all of our limited programs in that part of the world in any way that we could. In that period, I was heavily involved in the negotiation of a number of formal exchange agreements with the communist world and we worked hard to increase the numbers and widen our access to these societies in every way possible.

Q: What about broadcasting?

PENDERGRAST: Yes, broadcasting was a principal information tool dealing with the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, which of course took on added importance in the last years of the Soviet empire. But we were doing many different things in the exchange area as well, trying to diversify our exchange programs, not just with students and professors but to involve a wide range of other professional groups, the new modernizing class sensitive to the information revolution and everything else happening in the Western world. And it was a challenge, particularly because in places like East Germany and Rumania and Bulgaria, where the governments fiercely resisted Gorbachev's initiatives and naturally were not receptive to our own initiatives. Actually, we probably could do more in the Soviet Union at that time than we could in East Germany or Bulgaria. But we worked hard at it, and things definitely began to move. In Poland, of course, a particular interest of mine, when marital law had been declared back in '81, one of the first steps by the military régime, hardly coincidental, was a ban on all operations by USIA in the country, which continued through the '80s. One of the things I set out to do and eventually did accomplish was to negotiate a reopening of USIA operations and programs in Poland in 1988. They agreed grudgingly because the military régime, indeed, was still in power. But I think that they yielded slowly because, first, they recognized the forces that were at work in their own society which demanded greater access to the outside world, and they also recognized that if they were going to have a relationship with the United States government, they could not just basically tell USIA to stay out. There was an implicit *quid pro quo* with the overall official relationship moving forward.

Q: Where did Rumania fit in at this time. Ceausescu was in power until, well, just about the time that you left.

PENDERGRAST: And this was a country defiantly and consistently hostile to any sort of opening. It was difficult for us to have programs in that country. But it was the only country in the Soviet Bloc where we actually had a separate cultural center, and a very nice one, in Bucharest, that had been the result of the Nixon visit back in the late '60s. It was a showpiece but tightly controlled and monitored by the Rumanians. They were tough on our programs there, and it was only after the uprising and the eventual overthrow of Ceausescu that things opened up for us.

Q: Well, you were sitting with a bunch of Soviet experts at USIA, and I guess it was probably more than a matter of allocation of resources and favorite programs getting lopped to do other things, but what was the attitude of many of the people dealing with the Cold War Soviets for so long as Gorbachev - we're talking about the crucial years - came on? Was there considerable skepticism?

PENDERGRAST: Well, I think no one back in the mid '80s predicted any of the events that took place so swiftly in '89, '90 and '91. We were all surprised that things fell apart so rapidly - less so, perhaps, in Eastern Europe, where in some countries the Soviet hold was always fairly loose. I think those of us who had served in that part of the world

recognized back in the '60s and even the '50s, that the region was only artificially and superficially communist, that communism had never really taken hold there. It dominated only because of what the Red Army did in 1945. And so I knew back in Poland in the '70s - I always was confident communism someday would disappear, maybe in a very evolutionary rather than in a sudden eruption, but I certainly did not see the system as permanently rooted there.

But most specialists were clearly taken by surprise by what happened inside the Soviet Union itself. Many so-called Soviet experts in the mid-'80s were not sanguine that Gorbachev was even going to be able to even survive the challenge by the hard-line orthodox elements or produce anything that we saw emerge in the 1990s. My own view is that Gorbachev did not really want or expect the result, in other words, the breakup of the Soviet Union and collapse of communist institutions. Whatever he may say in retrospect now, he really wanted to save the Soviet Union and communism. His *Perestroika* was designed to preserve and strengthen rather than to overthrow. I think what happened, of course, was that people began to take the opportunity for change and reform much more seriously than he ever imagined, starting in the Baltic countries and then moving elsewhere to the Ukraine, Russia and other places. Across Eastern Europe as well, the democratic forces clearly exploited the Gorbachev policies as an opening for their own benefit, which particularly frightened the hard-line regimes in the GDR and Czechoslovakia. There was a demand for reform across the entire communist world that went well beyond what Gorbachev intended. But that is what happened and no one that I know - even the most eminent Sovietologists inside or outside government - saw it coming in the mid-'80s. We knew that Gorbachev was a very different leader than before, but Nikita Khruschev had been also seen as a major departure from the Stalinist era and he eventually, of course, failed. And I think that there was, among the Soviet specialists, a certain unease that Gorbachev might face the same fate, whether taken down by the military, the Party bureaucracy, or both. Gorbachev obviously did ultimately fail, but the whole system went down with him, too. So much of history is unintended consequences.

Q: In the events of November-December of 1989 and the fall of the Berlin Wall, were you all sitting around figuring, Well, this is back to the drawing board, and What do we do now?

PENDERGRAST: Well, frankly, I think the U.S. government and USIA - I mean everybody really was stunned, particularly with the rapidity that the communist states came apart. There was a clear sense that we have whole new ball game and new opportunities and new societies to deal with. And, so just as I was leaving the job, Eastern Europe was discovered and people jumped on the bandwagon. After having spent three or four years walking up and down the hallway trying to get people to recognize that things were brewing there, that something was indeed happening, at least in Eastern Europe, trying to get the programs and the resources, suddenly Eastern Europe became the bureaucratic flavor of the month. I had a certain cynicism to see such a response after all that I been pushing for years with mixed success.

Q: Well, as Eastern Europe changed hands, whither you? What did you do?

PENDERGRAST: I was initially assigned to become the public affairs officer at The Hague in the Netherlands. It wasn=t a particularly big job given the size of the country, but having served in Belgium and visited the Netherlands a number of times, it was a reasonably interesting and challenging environment. I also had a school-age son, and the schooling situation for Americans was very good in The Hague. I think my family looked forward to the assignment. I started to take Dutch and was at FSI for about two months when I got a call offering me the PAO position in Ottawa, Canada, the result of a broken assignment by another officer. I thought about the opening for a short time, and the more and more I considered it, the job intrigued me because Canada was a country I didn't know much about - in fact, very little. But it was a very large operation in terms of USIA programming, certainly larger than the one in the Netherlands, with branch posts in Toronto, Montreal, and Vancouver.

Q. *Yes, very important.*

PENDERGRAST: And, of course, the country had the added advantage of being close to the United States where we had a son in university and an elderly parent to monitor. It was also in the same time zone with Washington, but I didn=t know yet whether that was an asset or a disadvantage. In any case, I left Dutch language training, had some French refresher, and then in the summer of 1990, went off to Ottawa, Canada, and spent four years there.

In many ways it was probably the most illuminating and educational experience I've had in my Foreign Service career because I went there with virtually no knowledge of Canada. Like most Americans, I took it for granted. It was there. Canada, I thought, was a *de facto* extension of the United States, but as I arrived and got into the job, I realized that you're dealing with a creature very different from the United States.

Q: Also, I would think, particularly in the kind of work you're dealing with, I won't say it's hostile, but it's one that - particularly in the media and all - there are real tensions and concerns. I mean, you're talking about a very touchy group of people.

PENDERGRAST: You're absolutely right, and I say this quite honestly after substantial overseas experience, but I have never witnessed a more virulent, almost pathological anti-Americanism than I did in Canada. I've been in Germany and in Belgium and other places, but it was almost an insidious anti-Americanism exhibited by people who are superficially very much like us, who have similar cultural background, but the Canadians - and obviously there are variations - had a very strong resentment of the United States for our power, culturally, politically, and militarily, as well as our proximity. It's a significant reality I don=t think fully appreciated in the United States, where people assume the Canadians are just like Americans. The intensity varies from one region to another. Strongest by far in Ontario, the largest province of Canada. That's important, of course. The anti-Americanism weakens as you go toward the coasts, and if you get to Alberta or British Columbia or into the Maritimes, the anti-Americanism is muted or doesn=t exist at all. Quebec is a separate case. The Quebecers tend to be basically

positive to the United States, mainly because we're viewed as sort of a balancing force to English Canada. But the bottom line is that particularly in the dominant English Canadian establishment concentrated in Ontario, a strong undercurrent of anti-Americanism persists. I ran into it constantly in the media and the universities. On the personal level, I hasten to add, the Canadians are friendly, open, hospitable. But probing beneath the surface, one finds an often hidden impulse of resentment as well as a sometimes patronizing attitude that the United States is a violent, cold, culturally defunct society in contrast to Canada.

The attitude is not just the result of envy and insecurity but also a misguided arrogance of presumed knowledge. One of the things I always used to say to the Canadians (to Americans as well) was that the Americans know very little about Canada, which is true, but the Canadians think they know more about us than they really do. They have this arrogant belief that they know all about America=s weaknesses, problems, and shortcomings, but it is, however, a distorted image of the United States shaped by popular culture and American network news, which of course are accessible across Canada. Their direct knowledge - and this is true of most Canadians - of the United States is limited to Florida...

Q: Or Myrtle Beach.

PENDERGRAST: Or Myrtle Beach or maybe New York City, which they like to visit. But one USIS activity was the International Visitor program, where we selected individuals from a variety of fields and send them around the United States to get acquainted with our country. And we had a fairly large program in Canada, and people would always ask, particularly in Washington, "Why do you have a program for Canadians to come visit the United States? They can just go across the border and go to a shopping mall," which many of them do. But the program obviously was not a shopping trip. We took them to all parts of the United States, and invariably, when these people came back - including people who were anti-American by instinct - invariably would say, "You know, I'm a Canadian, and I thought I knew the United States, but I never, never did. I saw America on this trip through eyes that I'd never used before." I think - like most Canadians - they never appreciated the size of the United States, because they think that they have a large country (which they do), but they didn't realize how much larger we are in both our geography as well as population with all the regional variety, which most Canadians do not understand. They had especially little appreciation for those mainstream values and experiences found in Middle America in the small towns and cities, which I knew from my own Midwestern roots. Going to New York City or to Florida doesn=t really expose them to the reality of the United States, which we helped to provide by the IV program that emphasized the variety and diversity of the United States. It was a revelation to the Canadians.

Q: I would also suspect that the Canadians really don't know their country very well. I mean, just from what I gather - I may be wrong - people in Ottawa don't bounce over to the Maritimes or to Alberta or something. If they're going to somewhere, they're going to New York or Florida.

PENDERGRAST: Well, that's true. One distinct impression I had after being in Canada for those years is that the country tends remarkably to be even more diverse and decentralized country than the United States. We are a diverse, multicultural country but in Canada they deliberately sanction and cultivate the heterogeneous character of the country.

Q: Mosaic. They're not a melting pot.

PENDERGRAST: The "mosaic" is what they constantly cite. They're not a melting pot (i.e. like the United States); they're a mosaic. And their provinces exercise far more authority than do our states. The national government is much weaker. And culturally, of course, we know the French-English gap which exists, but it goes beyond that. There=s a profound regional diversity. The people in the far west of Canada almost look upon Ottawa as a foreign capital. In many ways, the people in British Columbia have more in common with the people of Washington State or Oregon than they do with the people of Ontario. So there is clearly a vast diversity, almost an estrangement, among the different peoples of Canada that creates a continuing tension and distrust among the different parts of the country. It's not just the French-English problem, which of course continues to simmer, but a deliberately cultivated society which is a collection of many widely varying communities and regions. And I don't know whether that's going to work over the long term, particularly given the geography. They're spread like a thin ribbon across the continent, with most of the population concentrated in an area 100 miles from the U.S. border. Lacking confidence in their own unity, the Canadians always seem to be worrying about American annexation, which seems impossible to us but is a recurring theme among Canadians.

Q: God forbid!

PENDERGRAST: And I would constantly say, "Listen, we have enough problems coping with our own 50 states and our own problems." The United States hardly would want to take on more territory. But the Canadians have a great deal of insecurity and unease about the deficiencies of their own country, an explanation in fact for the patronizing, anti-American attitudes which one encounters. They view us as a society where there's more violence, more incivility, more tension, and more inequality, a contrast to their self-image as a humane, orderly country. The problem, as they've found in the last decade or so, is that the so-called just society can be expensive. Their celebrated national health insurance program, which on paper is very attractive, was starting in the early 90s and now is getting worse to bankrupt the country and compromise the quality of health care that they have - so that people with really serious problems often go to the United States for treatment. Canada is finding the elaborate, jealously protected social net more and more difficult to maintain.

Q: I have a cousin who lives in Canada, and she came down to Johns Hopkins as a surgeon.
PENDERGRAST: It=s unfortunate, but Canadians have harbored this self-image of being

superior to us in different ways, which simply reflects the underlying resentment toward our political, economic, and cultural power. Because they are a relatively small country next to this giant, powerful society, it makes them feel both vulnerable as well as self-conscious.

Q: Well, one last question and then I'll put at the end what . . . because we'll continue this discussion. One of the things that I've heard is that the Canadians really don't have in their own minds much of a history, and so they sort of define themselves as not being Americans.

PENDERGRAST: Yes, that analysis has a great validity, rooted in a sense of their own lack of history as an extension mainly of the British Empire as well as the cultural fragmentation between French and English Canada. Canada was not really totally independent of Great Britain until the 1960s, and so they have not had an identity apart from the Commonwealth and the British Crown that the United States enjoyed for more than 200 years. There is no real ideological or cultural unity for Canadians. They define themselves primarily in terms of not being American, a fragmented, decentralized society and culture united mainly by hockey, but most of those teams are now in the States as well.

The Canadians are a wonderful, hospitable people and I enjoyed making friends there. On a social level, there is little anti-Americanism and they exude a sophistication and cultural level that really enhances an assignment there. They were a delightful four years for my wife and me to travel their country - and a beautiful country it is. But one is still left with a sense of incompleteness and insecurity about Canada. Whether it will all one day unravel and North America emerge as a single massive unit is hard to predict right now, but nothing is impossible over the long term. We=ll see.

Q: Okay, well, we'll pick this up the next time. We've talked about the Canadian attitude towards the United States and all, but I'd like to talk on more specifics - one, we haven't covered the ambassador or ambassadors who were there at the time-

PENDERGRAST: Three of them.

Q: -and how they dealt with the situation; the North Atlantic - what was it, trade?

PENDERGRAST: The North American Free Trade Agreement.

Q: Free Trade Agreement; the cultural wars; and your observations - you traveled around - how the embassy worked, and all that.

PENDERGRAST: Okay.

Q: Great.

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Today is the 16th of August, 1999. Dell, let's talk first about the ambassadors you had and you felt they operated in this situation.

PENDERGRAST: I had three ambassadors during my four-year tour, which made it challenging and interesting at the same time.

Q: Your four-year tour was from when to when?

PENDERGRAST: From 1990 to 1994, and so I had an exposure to three very different chief of mission personalities and managerial styles. They were all political ambassadors, but yet they each had positive qualities and an effectiveness which belied the common image of an inept, inexperienced political appointee rewarded for campaign contributions. They were, I think, very good ambassadors in their own ways, particularly because each had high-level connections in Washington. In Canada that=s very important, an ambassador who has the access, who has the ability to pick up the phone. Canadians regard the political connection as absolutely important. They view the Canada-U.S. relationship as indeed very special, and a political ambassador is perhaps more appropriate in Canada than in practically any country in the world. And each of the three, I think, did the job quite well.

My first ambassador was Edward Ney, the former president and CEO of Young and Rubicam, the public relations worldwide conglomerate, prominent in New York business and social circles, and of course a fundraiser for George Bush. He had been in Ottawa for a year or two before I arrived and was close to then Prime Minister Brian Mulroney. Ney was an older gentleman, well into his 70s, patrician and dignified in style, which I think some people found made him a little bit distant. But I myself was impressed by his keen interest in USIA programs, perhaps a result of his public relations background. In fact, he was the primary force that got a Fulbright Program started in Canada.

Ironically, although we've had Fulbright Programs in more than 100 countries over the last 40 years, we never had one in Canada, and Ed Ney quickly recognized that vacuum and took it upon himself as really his biggest ambassadorial legacy to create a Fulbright Program in Canada. I think he realized, as we all do when we've come to Canada as career or political diplomats, that the Canadians and the Americans do not understand each other very well. We're in a real sense so close but yet so far. Geographically and culturally we're linked in many ways, but our histories, our psychologies, our cultures are very different. Such an educational exchange initiative as the Fulbright program was absolutely essential. And Ambassador Ney worked hard to get the program launched, sometimes against a reluctant bureaucracy, which ignorantly wondered why Fulbright was needed in Canada. I was delighted to be Ney=s partner in getting the program launched, but he was the dominant force, particularly in fund-raising. The Canada program was and remains the only one in the world funded primarily by non-government funds. He did a superb job of fund-raising. He assembled a powerful board of directors, who further enhanced the fund-raising reach of the program. Fulbright in Canada today continues to prosper and makes, I think, a truly important contribution to Canadian-

American relations.

Ed Ney was close to Mulroney, which paralleled the affinity of Mulroney and President Bush. At the time, there was clearly a special U.S. relationship with the Conservative government in Canada, which ultimately, however, failed, because of its inability to solve the nagging French-English divide that has separated Canada. Mulroney, who started off an extremely popular prime minister, left with poll numbers scratching the bottom of the barrel.

Ney departed with less than a year left in the Bush Administration. He had served there for four years, and it was basically his time to move on. But he did leave a very important legacy, the Fulbright Program and I think overall was an effective chief of mission. I understood that he originally wanted to be Director of USIA in the Bush administration but did not get it. He would have been, I think, a very good USIA director.

Q: Well, with his background in public relations, did he seize on the cultural wars, you know, the Canadian effort to try to keep American advertising and programming from spilling over into Canada?

PENDERGRAST: Well, during his tenure this was less a front-burner issue than it became later under his two successors. It has always been, of course, a matter of sensitivity in Canada, the concern about American cultural predominance in North America. It's something that ambassadors as well as the embassies have attempted to address quietly, because clearly there is a plausible case that American culture - because it has the advantages of scale, of resources, merely the size of the country - will overwhelm and dwarf Canada, an inevitable and natural imbalance. But at the same time we're dealing with what is supposed to be a free, open market of culture and ideas, and no one is forcing the Canadians to see American movies or buy American magazines and books. I think our position has always been to respect Canadian sensitivity on the issue but at the same time pointing out the trade and the commercial rights that are basically inherent in any free-market economy in the world. Ney, like his successors, both Republican and Democrat, have pressed this point. But it is an intractable issue in the relationship that is not going to go away very easily.

Q: Well, now, did USIS at this time get involved in that, or was that more almost on the economic and political side?

PENDERGRAST: It was handled primarily in quiet behind-the-scenes diplomacy and negotiation rather than in an open public diplomacy way. We did not stand to gain much by provoking debate or attention to the issue. As I mentioned, while American culture was undeniably not only very popular but very dominant, our position was based on commercial and trade law, which the embassy pressed quietly. And I think in general we've done pretty well with the exception of tough Canadian limits on U.S. magazine editions sold in Canada. It is curious, however, that the Canadians who try so desperately to limit American presence in their country are never hesitant to seize any cultural opportunity here. The Cineplex Odeon theater network, one of the largest distribution

networks in the United States, is Canadian-owned. To say nothing of Seagrams and Universal Studios, but the Canadians usually just smile about that form of cultural imperialism.

Q: Oh, yes?
PENDERGRAST: And of course, Americans don't protest, but anything similar in Canada would be immediately and fiercely resisted. So there's a little hint of hypocrisy in their jealous protest of American culture. A lot of it was - and I found this true in many aspects of the Canadian critique of the United States - that because the Canadians themselves are so fragmented, divided, diverse, about the only thing that unites them is being Not American. In other words, to be Canadian is to be not American, and that is really what sort of unites the country, or at least large segments of it.

Q: Well, then, Ney was followed by whom?

PENDERGRAST: Ney was followed for a relatively brief tenure by Peter-

Q: Ney must have left in ninety-what?

PENDERGRAST: He left in early '92, I believe it was, replaced by Peter Teeley, who was a very different personality, considerably younger. He had served as press secretary to Vice President Bush and was close to the President, but he was in style and approach a contrast to his predecessor. He was what one might call or liked to think of himself as a blue-collar ambassador. Much more relaxed, more open, more accessible, and even prided himself on his working-class origins. And he particularly relished - again, building on his longtime experience as a press secretary - in personal relations with journalists. And so he was passionately interested in developing personal contacts and social relationships with the Canadian media community, which was rather unusual for an American ambassador. The Canadian journalists were initially somewhat surprised, but then eventually delighted in this man who would literally spend workday afternoons in a bar or restaurant with them, trading stories and jokes over rounds of beer. The ambassador actually loved this type of interaction, and often on a Sunday afternoon I would get a call from him wanting me to get a few journalists and come over and have a few drinks to enjoy Sunday afternoon over at the residence. It was, again, a rather unusual style, but I think that as a result, the Canadian media did warm up to him and in a sense to the United States. Given the brevity of his tenure, only a matter of months (he, of course, left after the election of Bill Clinton in '92), he never was able to get involved in the substance of Canadian-American relations as much as his predecessor or successor, but I think he was a good ambassador. And if George Bush had been reelected, he would have stayed on and probably would have had a very successful tenure as ambassador.

Q: Well, then, he was succeeded by whom?

PENDERGRAST: He was succeeded by another quite different personality, Jim Blanchard, the former governor or Michigan and a long-time friend and political ally of Bill Clinton. Blanchard had been apparently a prominent candidate for a cabinet post in

the new Clinton Administration, Secretary of Commerce, but did not get it mainly because, I understand, they wanted an Hispanic in the Cabinet and the position went to Secretary Pena. Canada was in a sense, I guess, a consolation prize for Blanchard - although he never really acknowledged or said that. And in the interest and the enthusiasm and the passion he brought to the job, he certainly demonstrated that he was absolutely committed to being ambassador. He was, again, in my experience with these ambassadors in Canada as well as others over the years, the quintessential political animal. I've never known anybody who breathed, lived and exuded politics so completely. This had been, of course, his life's profession, and he knew the nuances and the intricacies of politics, both American and Canadian, exceptionally well. And of course he also had good ties - probably the best of the three ambassadors - with the Washington policy community. He knew all the cabinet officers and of course the President, and he had extremely good access that I think resulted in his very effective and productive tenure as ambassador.

He set forth, really, two priorities as his primary interests. One was, of course, the North Atlantic Free Trade Agreement, which was concluded during that period. The very intense debate in the United States over NAFTA was, in large part, mirrored in Canada, where it took on, again, maybe an even more emotional, even irrational element because of the anti-American paranoia in many circles. The NAFTA was viewed as another example of opening up Canada to American companies and products, undermining Canadian industry, and so on. And it was a sharp debate that divided Canada, as the bilateral Free Trade Agreement had several years earlier. But I think Blanchard - primarily working quietly behind-the-scenes because for us to get overtly and very publicly involved in the Canadian debate would have been counterproductive - but he developed good relations with the new premier, Jean Chretien, and his staff and was very effective in interpreting and explaining the American political scene as well as showing to Canadians that the great advantages that came with NAFTA - the access to the American and the Mexican markets - and how Canada, as a small country, really in the end would benefit more than be hurt by it.

Q: How did he use you?

PENDERGRAST: As a very political person, from the very start, he recognized the importance of public diplomacy. Even before he arrived in the country, we were talking on the phone, working on different things that we wanted to do in a public relations context. The first thing he did - literally, before he even started work in Ottawa - was a transcontinental train trip across Canada to meet people and to get a sense of the country- (end of tape)

Ambassador Blanchard was intensely public relations conscious, but always, of course, linked to finely tuned political objectives and activities. He was a regular on the various Canadian TV talk shows and did a fair amount of public speaking as well. All of this was coordinated by USIS and required me to work closely with him. He became - I like to think - a good friend and colleague, who took me into his confidence on some of his political interests. At one time there was a great deal of speculation that he would return

and run for the Senate in Michigan in 1994, which stirred up a lot of media and public interest. He was consulting with people in Michigan as well as in Washington. There's no doubt that he seriously considered it, but I think in the end he did not mainly because he was taken with the challenge in Canada and thought he could accomplish more there than as a junior senator from Michigan. He never mentioned it, but as it turned out, 1994 was a Republican year (the famous Gingrich revolution) and it probably would not have been a good year to run for Congress, particularly in a volatile, bellwether state such as Michigan. He did tell me that if the President had personally weighed heavily on him to run for the Senate as an act of loyalty to the Democratic Party, he would have done it. But that did not come. I don=t even know whether he really talked to the President about it, but after a lot of back and forth with the people in Michigan and Washington, he decided not to run for the Senate and he stayed on.

And I think it was probably the administration's and the country's advantage because he was exceptionally effective, not only with presiding over NAFTA's acceptance in Canada and in the United States, but also with his other defining policy priority, the Open Skies Agreement, to open up long obstructed commercial aviation links between the two countries. Getting from one side of the border to the other side had been very difficult and expensive by plane because of the severe constraints on American carrier access into Canada. The ambassador really did an absolutely marvelous job, both publicly and behind the scenes, to get that agreement approved, which has yielded enormous gains for both countries in both tourism and trade. It really has opened up things because now travel is much easier and much less expensive with increased competition and additional city-to-city connections. So when it came to NAFTA and to the Open Skies, I think Ambassador Blanchard was a truly outstanding chief of mission, and I was very proud to have been part of his team. And because he was so public-relations conscious, I think USIS had an especially major role in the mission.

Q: Well, now, he's written a book, by the way.
PENDERGRAST: That's right. I've read it and I=d rank it among the best ambassadorial memoirs.

Q: It's quite a good book, a short book, but it gives you a real window. I think it's called something like A Window on - *I can't, anyway, it came out around '97 or-*

PENDERGRAST: No, it actually came out last year, I think.

Q: Okay, '98.

PENDERGRAST: I was actually very surprised that the book did not get more attention here in the United States. The only way I heard about it was from friends in Canada who told me that he was up there doing book tours. Naturally, the book aroused a great deal of interest in Canada - and mostly favorable, I'm told - but I have never seen a review of it in The Washington Post or The New York Times, which is critical for such a book in stimulating U.S. readership. I may have missed it, but as far as I know, it was surprisingly neglected here in the States. I can=t explain it, because it was, in my opinion, one of the

better diplomatic memoirs ever written.

Q: There was a major election when the Conservatives were practically wiped out. That was during your watch, wasn't it?

PENDERGRAST: That was, yes.

Q: Can you talk about how the embassy reacted before and during this period, I mean, what sort of was expected and how it came and did it cause any problems for you?

PENDERGRAST: The Mulroney government had been very pro-American and identified closely with George Bush and Washington. Mulroney and Canada had been a strong supporter of the U.S. in the Persian Gulf War. But the longstanding identity with the United States during the Reagan and Bush years probably worked against him, especially in Ontario, the largest (and most Ameriphobic) Canadian province. He became closely associated with the Americans, which only stirred up the latent sensitivities among Canadians about the United States. Canadians just don=t like their leaders to be too close to Washington. And that hurt Mulroney. There's no doubt about it. I think the embassy was very much aware of this, and certainly our position was starkly neutral. But everybody in the embassy - and across Canada - sense that the Conservatives were headed toward a major defeat. It was plain to everyone. Even the most astute Canadian experts, however, could not anticipate how the Tories were almost totally wiped out in Parliament. It was a Conservative catastrophe related also to the Mulroney failure to bridge the simmering Quebec/English Canada tension. As an Anglophone, French-speaking Quebecer, he staked much on bridging the gulf separating Canadians, but he ended up alienating both sides. I don=t think in the embassy there was any great apprehension about the new Liberal government, which exhibited a more nationalist tendency than did the Conservatives, although it wasn't always the case over a period of time. A conservative PM like Diefenbaker was perhaps the most anti-American premier we've ever had in Ottawa, but there was some concern that maybe Jean Chretien might put more distance between himself and Washington to avoid replicating the experience of Mulroney. And certainly that was the case initially. There was no doubt that Chretien was not going to be in Washington or Maine every other week. But we were clearly - not only during the campaign but afterward - reassured that there was not going to be any real anti-U.S. orientation in the new government, that they were going to stay the course on free trade, that they were going to remain strong allies - which, of course, they've done. So I think even though while the embassy recognized that an entirely new crew was taking power with the Liberals coming to power, we recognized that the relationship would continue to be strong, as indeed it has been.

Q: Were you giving out any cautions to your colleagues in USIS. Usually the idea is to get as much about America in, a fairly aggressive selling America - that's what USIS does - but particularly during and election time or in Canada, I'd think you'd almost want to keep it low key.

PENDERGRAST: Well, we kept that pretty much in control in Ottawa. I was country

public affairs officer and able to monitor and moderate any tendencies that might be coming out of Washington. Because Canada was geographically separate from the rest of the world, you didn't have people sort of launching propaganda volleys directly at Canada. We were able to pretty much control that, and we did keep a deliberately low profile in the campaign. USIA operations in Canada have always been unlike USIS operations elsewhere in the world, reflecting a necessarily more low-key, low-profile approach to public diplomacy. We've never had big cultural centers or major programs like we have in other countries. Most of our work has been largely quietly in the background working with universities, working with community groups, trying in a measured way to present the American positions. And doing the same, of course, with the media as well - depending on the issue and depending on the ambassador as well. It's a very different kind of place to run a USIS program.

Q: Talking about some of the foreign affairs issues, how did the Gulf War - we're talking about when Iraq invaded Kuwait and our counter proposal: George Bus assembled a very effective force against this - how did that play initially in Canada as these things went on?

PENDERGRAST: The Canadians were on board from the beginning in the Gulf War, and were active, reliable, and effective partners in the Allied coalition. It was, in large part, a direct result of the close Bush-Mulroney relationship, but I think the Canadian people did realize that this was a serious act which Saddam Hussein had committed flagrant aggression against Kuwait and something had to be done. Canadian forces did participate, at least they had some aircraft in the coalition action. We didn't have, really, any type of public affairs problem on that issue, certainly compared to what happened in other countries in the world.

Q: What about Cuba? I always feel that Cuba is almost the designated hitter as far as this is where the Canadians can show they really differ from the United States.

PENDERGRAST: Absolutely, and with both conservative or liberal administrations in Ottawa, this has always been something that separated the United States and Canada. It has been a serious public relations problem, something that we did work on with limited success. The Canadians clearly feel that human rights and democracy can be advanced there through political engagement, trade, and tourism, and they have told us this many, many times. Of course, there has been some self-serving profit for Canadian business, which has benefited from the absence of the United States. So perhaps it is not all just ideological purity; there are clearly some commercial reasons involved. But it is something that has been a nagging sore in Canadian-American relations, particularly when we try to impose any sort of extraterritoriality in our policy.

The Canadians have never fully appreciated the depth and the influence of the Cuban community in the United States. As with many other things, the Canadians really do not have a good understanding of the American political system. They really look at everything through the parliamentary optic. They see other governments and cannot understand that they operate very differently, and certainly the United States, a federal

system, with its separation of powers, is a very much more complicated democratic system. There is no prime minister who basically is the legislative and executive authority, and they never have really understood that fact very well. And of course, it's not only true with Canada but with many other countries in the world, but it is ironic that here our closest neighbor, linked to us in so many ways, has had such a blind spot when it comes to the politics of the United States.

Q: Well, was there any effort on our part to say, "Okay, you Canadians have been working on this so-called 'close relationship' with Castro for the last 30 years, and human rights haven't gotten any better"?

PENDERGRAST: Of course, we've made that point to them, and they feel that this is a long-term, cumulative process. The noble impulse perhaps belies the commercial objectives and purposes, but in some ways, I personally am sympathetic to the idea of some engagement with Cuba. Hostage to a handful of Cuban emigres upset that Castro won and Batista lost, I think maybe we do close ourselves off to that country more than we should. I saw first hand how commercial and cultural relationships with other communist countries was absolutely critical in opening up those societies. And, why should it be any different with Cuba? It is small and geographically close to the United States and probably will be far more vulnerable to change and external influence than was Eastern Europe. But we ourselves have helped to maintain the Iron Curtain around Cuba, which I think is a major reason that Castro=s communism has outlasted his comrades in Europe.

Q: What about the various ethnic groups that were coming into Canada? I mean, they take great pride in saying they're a - what is it?

PENDERGRAST: A mosaic.

Q: A mosaic - and did you find, were you looking at these various ethnic groups and targeting things towards them?

PENDERGRAST: No, I think that we didn't want to get involved in any identified ethnic separatism or targeting. In a way, the Canadians, in my judgment, probably did too much of that themselves. It was extraordinary how they adamantly reject the idea of assimilation and a melting pot - again, trying hard to make themselves different from the United States. But the mosaic ends up, in many ways, a blurred and confusing kaleidoscope with a bewildering array of ethnic communities actually financially supported by the government. In other words, they're able to develop their cultural programs and activities with the assistance of the government, a deliberate policy by the Canadian government to encourage multiculturalism. And as a result, you do have not just the French-English chasm separating Canada, but cultural barriers erected by the minorities that have come in just in the last 10 to 20 years, particularly from Asia, especially from the Far East, Eastern Europe, and the Caribbean. But it just further erodes the already thin sense of being Canadian, which Canadians are always trying without success to define. The mosaic unfortunately pulls apart Canada rather then brings it

together. It is such a contrast to the American experience, which is historically that of a melting pot where assimilation is the main objective and ancestral cultural loyalties are steadily diminished. But certainly in Canada that is not the case, and I think in the long term that's not going to help the country.

Q: Well, I would think, too, that you would build up a big infrastructure of people who were essentially bureaucratic tribal leaders of the Greek community or the what-have-you who really almost will try to do everything to make sure that Greek marries Greek and that they don't. . . . very much like the old ward politics of New York, where the idea was to keep them segregated in their little ghettos and not let them get out.

PENDERGRAST: No, you're absolutely right. That is happening across Canada. The development of these tribal communities is rampant in places such as Toronto or Montreal or Vancouver, which has a very large Asian population. All of this is not bringing the country together. It is dividing the country, and I think a disturbing trend. They were never able to solve the French-English problem, and they still haven't been able to, and now, on top of that, is this elaborate network of other ethnic communities compounding the French-English problem.

Q: I assume that you got involved in speeches and this sort of thing, and you and your colleagues. Was it hard to be frank - I mean the way we're talking now - or did you just keep off subjects, like saying "We're going for the melting pot; you're going for the mosaic; and frankly, we do it this way and we think our thing is going to come out better than yours"?

PENDERGRAST: Certainly in public speeches I would try to be a little bit diplomatic and not as challenging in my remarks, but in private with Canadians, I would not pull my punches and make my views clearly understood about the mosaic and the implications for Canadian unity. And, many Canadians acknowledged the problem. It was not something they automatically defended. I think the idea that every ethnic or linguistic community must retain and strengthen its separate identity has become so deeply embedded in the Canadian political fabric - if you will, a form of political correctness - that it isn't going to change very easily. They are a society much more decentralized than is the United States. The provinces have significantly greater power than our states do. Ottawa is really rather weak compared to Washington in terms of its national authority, and that sort of decentralization continues with a society rippled by the many ethnic communities. Canada just does not have the strong unifying elements which helped bring together the United States as a nation, particularly after our civil war. Part of it ultimately goes back to the decisions made in the 18th century by the British, who at that time, once they had consolidated control of Canada and North America at that point, decided that assimilation would not be pursued in French Canada. A decision to break down cultural and linguistic differences, traumatic in the short term, might have had a much better outcome for the country. But they decided in the 18th century that French culture and language would be respected and maintained, and of course that planted the seeds of the disharmony and alienation we have witnessed over the last century. And it also set a precedent for future decisions about ethnic rights and ethnic identity at the end of the 20th century.

Q: Well, did you find much of this impetus towards this - because this has really increased even in the last 20 or more years, hasn't it as different groups come in? Was there a sort of an intellectual engine, the intellectuals, who seem to play a little greater role than they do in the United States, the "chattering class?"

PENDERGRAST: It was certainly true in Quebec in the debate over association with Canada, which has taken place over the last 20 years. The intellectuals were the primary force for Quebec separatism, an impulse now generally in remission but almost certainly to return if les Quebecois see any cause of humiliation or discrimination by the rest of Canada. Younger, better educated Quebecers born after World War II have been much less influenced by the traditional subservience or inferiority complex of the French Canadian and have cultivated in their arts, media and political discourse a bolder, more confident nationalism that will not go away. They have reflected a feisty, unintimidated spirit similar to anti-American nationalism in English Canada - again, mainly in the chattering class, the intellectuals, university professors, media people - that is much less mirrored in the ordinary man-on-the-street.

Q: I've heard, and I don=t want to overstress this "them versus *us," but I've heard, and I think Blanchard in his book brings this out, that in the Canadian bureaucracy it's almost as though. . . and the bureaucracy has been brought up in the Cold War, and the Cold War is Canada* versus *the United States, and the bureaucrats are trained . . . they win a battle if they can stick it to the United States. It think this was in the Open Skies and all this that he mentioned. And it has almost a life of its own. Did you sense any of this?*

PENDERGRAST: Yes, no doubt in the government bureaucracy as well as in the intellectual community of Canada, there was an almost visceral enjoyment in sticking it to the United States, showing how they are different, showing how they aren't going to be pushed around by the United States. This happened even in some of our very nonpolitical USIA-type programs and exchanges where they could be occasionally difficult to deal and negotiate with. One had the sense they were doing it particularly because it was a way that they could show that they were independent of the United States. I think it's absolutely correct that in all of our relationships nothing happens very easily or quickly because there is the recurring impulse that we Canadians can't be too compliant, we can't be too responsive, we have to show that we're Canadian. But in the end, as I mentioned earlier, it's not so much that they're showing they're Canadian. It's to show that they're not American. And because one really detects, in dealing with Canadians, that they themselves aren't certain what is a Canadian. There is this glaring absence of a unifying cultural and political theme, a lack of a Canadian identity that ultimately translates into this, "Well, we've got to show the Americans that we're not American."

Q: Did you find there was a difference - I would assume that most of what we are talking about is pretty much Ontario-based - that when you got out into the west you felt almost you could relax a bit more, these are more like us?

PENDERGRAST: Oh, absolutely. Ontario was the hotbed of Canadian nationalism,

which often surfaced in some form of anti-Americanism. And I had a personal family experience to understand this reality. My son was a high school student when we went to Ottawa, and we ended up putting him in a private school in Ottawa - in fact, a prestigious school called Ashbury College, sort of a breeding ground for the Canadian English establishment over many, many years. Naive about Canada and Canadian attitudes (like most Americans), we did not fully anticipate the fact that our son was being brought into an environment which in many ways was decidedly, although often subtly, unfriendly. He was the only American in the whole secondary school, and even though the anti-Americanism was not strident, it was clearly there. And it took time and effort for him to develop a few Canadian friends.

We mistakenly thought, as Americans usually do, that Canada was just like the United States. Well, it wasn=t, and it was very different and particularly for our son, it was a real challenge. Probably in the end he benefited from the experience, but it was not easy, especially at the start. Other Americans arrived at the school in a year or two. Perhaps the atmosphere has changed, although a colleague who has a child there now says Ashbury still has that sense of Canadian entitlement and superiority which is often focused on the United States. I remember one student assembly at Ashbury when a teacher was condemning another student for chewing gum and said in a condescending way, "Why do you want to be like the Americans?" Everybody, of course, knew that our son Kevin was the only American there and they all turned and looked at him. Fortunately, he wasn't chewing gum. But that sort of remark in a public situation clearly illustrated the mood in that school, but I think it was generally concentrated in English Canada, particularly in Ontario - but by far the largest province and the most dominant in terms of the economics and culture of Canada.

As you go towards either coast, the attitudes toward the United States really do relax remarkably, and in a place like Calgary, Alberta, closely identified with the energy industry, they almost proudly talk about themselves as being another Houston, and they relish their ties with the United States. And in fact, Alberta was settled primarily by Americans who, back in the last century, came up from Montana in search of land during the 19th century. They did not come from eastern Canada. So I think that even though living in Ontario there was a recurring sense of anti-Americanism, particularly among the educated political and cultural elites, you didn't get that impression very often in the East or West of the country.

Q: You know, I'm a great Anglophile, but I notice when I watch British television in the programs we get here and all, there's a strong element in this of putting people in their place, putting people down in social conditions. Did you find that the good citizens of the upper class of Ontario worked hard to put you Americans down and all that?

PENDERGRAST: Not that significantly, no. I think that being American diplomats, we had a fair degree of acceptance by the Ottawa and Ontario community. The neighborhood where we lived was dominated by the Anglophone establishment, where Ashbury College was located, with a strong Anglophilic tendency. And these same people often had a somewhat patronizing attitude toward the cultural barbarians to the south. But it

wasn=t projected in an impolite or hostile way. It's just that in dealing with these people - professionals, intellectuals, university people - you could not escape an undercurrent of superiority and smugness derived from their Anglophilic tendencies and connections. There's no doubt about it. It was there. But it was not one that made daily life unbearable or unpleasant.

Q: How did you find your colleagues that you dealt with in our consulates, both in Nova Scotia - to the eastern provinces - Quebec, and then out into the prairies and Vancouver? Were they different? I mean, was their world a different world?

PENDERGRAST: Oh, absolutely. Because of the profoundly decentralized country, the consulates were operating in very different environments. Their priorities, their operating styles - everything was governed by that fact. But we at least, certainly in USIA, we tried to work closely with our consular colleagues. We had regular meetings bringing people together from the different USIS posts, trying to get on the same page because advancing our common interests and activities had to be done in very different cultural environments. And so working with the consulates in Halifax, Quebec City, Montreal, Toronto, Calgary, and Vancouver was a major challenge, but we at least recognized the problem and tried to address it.

Q: Particularly Vancouver, things were changing rapidly there. It was becoming a Pacific city - I mean, a lot of people from Hong Kong and Asians and all that - were you able to sort of encourage north-south relations, or did it just happen? In other words, I would think Vancouver and Seattle and maybe San Francisco and all would have such... I mean, those would be the ties, and in a way it would be different, and particularly for a USIS-type operation you'd almost have to have a different axis than you might have in Ontario.

PENDERGRAST: The people in the Northwest region, including not only British Columbia but the states of Washington and Oregon, have a very special relationship, economically as well as in other areas. There is constant movement and interchange back and forth across the border. And in many ways there was a greater sense of identity by the people of British Columbia with the American Northwest than with Ottawa. In talking to people in Vancouver, there was clearly a real element of distance and alienation from Ottawa not much weaker than the intense feelings of Quebec separatism. There was no detectable interest in separating the Canadian West and joining the United States - mainly because it was not something the Americans really wanted - but culturally and economically that region of North America has a lot in common. And the cultural and psychological distance separating the Canadian West and the rest of Canada should not be underestimated. But the Pacific orientation, because of trade and the immigration you mentioned, is an equally strong force. I remember visiting Simon Frazier University in Vancouver and discovering that they had a large program in Indonesian studies, reflecting their region=s close ties with Asia. I asked the president or the provost at the time, "I'm very impressed you have this Indonesian studies program. Do you have an American studies program?" and there was a blank look on his face. After a long pause he said, "Well, we really don't think we need that." Of course, this again is not just true in

Vancouver, but throughout Canada: the attitude that Canadians already know everything they need to know about the United States. That was a principal reason we started the Fulbright Program, a belief that the United States does need more scholarly study and understanding. As I have said, the Canadians think that they know more about the United States than they really do, while on the other side, the Americans don't even think about Canada.

Q: Are there any centers for Canadian studies here in the United States?
PENDERGRAST: There=s an expanding network of Canadian studies programs around the United States, funded at considerable expense by the Canadian government. They put a lot of money into Canadian studies. But it is still largely limited to academic specialists and has not taken root in the general population. Most Americans pretty much take Canada for granted unless Quebec separatism starts to get headlines.

Q: Are there any American studies programs in Canada?

PENDERGRAST: Only a few. We worked on this but our budgetary resources were limited, much less than what the Canadians did in our own country. I think there were only three or four functioning centers across all of Canada, and usually American studies in Canada really meant literature with relatively little attention to the social sciences. Of course, this is true elsewhere in the world as well. People everywhere are fascinated by American authors and literary giants, but there just doesn't seem to be much interest in going deeper into the social, cultural and political character of America. I think most people around the world - particularly intellectuals and university communities - have deeply fixed, ideologically distorted pictures of the United States, which they don=t want to challenge or examine seriously. Too much of the world sees the United States through the optic of CNN and popular journalism. The global information revolution has not really eroded distortion and bias.

Q: As we both know, you really would have to strain yourself to find good American places where they study the American political system in Europe, whereas an American - if you get a good liberal education - gets a pretty good solid dose of certainly European government.

PENDERGRAST: What is interesting is that though our histories, Canada and the United States, are closely integrated, if you go into the Canadian schools - and my son was there - you see everything through the Canadian perspective. The American Revolution, the War of 1812, everything is all interpreted from a British or Anglophile position, and there's really no serious attempt to understand the United States. And this extends even to things like the American Civil War. As we know, the Canadians, like the English, were in some ways not only tolerated but actively encouraged the rebellion in the South. There were, in fact, Southern combat units which actually operated from Ontario-

Q: Oh, yes, the St. Albinos Raid.

PENDERGRAST: -and so American history is poorly understood and studied in Canada,

although the United States is such an important country to them. You would think that they would want to learn more about us, but they really don't make much effort at least in the schools. Canadians go every year to Florida or maybe New York City and think they know everything about the United States.

Q: What was your impression of the effectiveness - again from looking at it from our embassy in Ottawa - of the Canadian embassy in Washington, DC, the ambassadors, how they work with Congress, and all that?

PENDERGRAST: I think the Canadian embassy in Washington is undoubtedly one of the most effective mission that they have overseas. Again, it sort of belies the fact that most Canadians don't understand the United States very well. That doesn't seem to hold true with the embassy. It think that they're very well connected and very savvy about how Washington operates. They work the halls of Congress well. They have good ties within the foreign affairs bureaucracy as well as in the White House.

Q: What was your impression of the Canadian Foreign Service?

PENDERGRAST: I worked quite a bit with the Ministry of External Affairs and with the embassy here in Washington on a number of activities. I was overall very impressed by the professionalism of their Foreign Service. And I've gotten to know over the years many Canadian diplomats at other foreign postings. I think that they really are a very impressive group of people. The idea of public service in Canada still has, I think, a strong appeal, unlike, I fear, in the United States, where the Kennedyesque summons to public service has faded over the years. In Canada, however, you do get some really outstanding people going into their Foreign Service.

Q: Did you find in dealing with the bureaucracy, the foreign affairs establishment particularly, but others, that this effort to try to balance the Frenchness and the Englishness and all - did that get in the way?

PENDERGRAST: I don=t think it got in the way. It was obvious that the French Canadians had a disproportionate presence within the Ministry of External Affairs and I think in many federal ministries. I=m uncertain how deliberate or contrived that outcome may have been. It may have been partly just a matter of linguistic competence, because not only in the Foreign Service in Canada but generally in the Canadian federal service, bilingualism in French and English is required, which excludes many English Canadians who really can=t manage an acceptable level in French. On the other hand, educated French Canadians almost always speak English quite well. It was clearly apparent that the French Canadians had a strong tradition within their Foreign Service. From time to time you might detect some quiet griping about favoritism toward the Francophones by a few English Canadians, but it wasn't that common. It was just a fact of life, probably close to 50 per cent French Canadian, in their foreign service.

Q: Well, in '94, you left, and whither?

PENDERGRAST: In '94, I left Ottawa and returned to Washington, which would become my final assignment in the Foreign Service. I assumed the position of USIA=s deputy associate director for educational and cultural affairs, the senior career person in that bureau of USIA and by far the largest element, which handled all of the exchange programs ranging from Fulbright and International Visitors to a wide array of other exchange programs in the professional and educational fields, particularly the burgeoning empire of exchanges involved with the former USSR. We had a budget of $200 million or more and a staff in Washington of 225 people. It was a major and challenging management job working under a political appointee associate director, with me functioning in effect as a chief operating officer dealing with day-to-day management.

Q: You did this from '94 to when?

PENDERGRAST: '94 to 1997.

Q: You've been off and on, obviously having to deal with exchange programs and all. How would you characterize your impression of the Clinton Administration, which by this time had gotten its feet on the ground, towards educational exchanges compared to maybe some of the others?

PENDERGRAST: I think that my work in that bureau was in many ways was simultaneously challenging, rewarding, and difficult - even exasperating. It was the period when USIA's demise or integration into the State Department was consummated. The process leading to that was one I found both confusing and frustrating. Although there was nominal lip service support for educational exchange as well as public diplomacy in general was there, the Clinton Administration really had a somewhat distant, even uneasy relationship with what USIA did. I think there was in this administration a sense that USIA was a relic of the Cold War, which had been preaching American ideology and propaganda to the world. The Clinton Administration did not have a sense of American mission or exceptionalism and was uncomfortable with the idea of telling America=s story to the world. That is a mainly intuitive judgment on my part but I just did not detect, even in the Agency=s management, a strong commitment to what we had done for more than 40 years. And that, in my judgment, is what finally led to the decision to eliminate the Agency and shift its functions to the Department.

Q: Well, this is also a time - you got there in '94, and the election of 94 brought in practically a know-nothing Congress, I mean, a . . . God, that's probably as good a term as one can think about it, and with the same connotations that the Know-Nothings had about foreign affairs back in the pre-Civil War times. Did you feel that you had lost some of your support in Congress for the exchange and for internationalism?

PENDERGRAST: No, I think that it wasn't just the '94 elections but probably began with the end of the Cold War. There developed in the Congress and elsewhere in the country a degree of uncertainty about why we needed these programs. We won the Cold War; they served their purpose; and did we really now have to continue them? That certainly became stronger feeling after 1994 with the new pressure on reducing budgets and

cutting backing government. And so in my work in USIA at the time, we were really selling two audiences. One, you had the Republican Congress, which was looking at the issue through a budgetary optic and wondering why do we need these programs when we can save money. And then, the other one was the administration itself, because I do feel that there was sort of an ideological resistance to what USIA did and the perception that such programs were Cold War relics. And it was a challenging piece of work for me. It was not easy and often frustrating because what I had invested more than 30 years now was under attack. Our budgets did decline - although not as dramatically as they might have - but they was a downward slide during that period that required a good deal of juggling and adjustment.

I think in this world of the Internet and the mobility of people moving back and forth across borders and oceans all the time as well as the instantaneous, real-time access to information, we are seduced into a false sense of security and confidence about what we know about the world. We superficially believe we're in touch with the world, but in the end, of course, you don't understand other societies and cultures and people simply by looking at CNN or staring at a computer screen.

Now this is in both directions. It's Americans looking out and foreigners looking in. So in a sense, because we live in a world where superficially we're in contact and have this pretense of a global village, we may have even more need now for information and exchange programs. The case has still not been made as effectively as it could have, and I certainly share in that inadequacy, but the main problem, at least in the Clinton Administration was the tendency to USIA as being more or less peripheral in foreign policy and not a major player. And that's the key issue now as USIA moves into the State Department. The danger is very real that USIA functions and programs will become marginalized and exiled to the periphery of State Department priorities, and then will wither away. Now again, I could be wrong, but I'm just not persuaded - despite the rhetorical commitment by the Secretary of State and others - that it's going to have the centrality of purpose and the sense of mission that it did in an independent agency. But the jury is still out on this.

Q: Well, with exchanges, I would have thought in this time that there would have been a certain push to try to get a lot of exchanges with these newly emerging states from the Ex-Soviet Union and all that, and also what had been the Eastern Bloc.

PENDERGRAST: It was certainly a growth industry with strong support in both the Administration as well as in the Congress, to try to do something that would help in the democratic movement within the former communist states. For example, Senator Bradley became personally committed to the idea of expanding the exchange of high school students and arranged for earmarked funds that started up a program that has proved to be, I think, very successful, bringing students from the former Soviet Union to the United States to spend a whole academic year. And of course such experiences dramatically change these young people and over the long term will be a very positive force in the way these societies evolve in the 21st century.

There were other programs that evoked special congressional interest as well as people at the top of the administration who were interested this as well. So we had a growth industry to sort of keep us going and our program offices at full pace, but it was really only in that area. We were really struggling to fund other parts of the exchange program.

Q: I would imagine that Western Europe would have almost fallen off the radar.

PENDERGRAST: It certainly is an area where over the last 10 years in both exchanges and in other program areas we cut back dramatically, to the point where for example in the Fulbright Program with Germany now is funded largely by the Germans. And, the same holds in other countries where the interest in exchanges with the United States really is stronger in the host country than here. And it reflects the diminishing general support we've had for public diplomacy programs of all kinds. In a world where the United States is so dominant and unchallenged, there is a short-sighted complacency that questions the need for these or any other international resource commitments. It's unsettling because we are putting ourselves at risk in a world which is more diverse and complicated in a cultural sense than ever before. Samuel Huntington=s book AClash of Civilizations@ summarizes the reality well. The collapse of the Cold War only has revealed and unleashed an entirely new form of international conflict and tension rooted in cultural and sectarian differences. And, the new world disorder, if one might call it that, requires a commitment to intellectual engagement and interaction which simply must go beyond the Internet and CNN. And I think that we really need to do more, rather than less, in the field of public diplomacy, but so far that concern has fallen on deaf ears. And, I believe, both the Administration and the Republican Congress share responsibility for this neglect, which will only come back to haunt us just as we saw happen with America=s retrenchment after World War I.

Q: Well, in the last decades, one of our major concerns has been the growth of fundamentalism, particularly in Islam. Is this a place we could do anything about exchange-wise?

PENDERGRAST: Oh, I think definitely we could, and we have done some things, but clearly not enough. Our approach to the fundamentalist Islam must be nuanced and very deliberate, but there's no doubt we could do more to open up our channels of communication and engagement with the leaders of the various Islamic movements around the world. Most fundamentalist Muslims are not terrorists. There's a lot that could be done and the possibilities exist to show them that the United States is not the cartoon image which many of them believe. But it=s all a matter of resources at this point and there is simply not the level of commitment and urgency which the communist threat evoked during the Cold War.

Q: What was your impression of the leadership of USIA during this three years you were back?

PENDERGRAST: Well, I have perhaps hinted earlier a certain degree of disillusionment with the leadership of USIA. I don't think in the Clinton Administration that people at the top of the agency were really strongly committed to what we did. It reflected the broader

distance and disdain which I think colored the Administration=s overall attitude toward the Agency. Both the director and deputy director certainly did not communicate very effectively a strong sense of commitment to what USIA did and their somewhat remote leadership style implicitly seemed to communicate that they really didn't care or didn't know about what was being done. And, the Agency=s leadership nullified a major internal reorganizational effort, which they initially urged, in order to show how the Agency was reforming and becoming more efficient. The effort, which I personally led, involved dozens of people from management, the unions, and all levels of the staff to craft together a better way of doing business and demonstrate that foreign affairs agencies could adapt and change. But the Agency leadership, incredibly, at the eleventh hour killed the plan. It did not inspire confidence in the future of USIA.

Q: Who were they?

PENDERGRAST: Well, the director was Joseph Duffey, a long-time friend of the President and the First Lady. Both the Clintons in fact worked in Duffey=s unsuccessful Senate campaign in the early 1970s and the close relationship has continued since that time. As much as I respect Director Duffey as a man of intellect and a gentleman, I believe that perhaps he himself was ambivalent about the Agency and its Cold War roots. And, his failure to make a strong case for USIA in the administration, in contrast to what the USAID leadership accomplished, is a principal reason that USIA was eliminated and merged into the Department.

Q: Well, Senator Jesse Helms has been behind one of the pushes. Did you find him an important figure in USIA during this time?

PENDERGRAST: One thing that really baffles me about the whole foreign affairs integration process was that Senator Helms and other conservative Republicans really wanted to target USAID, which was by definition anathema to them ideologically. We clearly got the signal that they were after USAID. Senator Helms and other Republicans, I had the sense, were basically favorable toward USIA. But Helms insisted that one of the major foreign affairs agencies should be integrated into the Department. It was the Administration's decision, not that of Jesse Helms, to have merge USIA with State while USAID remained with its separate identity and structure. That was, again, a decision made by the administration itself, which reinforces my sense about an ideological rejection of the Agency=s historical mission and function. Regrettably, no one on the Hill was ready to challenge the Administration=s decision and defend the Agency. It was not something with much of a domestic constituency. And, in the end there was at least the pretense of foreign affairs reform and budgetary savings.

Initially, the Administration had in fact resisted any form of tinkering with the foreign affairs structure and opposed any type of foreign affairs consolidation. A new megaagency, as the President, Vice President, and Secretary of State repeatedly said, was contrary to all the principles of modern management and would not really be more efficient. But the Administration turned around completely and then moved with its own plan to eliminate USIA, their least popular foreign affairs agency. I'm not so certain that

in the end this is going to make things either more efficient or more effective, particularly from the standpoint of public diplomacy, but again, only time will tell.

Q: Well, then, you left in '97, and just sort of to fill in, what have you been doing since?

PENDERGRAST: Well, I've been doing a number of independent projects and at least for now have deliberately avoided full-time employment so that I could enjoy, after 32 years, the opportunity to travel and do things that I've always wanted to do and never had the time to do, including some writing projects. I got involved again with the North American connection I had developed during my Ottawa period working on a report about the emerging North American higher education cooperation after NAFTA. This was something, in fact, in Ottawa that I very actively promoted, a sort of North American education track to the free-trade area. We have developed and generated an increasingly vast network of trilateral connections in the higher education field. And, I=ve done some pro bono work for the Public Diplomacy Foundation, which seeks to advance public diplomacy-type programs both professionally and as an academic discipline. The challenge is daunting for all of the reasons I=ve mentioned. In a world where there is the seductive appearance of intimacy and familiarity, what has been called the global village, public diplomacy really means today for many people little more than mobilizing domestic support for policies, which I think is a powerful impulse inside the Department. Today we mislead ourselves if we confuse our political, military, and economic power with truly understanding what is happening in the world or with how people view us. Despite all of the technological change and advances over the last decade, I really feel that international understanding and competence in the United States have declined. And, the risk for the future of our children and grandchildren is very real. Public diplomacy has a central role in helping to define and deal with that future, but I still do not see any real commitment either inside or outside the government.

Q: Great. Well, I want to thank you very much.

End of interview